

BRILL HANDBOOKS ON CONTEMPORARY RELIGION

Handbook of UFO Religions

EDITED BY

Benjamin E. Zeller

BRILL

Handbook of UFO Religions

Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion

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For my daughters. The sky is not the limit.



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Introduction

Benjamin E. Zeller

During her ill-fated run for the American presidency in 2016, former senator, U.S. Secretary of State, and candidate Hillary Clinton made an astonishing offer: if elected president, she promised to open the secret government files on Area 51, the classified United States Air Force base wherein the federal government supposedly engages in clandestine research on crashed extraterrestrial spaceships. Not a mere aside, Clinton actually repeated the vow several times, ranging from national television to small local newspapers. Pledging to “get to the bottom of” the question of UFOs, the *New York Times* noted that some “UFO enthusiasts” had even dubbed her “the first ‘E.T. candidate’” (Chozick 2016). Alas, Clinton lost the election to Donald Trump, who while embracing a variety of conspiracy theories, has shown little interest in the topic of UFOs, nor governmental transparency.

Clinton's willingness to broach the topic of UFOs in a high-stakes and high-profile national election reveals two themes that this text explores: first, the cultural prominence of American ufological folklore (e.g., Area 51, the “crashed spaceships” often associated with the Roswell incident) within the broader ufological community, as second, the impact of ufological thought within the broad public sphere. Without needing to explain the details, Clinton invoked a particular ufology mythology emergent from the twentieth-century American context. Simultaneously, her public readiness to take it seriously shows how the topic has moved from the fringes to the centre. Clinton is not alone, though perhaps the highest profile of such examples. Former Polish president Lech Walesa admitted believing in extraterrestrial visitations and even alien attempts to influence global politics in a 2019 address, recorded and posted to YouTube and covered in a variety of alternative media (Seaburn 2019). UFOs have entered political thought.¹

So too religious thought. Among religious thinkers, ideas about UFOs, their inhabitants and places of origin, and related concepts has a long and varied pedigree. As the contributors to this volume argue, religions have been concerned with unusual aerial phenomenon and related topics throughout their history. Yet the very concept of the intersection between UFOs and religion entangles the researcher in a net of unresolved (and in many cases, unresolvable)

1 Internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXJDYfcoqa8>, accessed 15/09/2019.

questions about the constituent terms. Setting aside the perennial debate over the definitions and nature of the concept of ‘religion’ (see Nongbri 2015), contributors to this volume have taken a broad view of what merits consideration as a ‘UFO’ or ‘UFO religion’. While closely associated in popular culture with both the flying saucer and the extraterrestrial (Lewis 2000), ‘UFO’ encompasses a far broader set of ideas. Rather than rely on the formal definition of the UFO as an ‘unidentified flying object’, here authors have deployed a model reminiscent of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Familienähnlichkeit* or ‘family resemblance’ approach (1953), wherein members of a category share an overlapping set of common features. In the case of ufological thought, this includes concepts such as unknown aerial objects (UFOs in the technical sense) of terrestrial or extraterrestrial origin, flying saucers in a more conventional sense, unobserved interplanetary vessels, extraterrestrials and other beings from outer space, non-human intelligent beings of unknown origins, alien abductions, physical extraplanetary travel, and visits to other planets via spiritual, occult, or ether-real methods. Hence, contributor Christa Shusko writes of fin de siècle author Eleanor Kirk’s literary journey to Mars, *The Christ of the Red Planet* (1901), and Régis Dericquebourg explores contemporary French ufologist Rael’s, né Claude Vorhilon’s, claims of first-hand extraterrestrial contact and visitation on a flying saucer. Both subjects equally engage the intersection of religion and UFOs, while only one claimed to have actually seen—actually, in Rael’s case, boarded—a UFO. To offer another example, Layne R. Little writes of the Hindu concept of *vimānas*, ancient flying machines traditionally associated with the Gods, and only more recently with extraterrestrials. In Little’s deft treatment, he shows how thinkers have projected onto the *vimānas* everything from steam technology to the occult to contemporary Hindu nationalism.

Contributors to this *Handbook of UFO Religions* have taken an equally broad view of what constitutes a ‘UFO religion’ or ‘UFO movement’. Contributor Franz Winter points to this complicated question in his chapter on the Japanese new religious movement Kōfuku no Kagaku (KnK). Winter writes that “it is important to state at the beginning of this chapter that KnK is not a UFO movement in the stricter sense of the word. It is, however, a movement whose founder draws on references, patterns of thought, and elements that deal with ufological contexts and that can be situated and contextualised within a specific religio-historical setting” (492). While Winter correctly notes that KnK is not a UFO movement in the same sense that famed UFO religions Heaven’s Gate or the Unarius Academy of Science are, his characterization of KnK points to the fact that ufological thinking is nevertheless at the heart of this movement. Chapters in this anthology have therefore taken a broad view of what constitutes a “UFO movement,” including groups for which ufology is only one part of

a wider set of religious ideas, practices, or doctrines. This includes for example Scientology, analysed by Hugh Urban in this volume, a movement that places at the centre of its cosmology an interstellar war reminiscent of science fiction, yet in daily practice does not involve ufology. Such a group nevertheless falls within the umbrella term of UFO religion.

Indeed, the study of UFO religion helps scholars grapple with the perennial question of the nature of religion by challenging and even dismantling imagined lines between ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ ideas, between what counts as religion, science, folklore, superstition, and magic. An oft-cited Baylor Religion Study has indicated that “over the last forty years at least 10% of Americans claim to have had a UFO sighting at any given time” (Bader et al. 2010: 7). If approximately thirty-three million people in one nation alone claim to have seen a UFO, it raises the question of why this phenomenon remains fringe, and why those who engage the topic of the UFO in religious ways are not taken more seriously. Fundamentally, there is little reason for scholars to accept one set of non-empirical or supernatural claims as more valid than another, or more appropriate for study, whether those claims involve the mysterious aerial phenomenon associated with the Virgin Mary, the ‘Milagre do Sol’ of Our Lady of Fátima, or the equally enigmatic claims of Whitley Strieber, whose account of alien abduction became emblematic of that phenomenon. As David J. Halperin has recently argued in his *Intimate Alien: The Hidden Story of the UFO*, the fundamental mythology of ufology not only tracks with broader religious mythologies, but reflects the same “deep stories” (2020: 138) that religious mythologies seek to explain: death, suffering, sex, the other.

0.1 Religion and UFOs

The intersection of religion and UFOs has been of interest to scholars since the dawn of UFO discourse, traditionally dating to 1947 and Kenneth Arnold’s sighting of nine unidentified flying objects later described in the press as “flying saucers.” No less a researcher than Jacques Vallée (b. 1939), astronomer, research scientist, and one of the founders (alongside J. Allen Hynek) of scientific ufology, has written of the relevance of religion to the pursuit of knowledge about UFOs. Presenting a perspective representative of many ufologists, he writes of the relation between extraterrestrial visitation and religion:

The real (or imagined) arrival of beings and artifacts from outside Earth has had enormous impact on human societies ... Theology has been shaped by a belief in sky-dwelling divinities. If mysterious craft are seen

in the sky and stones fall from the clouds, what can Man's position in the scheme of things be?

VALLÉE AND AUBECK 2010: 355

For Vallée, the human need to understand our place in existence, especially in relation to whatever Others exists beyond our reach in the sky, defines not only religion, but the manner in which societies respond to UFOs. UFOs possess inherent theological value, Vallée explains, because both point to our relationship with the heavens. Vallée, as a partisan in the debate over the reality and nature of UFOs, takes a firm position on their reality, and argues in a position akin to other 'Ancient Alien' proponents that religious texts record premodern extraterrestrial visitations (2010, 470). Yet even scholars adopting more agnostic perspectives on the nature of UFOs can agree that ideas about UFOs and their inhabitants strike a deep chord. Carl Jung's famous suggestion that UFOs represent "technological angels," reflects a notion that these alien concepts speak to the human psyche (1958/1959). For Jung, anxieties of the modern age become manifest in sightings of UFOs just as pre-modern people experienced angelic visions. While religions responded to such anxieties in previous ages, Jung positioned the UFO as the quintessentially modern and secularized response. Halperin's aforementioned recent contribution to the literature (2020) extends and updates the Jungian interpretation to include more recent elements of ufological folklore, such as the resurgence of interest in Roswell, New Mexico, and the ineffable 'Men in Black'.

Vallée, Jung, and Halperin concur that the UFO speaks to the fundamental human questions also addressed by religions. Other scholars have envisioned different points of contact between ufology and religion. Brenda Denzler, whose sociological study of ufologists represents one of the first major anthropological engagements with the topic (2001), identified religious beliefs and scientific passions as two intersecting factors within contemporary ufology. Based on interviews and survey data with hundreds of ufologists, Denzler argued that such individuals spoke of UFOs with "language that suggests religious awe" (2001: 155). While especially true among those who claimed direct experience or sighting of UFOs, Denzler found this approach extended widely. She identified the "numinous quality of some UFO experiences," and the profound effect they had on their witnesses (2001: 106). Even among those with only indirect experience of UFO sightings, or no such experiences at all, Denzler identified a "passion" for uncovering truth and exploring the mystery of UFO phenomenon.

Fellow anthropologists have explored further relations of ufology to religion. Debra Battaglia, who has researched the Raelian movement, has argued that "the idea of the extraterrestrial is shaped in response to inadequacies of

cultural models for explaining lived experience" (2005: 9). Similar to Jung's vision of the projection of psychological anxieties onto the flying saucer, Battaglia identifies contemporary social anxieties about race, identity, and technology revealed in UFO cultural. Belief in UFOs serves a cultural role, one overlapping with religion, since it helps explain the nature of one's lived experience. Diana Tumminia pushes the connection even broader, arguing that ufology "intersect[s] with other types of narrative production based on a spectrum of UFO imagery, science fiction, and extraterrestrial lore in a cultural feedback loop of human interpretation" (2007: xxii). The UFO and the alien, Tumminia explains, has become a trope in modern culture, and embedded within a broad array of cultural products and social subcultures. Though writing at the end of the twentieth century, Jodi Dean's position that the extraterrestrial and UFO have come to represent "the new conditions of democratic politics at the millennium" (1998, 7), with debates over rationality, truthfulness, and especially the politics of treatments of the other—"foreigners, immigrants, and strangers" (1998, 17)—remains a powerful argument two decades into the twenty-first century.

In her recent treatment of the intersection of ufology, science, and American culture, *American Cosmic: UFOs, Religion, Technology*, Diana W. Pasulka has argued for "the case that belief in extraterrestrials and UFOs constitutes a new form of religion" (2019: 216). In her project, Pasulka tracks this religiosity among elite scientists and technologists, immersing herself within a world as much about futurism as it is about layered secrets and conspiracies. Pasulka notes that same sort of forces present within this nascent form of techno-scientific ufological religion as one finds in other religious traditions: the systematizing and management of mythology and beliefs, the creation of dogma, and debates over authenticity and evidence. Much of what Pasulka observes among these elite scientists mirrors the same patterns within previous UFO religions, as documented in this book. Pasulka notes the additional layer of new media, and the way in which new media and new technology beam the UFO monomyth directly to consumers in new audio-visual forms.

Pasulka's (2019) and Halperin's (2020) books are the most recent, but an expanding number of religious studies scholars have treated the intersection of UFOs and religion in the past few decades. W. Michael Ashcraft's historiographic essay, serving as the first chapter of this *Handbook of UFO Religions*, details the expansion of this scholarship over its first seventy-five years. Three formative edited anthologies have represented the most recent collective scholarly assessments of the topic. These books, edited by James R. Lewis (1995), Christopher Partridge (2003), and Diana Tumminia (2007), have presented the findings from a diverse range of researchers involved in the study of religion and the UFO. Contributors to this book have drawn on that existing

scholarship, but sought to extend the conversation in new directions. This book not only considers several groups not covered in those earlier anthologies, as well as updates the coverage to consider new developments within these movements, but also seeks to deploy new methodologies to the study of UFO religions. Nevertheless, many of the same themes re-present themselves. Christopher Partridge's observation that UFO religions represent extensions of Theosophical traditions (2003: 7) and also "physicalist religion" wherein the "modern, secular, scientific worldview" holds sway (2003: 21), repeats throughout this book. So too Tumminia's focus on ufological discourse as "stigmatized" (2007: xxxii), an observation drawing on Michael Barkun's work as well (2003). And as Lewis pointed out in the first major scholarly collection on the topic, echoing Vallée, there exist fundamental "characteristics of UFOs that link to the religious consciousness," such as identifying sky-beings as sources of mystery and inspiration (1995: xii). All of these observations have proven correct, and are amplified by the treatments here.

0.2 Overview of *Handbook of UFO Religions*

In addition to introductory material, encompassing this introduction and W. Michael Ashcraft's historiographic essay treating the scholarship of UFOs and religion, this book is divided into five sections. The first section looks to the intersection of ufological thought and major religious traditions whose adherents do not necessarily or ordinarily consider UFOs relevant to their religious beliefs and practices. This encompasses ufology within Christian thought, specifically American Evangelicalism (Joseph P. Laycock), Hinduism (Layne Little), Judaism (David J. Halperin), and Native American religions (Paul O. Myhre). The omission of several major religious traditions in this book is lamentable but not intentional. Islam, for example, claims the second largest number of adherents worldwide, and Buddhism the fourth. Yet the relative paucity of attention by researchers to the place of ufological thought within these traditions made it impossible to include such chapters. This does not indicate that thinkers within those traditions do not engage concepts involving ufology, only that scholars have yet to turn our attention to the matter. To take the example of Islam, anecdotal evidence exists that contemporary Muslims consider questions about extraterrestrial life, visitation by spacecraft, and similar topics, often in manners comparable to believers from other traditions.²

2 See, for instance, the examples of a Muslim internet discussion board and a theological questions and answer forum. Both the "bottom-up" forum and "top-down" theological

Researchers simply have not caught up with this lived Islamic experience, with the exception of some attention to Islamic offshoots such as the Nation of Islam (Finley 2012). Buddhism offer an analogous case, as do the many religious traditions of Africa. Additionally, several planned chapters—on African American ufology, Catholic ufology, and ufology and gender—were lamentably not able to be written and included. This points to the need for greater attention to UFO religiosity from more scholars, rather than the unsustainable reliance on a small subset of researchers.

The second and third sections of this Handbook look to thematic issues in the relation between religion and UFOs, and case studies of individuals involved in such thought. In both these sections, the treatments cut across single religious traditions and encompass ideas that span multiple movements and groups. Erik Östling's treatment of alien abduction narratives as contemporary and emergent folklore, for example, looks to the narrative accounts of abductees in terms of their folkloristic context, and argues for locating such accounts within a narrative tradition that also includes religious folklore. Lukas Pokorny, by contrast, focuses on the work of a single thinker, Benjamin Creme, whose life work draws on a diverse set of ideas involving millennialism, messianism, and conspiratorial thinking. Other treatments in the two section include Olav Hammer and Karen Swartz's chapter on Ancient Aliens, David G. Robertson on conspiratorial thinking, and Rafael Antunes Almeida on Brazilian UFO conferences, in addition to Östling's chapter. Part three, looking to individual proponents of UFO thought, includes, in addition to Pokorny's chapter, Stefano Bigliardi on Italian author Mauro Biglino, Christa Shusko's aforementioned chapter on the work of Eleanor Kirk, and Holly Folk's research on Raymond W. Bernard, who brought earth and sky together by linking ufology and Hollow Earth theories.

The fourth and fifth sections include chapters considering religious groups predicated on ideas about UFOs and related concepts. All relatively recent in origin, these new religious movements (NRMs) span the globe, though many hail from the United States, location of the first sighting of a so-called 'flying saucer', and the source of much of the subsequent UFO mythology, often produced and disseminated by Hollywood. These sections include several

website take quite seriously questions of extraterrestrial life and visitation, and invoke many of the same themes and concepts as found in other religious engagements with ufology. Internet site, "Aliens and Extraterrestrial Life: An Islamic Look," at <https://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-about-islam/aliens-extraterrestrial-islamic-look/>, accessed 19/08/2019; internet site, "Islam views on Ufo's?," <https://www.ummah.com/forum/forum/family-lifestyle-community-culture/islamic-lifestyle-social-issues/347696-islam-views-on-ufo-s>, accessed 19/08/2019.

treatments of groups familiar to scholars of UFO religions, such as Unarius and Heaven's Gate. Rather than rehash the existing scholarship on these groups, the essays move in new directions, such as the George Chryssides's focus on charisma within the former, and Diana Tumminia's retrospective analysis of the latter from her perspective as a long-time researcher. Other chapters in part four include Hugh Urban on Scientology, Susan Palmer on the United Nuwabian Nation of Moors, Carole Cusack on Norman Paulsen and Sunburst, and Susannah Crockford on the Starseed community in Sedona, Arizona. Looking more internationally, part five includes chapters by Kelly E. Hayes on The Valley of the Dawn, Mikael Rothstein on the Aetherius Society, Régis Dericquebourg on the Raelian movement, Franz Winter's aforementioned work on Kōfuku no Kagaku, and Lukas Pokorny's second contribution to this volume on East Asian UFO religiosity.

Certainly, several groups with clear UFO connections are not included in this Handbook, such as = FIGU (Freie Interessengemeinschaft für Grenz- und Geisteswissenschaften und Ufologiestudien). Often this was due the small number of scholars studying such movements. Similarly, there are likely numerous emergent or unknown religious movements involving UFOs that have simply failed to attract the attention of scholarship. Of note, this book includes no treatment of new African UFO movements, not because there are no such movements (simple mathematics implies there probably are, given the 1.2 billion people living there!), but because researchers have not yet turned our attention to them. This *Handbook of UFO Religions* is therefore offered as a snapshot of the state of the field as it currently stands, with the hopes that in the decades to come, new research fills in the gaps and points to the lacuna that this book has overlooked.

0.3 Patterns

0.3.1 *Scientism*

Susan J. Palmer titled the final chapter of her 2004 book on the Raelian movement, "Science is Our Religion," directly quoting a member of the group (195). Palmer described the Raelian perspective as a "religion of science," a "religion of technology," and a case wherein "science has itself *become* a religion" (2004: 200–201). What Palmer identified among the Raelians applies equally to many other UFO religions and their adherents, an argument that I have also made about Heaven's Gate (Zeller 2010: 121–162; Zeller 2014: 79–82). In the case of the Raelian movement and Heaven's Gate, these religious groups explicitly address the Christian Bible and Christian theology by way of a modern technological-scientific worldview, reading the Christian tradition through

that lens. Contributors to this volume, not only Dericquebourg on the Raelians and Chryssides on Heaven's Gate, have traced similar patterns of the reading of religious tradition through the lenses of science and technology. "Starseed discourse was replete with metaphors of science and technology," explains Crockford in her chapter on a Sedona's Starseed community (407). Within Starseed discourse, Crockford shows, the concept of human DNA comes to represent a stand-in for ideas about fate and predestination, replicating older religious claims in the guise of modern science.

In an era of fragmented narratives, the advent and achievements of science and technology offer the allure of a grand meta-narrative to both believers in UFO religions and broader ufology, and scholars studying the phenomena. Christopher Partridge has cautioned that such approaches are less "based on science" than reflect a "physicalist interpretation of scriptures and ancient mythologies" (2003: 22–23), and indeed UFO religions generally challenge normative academic scientific approaches. They less invoke science in a formal sense, as the image of science and at times the materialist or physicalist assumptions of science, what philosopher of science Mikael Stenmark has called "epistemic scientism" (2001: 4). For adherents operating under such an epistemic position, all knowledge must be filtered through claims to scientific hegemony. Such positions march in time with simultaneous modernization, secularization, and rationalization, all forces that have proceeded unevenly but clearly through the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

Yet lurking beneath the scientism, UFO religions often challenge fundamental assumptions of mainstream academic science. While non-materialistic claims are sometimes phrased in the language of science, such as the "psychic anatomies" responsible for spiritual growth of the Unarius Academy of Science as described by Diana Tumminia (392), at other times such groups appeal to explicitly non-materialistic claims without recourse the scientific language. The rich patterns and practices of Spiritism within the Brazilian movement The Valley of the Dawn, as presented by Kelly E. Hayes, offers such an example (426–29).

Further, in their appeals to science, adherents of UFO religions often demonstrate a remarkably anti-intellectual position wherein the opinions of experts and the scientific establishment assume a secondary position to direct empirical claims of participants in the subculture of ufology. Since the claims of scientists and other experts sometimes directly contradict those of ufologists, this serves a useful legitimisation function, but it also points to a broader "folk science" approach within ufology, to use the term of humanist physicist Taner Edis (2006). This folk science declares that the reality of UFOs and their inhabitants can be assumed, based on the testimony of many thousands of witnesses, and also because it simply makes sense to those who proclaim it, regardless

of the opinions of scientific experts, military commissions, and governmental bureaucrats. The position is reminiscent of both the Scottish Common Sense Realist tradition that later invigorated the American Fundamentalist movement and its anti-Darwinian crusade, and also contemporary proponents of conspiratorial thinking, a link examined by David G. Robertson is both his contribution to this *Handbook* and his own book (2016). Stefano Bigliardi's examination of Italian author Mauro Biglino, and his promotion of Ancient Aliens theories, indicates the way that participants within the subculture can both claim the mantle of science, yet simultaneously challenge it through such anti-intellectualist and folk-scientistic ways.

0.3.2 *Occultism, Esotericism, Theosophy*

Scientific claims to the contrary, a clear link between ufology and Western Esotericism and occultism can be perceived. Hammer and Swartz's chapter on the development of the Ancient Alien motif offers the most explicit treatment of this connection within this volume, for they trace the historical development of the Ancient Alien within the Theosophical family of religions to its inclusion within Charles Fort's (1874–1932) catalogue of "Fortean" phenomenon, such as extrasensory perception (ESP), telekinesis and other psychic abilities, teleportation, ghosts and other spirits, unnatural weather patterns, and sightings of folkloric creatures (1919), to its broader place in contemporary ufology.

Many UFO religions descend from the broad category of theosophical religions, especially those emergent from the North American context. Guy and Edna Ballard's IAM movement helped popularize the connection between theosophy's 'masters' (elsewhere, Ascended Masters) and extraterrestrial intelligence, drawing on a reservoir of theosophical thinking beginning with founder H. P. Blavatsky but continuing through Charles Leadbeater, Annie Besant, and Alice Bailey. As several contributors to this *Handbook* note, Blavatsky included extraterrestrials among the theosophical masters with whom she claimed communication and from whom theosophists hope to learn spiritual wisdom, a notion expanded especially in the Besant and Bailey influenced traditions within Theosophy proper and the theosophical offshoot traditions. In the work of some ufologists, such theosophical 'masters' transmute into extraterrestrial visitors come to Earth to offer spiritual wisdom and salvation. This link is most evident among contactees, who claim in their experience with such beings, often called "Space Brothers," new religious revelations that nevertheless echo previous theosophical claims about topics ranging from lost civilizations and technologies to individual spiritual development. The "Hierarchy" of Space Brothers as popularized by Benjamin Creme, considered in this volume by Lukas Pokorny, offers one such example.

Broader occult interests characterize many elements of UFO religiosity. Astrology, with its clear link the heavens and outer space, represents one such current. As Christa Shusko points out, Eleanor Kirk's foray into extraplanetary travel began with her interest in astrology, along with her studies of Theosophy and Mental Science. Creme also, Pokorny notes, has been influenced by astrology, and astrology served a central role in the emergence of Heaven's Gate. Ashcraft notes in his chapter the manner in which many popularisers and early scholars of ufology, some of whom were as much students of the phenomenon as they were critical analysts, subsumed ufology within broader occultism. Nor was this merely a transatlantic phenomenon. Little points to parallel development within South Asian occultism, and Pokorny within the East Asian context.

0.3.3 *Millennialism*

While engagements with ideas about science and the occult characterize many sectors within UFO religiosity, the topic of millennialism encompasses nearly all of them. In the broadest sense, millennialism refers to collective salvation via massive change, sometimes catastrophic and sometimes progressive in orientation, as scholar of millennialism Catherine Wessinger has argued (2011). The first wave of UFO religions, founded in the Cold War era under the shadow of Hiroshima, often took such millennial outlooks for granted. As historian Paul Boyer argued (1985) of Cold War culture, the "cultural fallout" of the Atomic Bomb powerfully shaped the millennial outlook of the 1940s–1960s, the same era in which these new ufological religiosities emerged. The Aetherius Society and Unarius Academy of Science, and the various contactees and abductees considered by folklorist Erik A. W. Östling in his chapter in the *Handbook*, variously understood extraterrestrials to have come to Earth to offer dire warnings about the state of our planet, to offer solutions for our social and technological ills, or to actively take part in the destructive campaigns against human society. Often, as in the case of the elaborate conspiracy theories developed by proponents of ufology, differing groups of aliens engaged in each of these activities, as Robertson shows in his chapter.

Progressive millennial ufology, to adopt Wessinger's categorization, often drew from the same well as theosophically-oriented ufology, calling for the wisdom of the Space Brothers to usher in a new era of religious, scientific, and social salvation. The Unarius Academy of Science, as discussed by Diana Tumminia, and more recently groups like the Valley of the Dawn and Raelians, offer visions of massive social transformation through beneficent guidance by extraterrestrials. This ranges from promises of eternal life through scientific technology to spiritual uplift to utopian dreams of the end of poverty, war, and disease. The "amelioration of human suffering," as Hayes describes the goal of

the Valley of the Dawn (432), calls for collaboration between extraterrestrial intelligences and receptive human beings. Various proponents of the ancient astronaut theories, including contemporary figures in Italy and Brazil as discussed by Bigliardi and Almeida, argue for similar roles played by extraterrestrial visitors in the distant past, who it is claimed provided pivotal assistance to shape human social, cultural, and even biological development. Projecting such progressive millennialism into the past, the ancient astronaut concept proclaims that visitors from space provided the same sort of disruptive but redemptive social transformation that other ufologists hope will occur in the future.

Catastrophic millennial ufology looks to equally disruptive social transformation, one that Wessinger argues is tied to a pessimistic view of humanity and a vision of violent and destructive disruption of the existing order (2011). Groups like Heaven's Gate, and more recently Kōfuku no Kagaku, exhibit such tendencies, as do abductees who claim alien conspiracies to corrupt or manipulate human society. The reptilian hypothesis, popularized by David Icke, has spread throughout ufology, and promotes the fear of hostile lizard-like aliens masquerading as human beings so as to infiltrate the highest levels of human government, business, and society. The ultimate aim of such aliens, which vary depending on the particular conspiratorial claim, invariably involve the downfall of the present human order.

Avertive millennial ufology envisions the same sort of nefarious forces at play within the catastrophic vision, but calls for human actions to prevent the impending apocalypse. Joseph Laycock's presentation of Evangelical Christian counter-ufology represents such avertive millennialism. For such Evangelical ufologists, UFOs represent demonic invasion, and are in league with forces of liberal secularism (such as science) in threatening the Christian order. Only by actively working against these UFOs and what they represent, "resisting" them in the words of such Christians, can humanity preserve ourselves and our society. Outside of the Christian context, one finds analogous claims among abductees, as Östling shows, who hope to prevent future abductions by sharing their experiences and memories.

0.3.4 *Hybridity with Popular Culture*

A final theme that cuts across many UFO religions is a fluid intersection with popular culture wherein the delineations between fact and fiction, religion and entertainment, have become blurred. Drawing on Jean's Baudrillard conceptualization of hyperreality, Adam Possamai has identified a pattern of religious hyperreality, describing it as "religions and spirituality that mix elements from religious traditions with popular culture" (Possamai 2007: 1). Hyperreal

religion draws from popular culture alongside more traditionally religious concepts and approaches, and in doing so recasts the religious value of the popular culture references as meaningful and truthful (Possamai 2012). Within UFO religions, the prevalence of ideas drawn from popular entertainment series such as *The X-Files*, *Star Trek*, and *Ancient Aliens* demonstrates the reach of hyperreal religion. Continuing the thread of the reptilian hypothesis, as noted above a popular part of UFO millennial outlooks, undoubtably the particular claims about extraterrestrial reptilian invasion lean as much on the 1983–1985 American television series *V* as they do David Icke's writings. *V* offered effectively the same vision of reptilian invaders hiding behind human skin, infiltrating governments and societies, as Icke later popularized. This perspective then made its way into ufological discourse by way of both the popular culture and Icke's conspiratorial thinking, entering into the religious thoughts of groups like Heaven's Gate and The United Nuwaubian Nation, as Susan Palmer notes in her chapter.

Christopher Partridge's model of occulture, a blending of paranormal, religious, and popular cultural practices and concepts, also explains the manner in which UFO religion engage popular culture (Partridge 2004, 2005). Occulture, as Partridge deploys the term, refers to the way in which religious or spiritual ideas often blend into popular culture itself, as well as cultural flows in the other direction. A common occultural theme is what he called the "sacralization of the extraterrestrial," or the systematic interpretation of aliens as technologically and spiritually advanced beings who intervene in human life for good or ill (Partridge 2005: 167, 174). Perhaps most emblematic of this is *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), one of the most popular Cold War UFO films, and one that cemented in the public imagination a linkage between the extraterrestrial and a quasi-religious salvific role. The film's alien hero, Klaatu, overtly parallels Jesus, and following his death and resurrection, issues an edict to humanity meant to persuade us to embrace peace on Earth, rather than face judgement from the heavens (Etherden 2005). As such religious value seeped into UFO popular culture, it filtered back into UFO religions, resulting in the sort of blending described by Franz Winter in his analysis of *Kōfuku no Kagaku*, wherein anime, manga, and other popular culture comes to serve as both muse and media within this Japanese UFO religion.

0.4 Conclusion

Despite ongoing secularization and rationalization, both UFOs and religion remain hot topics in global society. Despite Max Weber's warning that the iron

cage of modernity would result in a world of rationalization and mechanization, contemporary moderns increasingly look to the enchanted world of ufology, alternative spirituality, and new and retrenched forms of religiosity. UFO religions represent one particular manner in which this occurs, and it does so in social contexts broadly distinct from each other. While contemporary ufology emerges from Cold War American origins, the distinctive forms that ufology and UFO religions take globally reveal the broad nature of this religious movement's appeal.

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Scholarship on UFOs and Religion: The First Seventy-Five Years

W. Michael Ashcraft

1.1 Introduction

Several aspects of Unidentified Flying Objects (henceforth UFOs) and alien experiences point to the emotional and cognitive terrain conventionally called religious: life-changing experiences in alien encounters, enhanced awareness of unity among all life forms, and excitement about uncovering unknown realities in the cosmos. Whether or not they are officially members of religious organizations, people who believe they have had encounters find deep meaning in those experiences.

Scholars in many fields have studied the relationship between religion and UFOs over the past seventy-five years. In this essay, we survey their findings. Some people have joined together to form UFO religions. They are covered elsewhere in this volume. Instead, our focus is on the scholars who have addressed questions regarding UFOs that include religious beliefs and religious social structures.

Our understanding of the scholarship on UFOs and religion requires some historical background. People have reported strange phenomena in the sky from antiquity to the present. The modern interest in UFOs, however, in the United States dates from 1947, when American aviator Kenneth Arnold (1915–1984) reported sighting several disc-shaped aerial phenomena near Mount Rainier, Washington. Over the next several years, other observers claimed to see unusual objects in the atmosphere. In the 1950s, these sightings were accompanied in many cases by claims that people had made contact with alien beings in the UFOs. Those who had such experiences were called contactees. They published articles and books, and received considerable journalistic coverage. Contactees said that aliens possessed technology far in advance of anything human beings had yet invented. These aliens also were concerned about humanity's welfare. According to contactees, aliens described the cosmos in terms resembling those of Theosophy, a nineteenth-century movement that combined occultic with Eastern religious ideas (Partridge 2003). The messages

that contactees conveyed to the public had religious or quasi-religious overtones, and included information on humanity's place in the universe, the guiding principles that all advanced civilizations beyond the earth subscribed to, and the possibilities for humanity's spiritual transformation. In the 1960s, however, the nature of reported alien encounters changed. Beginning with the abduction story of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961, many individuals came forward claiming that they were abducted, taken into alien craft, and subjected to scientific experiments that were typically invasive and painful. Abductees questioned the rosy picture of aliens earlier contactees had painted. They warned that aliens wanted to control human beings and the earth. These messages also had religious implications, but now the religious questions dealt with the presence of evil among aliens. The increased emphasis on abduction stories was not the only development in the 1960s that impacted UFO believers. This was the era of the counterculture, when many alternative religious ideas found wider audiences than ever before in American history. UFOs were lumped together with astrology, clairvoyance, and dream interpretation. Noted church historian Martin Marty called it the "occult establishment." He defined it as a melding of pre-1960s occultism with newer paranormal phenomena, including UFO sightings and encounters (Marty 1970: 216–226).

Abductions inspired numerous books, articles, films, and television shows. In addition to the popular media, both academic and popular investigators compared abduction narratives to similar narratives of Near-Death Experiences and social panics based on supposed manifestations of Satanic power. Today it is common to find UFOs existing alongside other paranormal phenomena in the same book, documentary, or website.

The study of religion and UFOs has been conducted in several fields: theology, sociology, psychology, folklore, history of religions, and religious studies. Most of the scholars in these fields are researchers who hold graduate degrees from accredited universities and are regarded by gatekeepers of their disciplines (like professional societies and academic publishers) as legitimate, reliable scholars. At the end of this chapter, however, I consider another category of researchers, whom I call "explorers of consciousness." Many of them are acknowledged scholars with legitimate academic credentials. But they take their scholarship one step further than other academics discussed in this chapter. They believe that UFOs and Extraterrestrial Intelligence (henceforth ETI) are real. In their writings, they urge their readers not only to keep an open mind about UFOs, but to embrace the philosophical and religious themes that contactees and abductees have relayed to the public.

1.2 Theology

Theologians began debating the existence of ETI in the pages of religious periodicals in the late 1940s and increasingly in the 1950s, but they were preceded by thinkers who contemplated this question as early as Classical antiquity. The phrase for this debate was the “plurality of worlds” (Dick 1982: 2). An older conception of the cosmos, called geocentrism, had placed the earth and humanity in the centre of God’s creation. But scientists in the early modern era, like Copernicus and Galileo, compelled thinkers and church figures to slowly alter their view of the universe. As modern science advanced, the geocentric model failed to compete and ultimately was rejected by most intellectuals and scientists.

Some Roman Catholic thinkers questioned the assumption that often accompanied a geocentric model: that human beings were not only the most advanced creatures under God’s rule, but the only intelligent ones. Speculation based on the notion of the “plurality of worlds” raised serious questions about this assumption. The third-century theologian Origen of Alexandria argued that God made a vast number of intelligent beings who were not physical entities but pre-existent souls, some of whom fell from God’s favour. The soul that became Jesus Christ, said Origen, need not be regarded as wedded exclusively to humanity. Because Christ was divine, he could also be the saviour for other races on other worlds (O’Meara 1999: 8–10).

Medieval Franciscan friar Guillaume de Vaurouillon was credited as “the first author who raised the question of whether the idea of a plurality of worlds is compatible with the central Christian notions of a divine incarnation and redemption” (O’Meara 1999: 14–15). He avowed that God could create many worlds if he chose, and Christ’s death was redemptive for all of God’s children, even those on other planets (O’Meara 1999: 15). A modern Catholic writer, Joseph Pohle, argued that there must be intelligent life on other worlds. The number of stars and planets was staggering, and Pohle, like many who came later, could not imagine that humanity was the only conscious, rational species in the vastness of space (Kleinz 1960: 36).

By the 1950s in the United States, ETI had become a subject of interest to both the scientific community and the general public. Theological commentators were concerned about responding to the challenges to religion posed by scientific advances. Building on the foundation of earlier writers, Roman Catholics argued that the existence of other intelligent species beyond the earth need not damage or destroy Christianity. Advocates like Francis J. Connell, Angelo Perego S.J., John P. Kleinz, Daniel C. Raible C.P.P.S., and T. J. Zubek, O.F.M., said that God was infinite, and if he chose to create multiple intelligent species, and bestow upon them the gifts of faith, grace, and salvation, then human beings

need do nothing more than stand in awe of this great God. They claimed that the new views of life and cosmos propounded by scientists should not worry Catholics. Although a few Catholic voices departed from this consensus, the more positive approach toward the existence of intelligent life in the universe seemed to prevail (Vakoch 2000: 167–168).

Protestant theologians followed suit. Martin J. Heineken, professor of theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, said there was nothing in the Bible that ruled out life on other planets: “It would ... be a great presumption to deny the existence of other creatures of God.” He speculated that they may not have fallen into sin as humanity did, and thus would not need the redemption that came with Christ’s crucifixion. If they were fallen, then Christ was sufficient to cover their sin (Heineken 1959: 122–123). Another Protestant spokesman, W. B. Easton, agreed. He noted that Jesus told his disciples in the Gospel of John that he had “other sheep that are not of this fold.” These ‘sheep’ could as easily be extraterrestrial as human (Easton 1961: 429).

Jewish theologian Norman Lamm also weighed in on these issues. He discussed three challenges to Judaism posed by the existence of ETI. The first was the uniqueness of humanity. The Torah taught that human beings were made in God’s image. In Judaism, God makes human beings the stewards of all creation. The second challenge was to the uniqueness of the Creator. At the time of Lamm’s publication, scientists were working in laboratories to replicate life. If life could be copied, conceivably it could also exist on a distant planet. The third challenge was to the relationship between God and humanity. The universe is so large that we must acknowledge the likelihood that numerous intelligent species exist, not just human beings. If so, then what about God’s loving, covenantal relationship with us? After reviewing these concerns, Lamm concluded that the basic idea in Judaism—that God cares for us—would not be diminished by the discovery of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe (Lamm 1966: 21–48).

Discussion about the nature of God, and for Christian thinkers, the nature of Christ, would continue as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s. In that latter decade, a new voice emerged among mainstream Protestant theologians, Ted Peters, of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. In 1977, Peters published *UFOS: God’s Chariots? Flying Saucers in Politics, Science, and Religion*. He argued that UFOS indicate a deep human need for oneness with our Creator. In today’s world, Peters noted, a sense of transcendence was missing. UFOS restored to us that missing dimension, so basic to human societies (Peters 1977: 9, 17–18).¹

1 C. G. Jung first pointed academics in the direction of myth. See below.

Peters linked theological categories—transcendence, creation, human alienation—with interpretations of UFOs then current in the academy. Many writers in this decade simply grafted aliens onto their Evangelical Protestant understanding of biblical religion (Saliba 1995: 32). But Peters made a place for theological perspectives in the ongoing discourse among various disciplines about the importance of UFOs and ETI.

Since the 1970s, he has continued to refine his basic insights. In a 1998 article, for example, he addressed the tragedy of the Heaven's Gate suicides. He believed that this group offered a glimpse into something important in our society. Members of this new religious movement (henceforth NRM) looked for transcendent meaning in a secularizing world. They turned to UFO mythology, rather than conventional Christianity, for that meaning (Peters 2003: 239–240).

Recently, Peters published the third in a series of lectures that examined exotheology, or “the theological analysis of questions arising from new knowledge about outer space.” Exotheology explores questions related to ETI. Peters examined various myths associated with UFOs, speculation about life on other planets, and the contributions of his theological predecessors, especially Paul Tillich (1886–1965) and Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014), who insisted on using traditional theological categories but with new applications in the intellectual arena of the present (Peters 2008: 101, 125–127).

Peters' term, exotheology, has a cognate. As early as 1969, Clifford J. Stevens published *Astrotheology*, in which he argued that ETI might have their own theology (Vakoch 2000: 171). Steven J. Dick used the same word as an umbrella term for all speculation about ETI and God, from antiquity to the present (Dick 1998: 245–248). Although exotheology and astrotheology can apply to different ideas, the very fact that theologians have now given a name to questions of ETI and theology may indicate that in the future, theological reflection on humanity's place in the cosmos will become increasingly sophisticated, and could prepare the ground for a full-blown theological renaissance should ETI ever be proven.

Michael Lieb, a retired professor of English, contributed to theological discussion of UFOs and ETI with his 1998 book, *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time*. As the title suggests, Lieb connected the biblical experience of Ezekiel's *visio Dei*, made famous by sixteenth-century Florentine painter Raphael in his *Ezekiel's Vision*, to an interesting collection of writers and thinkers from John Milton to the Nation of Islam (NOI) leader Louis Farrakhan. Lieb argued that these are “children of Ezekiel” in that they attempt to disclose what God has kept hidden from humanity. They are ‘technologists’ (from *technē*, meaning skill or art), so-called from Martin Heidegger's “The Question Concerning Technology” (Lieb 1998: 13). They revealed to their

audiences the true way of things. The vision that Ezekiel described, it could be argued, resembled modern machinery and scientific allusions to the inner workings of phenomena. The entity had weird eyes and wheels, and appeared to be a conveyance of some kind. Thus the term 'chariot' was assigned to this imagery. UFO enthusiast Erich von Däniken even entitled his most famous book after the Ezekiel vision: *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past* (1968). Von Däniken asserted that the thing Ezekiel saw was a UFO, containing visitors from other dimensions or other planets. He thus took the technologizing of what's hidden to the ultimate conclusion that it is entirely a technology, a machine, something that could be understood scientifically.

One of the most fascinating parts of Lieb's work was the inclusion of the Nation of Islam (NOI), an African American NRM begun in the early twentieth century. This is a rare instance in the history of UFO speculations of an African American interpretation of UFOs and ETI. The second half of Lieb's work was devoted to a close reading of speeches by NOI leaders Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan. They technologized Ezekiel's chariot as a huge vehicle in the atmosphere above the earth's surface that would rain destruction on white people as just recompense for all of the suffering whites had caused blacks from the mythological beginnings of the white race to the present (Lieb: 150). In NOI theology, humanly constructed objects, apocalyptic expectation, and racial justice blended together. Edward E. Curtis IV elaborated on these themes, as well, highlighting the emphasis among NOI members on Islam as a rational, scientifically justified system of belief (Curtis 2016: 9).

1.3 Sociology

John Saliba noted in 1992 that in-depth studies of UFO cults were scarce, but one of the most frequently cited was *When Prophecy Fails* (1956), whose lead author was noted social psychologist Leon Festinger (1919–1989) (Saliba 1992: 75). Sociology was slow to focus on the study of UFOs. Festinger was one of the few sociologists who did so. Festinger and some of his colleagues learned about a Chicago housewife named Dorothy Martin (called Marian Keech in Festinger's book). She taught a small group of followers that a Guardian entity would arrive soon in a flying saucer to take them away from earth, which would be destroyed in a natural cataclysm. But Keech kept pushing back the date of the flying saucer's appearance. Finally a definitive date was set, but the saucer failed to appear. Festinger called this phenomenon failed prophecy. He was interested in how members of the group would respond. Although some quit, others stayed, and overcame their disappointment by reinterpreting Keech's

messages and even proselytizing for the movement (Ashcraft 2018: 63–64). Festinger's book inspired many later studies of failed prophecy. That it was about a UFO group was, arguably, incidental. The group could have anticipated a messiah from within a Christian context, rather than a Guardian arriving in a UFO, and the study would have still been famous, because it gave to social science the idea of failed prophecy.

Other contributions to a sociological literature on UFOs appeared in print by the late 1960s. These studies mostly examined the social categories into which advocates for UFOs fell. Sociologists interviewed participants who believed in UFO appearances as well as encounters between humans and aliens. H. Taylor Buckner traced the development of UFO social groups chronologically, showing that by the 1950s many UFO believers had formed clubs in which members claimed contact with aliens. This in turn spawned publications and circuit lecturers which increased interest in UFOs beyond the limited membership of such clubs. For Buckner, this was a significant development. Once a certain level of interest was generated and sustained, these groups created "a universe of regularized mutual response, whose boundaries are set by the limit of effective communications. Each social world has a universe of discourse in which pertinent experiences are categorized in particular ways" (Buckner 1968: 225).

Buckner noted that these organizations were a phenomenon of the 1950s. By the 1960s they had declined (Buckner 1968: 227). But people continued to believe in UFOs. Phillis Fox interviewed several hundred people in rural California in the 1970s. She discovered that the majority believed in UFOs, but did not form clubs as earlier advocates had. She identified several factors that strengthened such beliefs: open-mindedness, larger belief systems, and social class. They reflected the ability of Americans to shift their beliefs, making them, in Robert Jay Lifton's famous term, 'protean selves' (Lifton 1993). Fox also focused on interaction. People were more likely to believe in UFOs if those whose judgment they trusted also believed (Fox 1979: 20–28).

Richard Michael Rasmussen divided UFO advocates into three categories: cultist, enthusiast, and rationalist. The first were those who thought that aliens came to earth to help humanity. Their interpretations, said Rasmussen, ranged from the pseudo-religious to the religious. Their literature taught a cosmic philosophy about humanity's place in the universe. Enthusiasts were people who believed, and had a love/hate relationship with science. They embraced scientists if the latter confirmed their ideas, but otherwise they regarded scientists collectively as threatening to the acceptance of UFOs by the general populace. Finally, the rationalists were those very scientists, with authentic educational and research credentials, who were reluctant to affirm anything about aliens (Rasmussen 1985: 2–6).

Interestingly, Ron Westrum was the lead author of a study that contained an identical breakdown of UFO followers (Westrum 1985: 179–182). So did Saliba (Saliba 1992: 72). The consensus among sociologists, and other scholars, was that the contactee movement of the 1950s, when encounters with aliens was depicted positively, gave way to a diverse range of believers in the 1960s and 1970s. At this point, UFO advocates became part of a larger paranormal milieu. The countercultural environment of that period permitted the flowering of many alternative beliefs, practices, and groups. Atlantis and other hidden ancient civilizations, monstrous species like Big Foot, ghosts and other entities from the afterlife, and other unusual phenomena absorbed the UFO advocates in an occultic revival, as mentioned earlier (Ashcraft 2018: 48). One of the first social scientists to identify this conglomeration was C. E. Ashworth. He observed British occult enthusiasts who mixed many beliefs and practices. Ancient astronauts, parapsychology, reincarnation, monsters, aliens, witchcraft—they were all represented in a kind of paranormal festival where anything you were interested in was offered at someone's booth. Conventional scientists dismissed this revival as irrational hogwash. What many educated observers at the time failed to appreciate was the growing religiosity of this phenomenon. A sense of life's larger purpose was ever-present among occult participants. They were fascinated by, and deeply respected, the mystery that lurked around the edges of our known world. Ashworth found social structure among them, where stories and meaning converged. Borrowing from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), Ashworth argued that these people were doing what religious people had always done: building social networks of purpose and relationship that sustained their lives (Ashworth 1980: 355, 368).

Another study, that links this section with the previous one, had as its principal investigator the theologian Ted Peters. It was called the Peters ETI Religious Crisis Survey, sponsored by Counterbalance, “a non-profit educational organization working to promote the public understanding of science” (Peters 2008). It was designed to either confirm or deny the assertion made by the director of the Center for SETI Research, Jill Tarter, who said that religions would collapse if ETI were shown unequivocally to be real. Peters and his associate, Julie Froehlig, surveyed graduate students at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, as well as a broader set of respondents contacted by mail. Victoria Alexander had published a similar survey a few years earlier, but she only queried clergy in two of the Abrahamic faiths, Christianity and Judaism (Alexander 2003). Peters and Froehlig, on the other hand, surveyed both clergy and laity who identified with eleven different religious groups, including several non-Christian ones. In general, this Survey showed that most people were comfortable with the prospect of ETI being proven real someday. This contrasted with the assumptions held by most scientists who worked with

UFO topics. They thought religions would fall apart if ETI was proven to be real. But the survey respondents had few worries about the impact of ETI on their religious traditions (Peters 2008).

By far the most significant sociological study of UFOs was by Christopher D. Bader, working with F. Carson Mencken and Joseph Baker among others. The end result of their research was the publication of *Paranormal America: Ghost Encounters, UFO Sightings, Bigfoot Hunts, and Other Curiosities in Religion and Culture* (2010; 2017), but they had published a number of articles in peer-reviewed journals leading up to this book (McKinnon 2011: 432). Bader became interested in UFO contactees in 1989, and after some negotiations, gained permission to interview members of the UFO Contact Center International (henceforth UFOCCI) as well as attend their meetings (Bader 2003: 671–672). His work coincided with the shift in the UFO movement noted earlier, from emphasis on contacts with aliens to exploration of abduction cases. Bader found that abductees, who initially spoke in negative terms about their abductions, came to a greater acceptance of their experiences, interpreting abductions in light of larger ideals and purposes (Bader 1995: 87). Bader and company used the 2005 Baylor Religion Survey to assess this population. They discovered that many were self-identified Christians who integrated UFO beliefs into their faith, although people who attended church regularly were less likely to report UFO experiences than those who did not (Mencken, Bader, Stark 2008: 194).

In *Paranormal America*, Bader, Mencken and Baker found that interest in the paranormal was growing. Conventional Christian beliefs were not necessarily obstacles. Two types of believers of UFOs dominated the ranks of paranormal believers: those seeking enlightenment, and those seeking discovery. The first category were people who cultivated insights for personal growth from alien encounters. The second were those who were amazed that a different reality existed (Bader, Mencken, and Baker 2010: 12). Sources like the Baylor Religion Survey and the UFOCCI (now defunct) reappeared in the pages of their book. So, too, did Christian paranormal believers. The results of their years of research provided a fascinating, long-overdue study, now in its second edition.

1.4 Diverse Disciplines on UFOs as Myths

We now turn to a group of writers whose primary interest was in interpreting religion and UFOs using the concept of myth. Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) was the most important individual to lead scholarship in this direction. His interpretation of UFOs first came to light during an interview in 1954. The editor of

Weltwoche, a Zurich newspaper, asked Jung to answer some questions posed by one of the newspaper's reporters (Jung 1976: 131). On that occasion, Jung admitted he had been interested in UFOs since 1946. He refused to affirm that UFOs had material reality. As Robert A. Segal later wrote, "C. G. Jung typifies the agnosticism of twentieth-century social science" (Segal 2003: 314). For Jung, the debate about whether UFOs were real was not important. Rather, he wanted to know what UFO belief implied for modern humanity. This was the Cold War era. Millions of people felt anxiety over the prospect of nuclear-armed nations starting a war that could decimate the human race. Jung, using the categories of analytical psychology, concluded that sightings of, and encounters with, UFOs were symptomatic of modern malaise. He argued that UFOs compensated for our "scientific picture of the world," devoid as it was of the extraordinary, the marvellous, and the unknown (Jung 1976: 135).

Jung's published interview made international headlines. It was reprinted, then new material was added and ran in several periodicals (Jung 1976: 131). Eventually Jung published *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1959). This book "has had a lasting influence on virtually every ufologist who has ever considered the psychological and sociological aspects of the UFO phenomenon" (Story 1980: 127). Jung said that every great period was marked by symbols pointing to the collective psyche of that time. Jung believed that we were nearing the end of an era. UFOs appeared to people afflicted by the psychic and spiritual stress of living in a society dominated by science and technology. For Jung, the thousands of sightings of UFOs must have "an omnipresent emotional foundation." It did not matter that UFO sightings might have physical aspects measurable by scientific devices, or that sightings could be witnessed by many observers at once. Jung said, "Things can be seen by many people independently of one another, or even simultaneously, which are not physically real" (Jung 1959: 12–13).

UFOs had "become a *living myth*" for Jung. Their rounded shape recalled mandalas of past cultures, which symbolized order. Jung thus posited UFOs as quasi-religious, cosmic, universal symbols that reassured humanity. Much of the book then examined numerous cases where UFOs as symbols of completion could be found in dreams, modern paintings, and other aspects of culture (Jung 1959: 16–17).

Historian of religions Robert S. Ellwood, Jr. borrowed from Jung to analyse contemporary mythmaking in the 1960s and 1970s. Ellwood noted that aliens functioned much like Jung's "technological angels." Angels were divine messengers. Perhaps aliens were simply the most recent iteration of that ancient symbol in human consciousness (Ellwood 1973: 135). Joseph A. Blake focused on the archetypes in Jung's thought. Jungian archetypes are universal

psychological templates for the formation of specific cultural items. Blake thought that the archetype was a useful means of interpreting UFOs, both in their contemporary manifestation and as earlier, religious imagery (Blake 1979: 324). Both Ronald Story and John Whitmore borrowed from Jung's work on dreams. Story said that people in most cultures believe the contents of their dreams have consequences for waking life. Many people have dreamed of UFO-like images. For example, the prophet Ezekiel discussed earlier in the Hebrew Bible described a flying chariot, or wheel within a wheel, in a dream-like vision (Story 1980: 129). Whitmore found that abduction stories, in which people were taken against their will into spacecraft and subjected to horrifying experiments, had a dream-like quality. Common dream imagery recurred in these accounts, such as time and space appearing as disjointed or nonsensical (Whitmore 1995: 68–69).

Other scholars employed the term myth differently. Researcher Brenda Denzler said that the UFO myth was simply the assertion by believers that UFOs are real. Advocates constructed this myth from their own experiences. Most of the people whom she interviewed or who participated in her surveys were white males with high levels of formal education. At first glance, one would peg this particular population as more likely to be sceptical of UFOs. Yet their experiences with aliens were overwhelmingly persuasive. As they told and re-told their stories, they built up communities sharing common experiences that enabled them to fend off scientific challenges to their ideas (Denzler 2001: 2, 135, 163–167). They also took for themselves the label 'experiencers'. These were abductees who revised their understanding of their experiences from initial fear to later acceptance.

Most recently, Christopher Partridge employed myth in his investigation of the dark side of UFOs. Abduction narratives did not employ the warm, positive images that contactees had borrowed from Theosophy. They reached for an earlier source, Christianity. Abduction stories relied on the same symbols that Christians had historically associated with Satan. Both abduction and demonic narratives indicated that a final battle between good and evil was coming. And both involved sexual promiscuity and other evidence of humanity's moral flaws. For Partridge, these two myths from opposite ends of the historical spectrum were found to have much in common. Indeed, one could conclude that it was the same myth in both cases, abduction and demonology (Partridge 2004: 163, 165, 175–178).

Folklore specialists have also used myth to better understand UFO beliefs. Linda Dégh noted that legends of UFOs were devised as explanations for phenomena that people otherwise did not understand. The experience was linked to memorates, or oral narratives based on memories. With the passage of time,

memorates were given to people in a chain but the memorate itself could lose its potency as other legend-building chains were fashioned (Dégh 1977: 244–247). Peter M. Rojcewicz echoed Dégh's work in his own study of *Men in Black* (henceforth MIB), a common component in UFO myth. Those who had encountered MIB did not speak of their experiences in ways that easily fit into the commonly accepted MIB narrative. But the narrative won out eventually, so that people with no first-hand experience with MIB could share collective memories (Rojcewicz 1987: 148–149).

The most prolific folklorist writing about UFOs was Thomas E. Bullard. He was a crossover figure. He earned his Ph.D. in folklore, but much of his professional research was conducted in cooperation with UFO organizations and publications that sceptical observers criticized for lacking sufficient objectivity. He admitted that “in the end I side with the believers” (Bullard 2010: 24). In an article on abduction stories, Bullard pointed to parallels with similar episodes in history. Like “older supernatural encounter traditions,” victims of alien abductions were, according to their narratives, whisked away from their daily lives with no warning, subjected to experiences that were frightening and painful, yet developed a deep realization about reality, much like a theophany in traditional religions (Bullard 1989: 152–153, 158). More recently Bullard elaborated on the process of building an abduction myth. Most such myths began with someone who had an experience. They might not have articulated all aspects of that experience clearly, but with re-telling the experience assumed details of previous abduction stories. The tropes used in historic instances of capture narratives were employed: capture, examination, discussion, journey, sacred occurrence, and return home. Some people associated a particular abduction with related stories, such as shamanic ritual journeys. Fairy lore was remarkably resonate with abduction narratives. Bullard ultimately dismissed these comparisons as speculative at best. And after many pages, he dismissed other mythically dependent explanations as well. As a conscientious believer he concluded that alien abductions were deeper and more mysterious than similar situations. They stood apart, *sui generis*, as incomparable (Bullard 2000: 163, 168, 170–171, 188).

1.5 Explorers of Consciousness

In the 1990s television hit, “The X-Files,” a poster with a photograph of a supposed UFO and the words “I Want to Believe” became an iconic reminder that many people in contemporary society yearned for enchantment. Believers in the reality of UFOs and ETI came from all walks of life, as did experiencers of

UFO events. In a recent study, D. W. Pasulka discussed scientists who were convinced of the reality of UFOs so strongly that she identified their commonly held beliefs as religiosity (Pasulka 2019: 6). These were mainly scientists who asked to remain anonymous. The scholars discussed here, however, are different from the subjects of Pasulka's study. They are from various disciplines, and they pursue explanatory lines that emphasize consciousness, a slippery term that points to the deepest aspects of human existence. The large number of individual thinkers and writers who focus upon consciousness are far beyond the scope of this essay's coverage. The list would reach back to earlier advocates like Joseph Campbell and Terence McKenna, who explored mythology, near-death experiences, and related topics (Ring 1989: n.p.). The contributors to a collection of articles about the interplay of science and spirituality, *Mind Before Matter* (2007), could serve as a representative sample of consciousness scholars today. They include the late John E. Mack (1929–2004) (see below), religious studies scholars Christopher Bache and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, philosophers Richard Tarnas and Michael Grosso, physical scientists Bernard Haisch and Mary F. Schmitt, and Jungian analyst Anne Baring. These contributors were asked "to turn the old paradigm, that only matter is real, on its head, and to begin with the assumption instead that consciousness is the primary reality" (Pfeiffer 2007: 14). These consciousness advocates argued, and argue still, that the UFO phenomenon defied all efforts to categorize, dissect, or interpret it. But it was important that humanity learn as much as possible about this phenomenon, because it could be the key to advances in consciousness.

One of these explorers of consciousness was Jacques Vallée (b. 1939), an astrophysicist most famous for a series of books about the nature of UFOs. His first major work was *Passport to Magonia* (1969), in which he compared the descriptions of aliens with those of fairy folk from Celtic lore. In both cases, entities of diminutive stature contacted human beings across an invisible divide, showing glimpses of an alternate world in juxtaposition with our own. Both aliens and fairies also shared a proclivity to kidnap human beings, taking them to strange places and conducting sexualized rituals (Vallée 1969: 67–85, 107, 109). Vallée concluded that something real but mysterious was happening here. Fairies in the folklore of numerous cultures were not merely figments of human imagination, and yet the truth about fairies, and aliens, was nestled somewhere in our imagination. Vallée believed that humanity was entering a stage in history when the mythic was impinging on our awareness and demanding to be taken seriously. In his next book, *The Invisible College* (1975), Vallée asserted that "there is a control system for human consciousness" that either was guided by a superhuman entity or operated according to those laws of nature we had yet to comprehend. Either way, Vallée insisted, something

real from beyond our daily awareness was now entering our collective understanding. Vallée suggested that UFOs were “the means through which man’s concepts are being rearranged” (Vallée 1975: 196, 198). Jeffrey Kripal called Vallée’s explanations a “modern form of gnosis” (Kripal 2010: 144). Vallée’s insights, according to Kripal, were both objective and subjective, ‘out there’ and ‘in here’, both extraneous to human life and an intimate part of that life. Vallée was satisfied with neither the answers of science nor religion, but recognized that both were needed to enable us to comprehend what UFOs represented.

He later published a trilogy: *Dimensions* (1988), *Confrontations* (1990) and *Revelations* (1991). These books contained considerable material about UFO contacts and abductions around the world. Based on this and earlier work, Vallée concluded that ETI were really terrestrial visitors from other dimensions, or perhaps our own future (Rutkowski 2009: 100–101). Terms associated with this view include “ultraterrestrial” and “hyperdimensional.” Carl Raschke, in commenting on Vallée’s work, suggested that entities from the future (or from other dimensions) may be altering our consciousness so that we can accept truths about the composition of our universe (Raschke 1989: 25–26). That universe was far more wonderful, frightening, and mysterious than our limited knowledge and imaginations could tell us.

Another explorer of consciousness was John E. Mack, who co-edited the collection mentioned above, *Mind Before Matter*. Mack was a psychiatrist at the Harvard Medical School and Pulitzer Prize-winning author. The trajectory of his career was such that no one would have expected him of becoming interested in aliens and UFOs. He held an indisputable place, by the later twentieth century, among the American intellectual elite. People from his circles, especially scientists, dismissed UFO believers as crackpots.² And yet Mack’s life took an unexpected turn. He met Budd Hopkins, a well-known hypnotist who worked with people claiming to have been abducted by aliens (Paul 1995: 55). As a result, Mack investigated abductions and decided to conduct empirical research on abductees. He initially concluded that they suffered from mental illness, but eventually moved away from that position and admitted that abductees were talking about something quite real (Lewis 1995: 87).

In 1994, Mack published his findings in a book that would gain considerable attention: *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*. He recounted that many of his subjects had broadened their consciousness through abduction experiences. They were awestruck at the universe’s infinite wonder, and felt a deep sense of oneness with it all (Mack 1994: 407). A few years later Mack published another book, *Passport to the Cosmos* (1999). Here he argued that science’s

2 Internet site, “John E. Mack,” Wikipedia, at <http://www.wikipedia.org>, accessed 04/04/2019.

normal means of investigation failed to penetrate the reality of abduction phenomena. Mack reported that “the source is unseen” and “these manifestations are elusive, sporadic, and difficult to document convincingly” (Mack 1999: 10).

The elusive nature of the paranormal was a theme running through much of the scholarship of Jeffrey J. Kripal (b. 1962), our third explorer of consciousness. Kripal is a religious studies professor at Rice University. He was at the centre of a controversy involving his biography of Ramakrishna, a famous Indian guru. In that book, *Kali's Child* (1995), Kripal interpreted Ramakrishna's mystical visions psychoanalytically, concluding that Ramakrishna was homoerotically attracted to devotees. This upset Ramakrishna's followers and led to a prolonged period of public criticism of Kripal (Hanegraaff 2008: 259). He became famous among academics conversant with his blend of psychoanalysis, eroticism, and mysticism. Kripal published several significant studies, which contribute to his intentional construction of an oeuvre, “a larger intellectual gestalt, which is organically evolving and taking shape as its author is working out the implications of certain germinal ideas” (Hanegraaff 2008: 260–261).

Although UFOs and aliens were not the sole focus of Kripal's studies, they were nonetheless very important aspects of his work. They figured prominently in his romp through the paranormal, *Mutants & Mystics* (2011). In the opening to this delightful book, he noted that he wanted to show that “modern mythologies can be fruitfully read as cultural transformations of real-life paranormal experiences” (Kripal 2011: 2). But it was in one of his more recent works, *The Super Natural* (2016), that he laid bare his agenda of bringing together the subjective and objective. He co-authored this book with Whitley Strieber, arguably the most famous abductee alive. Strieber published *Communion* in 1987. In that book, he described strange experiences with inexplicable visitors that helped him to expand his conscious awareness of the vastness and mystery of the cosmos. In two subsequent volumes, *Transformation* (1988) and *Breakthrough* (1995), Strieber continued his saga.

Kripal and Strieber served as point/counterpoint in *The Super Natural*. Strieber wrote as the still-questioning experiencer who is not an academic, Kripal as a historian of religions. Their book was intended for those people who weren't sceptical debunkers of UFOs, but also were not true believers. This middle ground, argued Kripal, was where one could potentially encounter the real, or the sacred. Most of the book described practices that anyone could follow to determine if their experiences were indications that something or someone was trying to communicate through mysterious means. First, advised Kripal, “compare the appearances you are trying to understand with other similar but different appearances in the historical record.” Then “make

a cut,” meaning that you temporarily bracket interpretations of what you have experienced. Third, contextualize your experiences, seeing them in comparison to related ones in the history of religions. Fourth, “consider the possibility that some of these encounters may be mediated expressions of another mind (maybe ours) making contact with the human ego.” Next, “practice an erotics.” Look at gender and sexual orientation in the context of unusual experiences, especially noting how the latter might “‘flip’ the human sexual system and so lead to various forms of union or communion.” Then “say away.” “Learn to live with the paradox, to sit with the question.” Seventh, “listen for the traumatic secret.” It is possible that extraordinary experiences have “‘cracked open’ the ego for contact and communication.” Then “look for energetic, electromagnetic, or plasmalike phenomena” associated with the experience. Finally, “decide for yourself whether the story that your cultural trance-forms have put you in is a story you really want to be in” (Strieber and Kripal 2016: 340–342).

The Super Natural was like a self-help book for UFO contactees and abductees. The advice Kripal gave was a combination of scholarly method (comparison, historical contextualization) and strategies that assume at the very least that forces and realities far greater than anything human beings can imagine was at work in one’s life. Furthermore, even though the term ‘consciousness’ was absent from this volume’s index, the term aptly applied to Kripal’s advice. As used by authors like Vallée and Mack, consciousness was the great realization waiting for any of us who could leave behind the shell of our ego. As Kripal said, “Here are the steps then: contact, communication, communion, community, and finally ... consciousness” (Strieber and Kripal 2016: 342).

1.6 Conclusion

The future of scholarship on religion and UFOs is impossible to predict. Studies of UFO-related NRMS will continue, because these groups continually arise and decline, fashioning ever newer interpretations of aliens and UFOs. But the subject of this essay is broader and less well-defined than UFO religions. There is no centre, nor is it really a field. Rather, it is a crossroads where disciplinary methods and theories meet speculation about what lies beyond our limited knowledge of the cosmos. What can be asserted with some confidence is that that speculation will very likely continue into the foreseeable future, and as long as that happens, people will draw on religious themes and practices to give shape and meaning to what they do not understand, fear, and at the same time, welcome.

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PART 1

Religious Engagement with UFOs



Vimānas and Hindu Ufology

Layne R. Little

2.1 Introduction

Among the earliest references to *vimānas* found in the Vedas (1500 BCE–900 BCE), they are often described as divine chariots driven by twin gods, associated with horses and healing, who ferry heroes slain in battle to heaven.¹ In keeping with this martial theme, later Sanskrit epic literature populates their tales with descriptions of gods, heroes and demons traversing the sky in fantastical flying chariots. By the late nineteenth century, under the influence of the Theosophical Society, *vimānas* were seen as evidence of advanced technology that was once possessed in ancient India, Atlantis and Lemuria. Beginning in the 1950's popular writings on flying saucers began to look back to the flying chariots of Hindu mythic literature to assert that the same UFO phenomena and alien contact had occurred in ancient times. In this chapter, I offer a historical survey of how the wonderfully imaginative *vimānas* of Sanskrit literature entered into popular imagination. This study will explore three interlinking threads of discourse—Theosophists, Hindu nationalists, and Ancient Astronaut Theorists—and the ways in which their theories about *vimānas* became irrevocably entangled between the 1880s and the present. This chapter will conclude by reflecting on the past two decades as a small but vocal group of Hindus have increasingly shifted away from nationalist assertions of ancient technologies in India towards echoing ufological speculations that epic literature may be describing extraterrestrial encounters.

2.2 Theosophy and Early Theories of *Vimānas*

Desmond Leslie (1921–2001), while waiting in the library of a friend, was scanning the titles on the shelves when his eyes settled upon the spine of W. Scott-Elliot's *The Story of Atlantis and Lost Lemuria* (1925)² and he began to

1 These associations extend to other Indo-European civilizations. See Parpola (2004–2005).

2 These were originally published separately (1896 and 1904 respectively). Although Scott-Elliot is credited as the sole author, he was not the one providing the bulk of the content.

skim its pages. In addition to spectacular maps—which seemed to situate lost Atlantis and Lemuria in real geographical space—what really leapt out at him were descriptions of ancient flying aircrafts, called *vimānas*. Desmond Leslie's family was descended from the illustrious Clan Leslie, many of his ancestors being Earls, and his father was a first cousin to Sir Winston Churchill. He himself was a Spitfire pilot in the Royal Air Force in WWII, so he was thrilled to be thumbing through a theosophical treatise that offered a glimpse into the remote past when ancient airships freely roamed the antediluvian skies. Leslie recounts that: "The thing that interested me the most was the description of their flying machines, which it said were circular and glowed in the dark, and could move very quickly on this free energy, and they were called *vimānas* and that got me going. I said, 'Now wait a minute. These sound so like these flying saucers we just heard about'" (Leslie 2006). In addition to establishing this early connection to UFOs, it is significant that Leslie evoked a notion of a mysterious free energy source that powered these crafts. Theosophists called this source '*vril*,' (a term likely derived from 'virile'). Madame H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), one of the five original members who founded the Theosophical Society in 1885, had popularized the notion of *vril* in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), and in that treatise drew a connection between *vril* and flying vehicles. She had borrowed the original idea from Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1871 proto-science fiction occult novel *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race*. Of *vril* she writes:

The name *vril* may be a fiction; the Force itself is a fact doubted as little in India as the existence itself of their Rishis,³ since it is mentioned in all the secret works.

It is this vibratory Force [*vril*], which, when aimed at an army from an Agni Rath [Fire Chariot] fixed on a flying vessel, a balloon, according to the instructions found in *Ashtar Vidyā*,⁴ reduced to ashes 100,000 men

C. W. Leadbeater was an important leader in the Theosophical Society and a close confidant of Annie Besant who became the head of the Theosophical Society after Blavatsky's death in 1891. He used his clairvoyant powers to access the Akashic Record to provide Scott-Elliott with all the details of ancient Atlantis and Lemuria. He also provided the maps by consulting globes preserved in the "Museum of Records of the Great White Brotherhood," an archive of artifacts kept on the astral plane (Tillett 1982: 293, fn. 2).

3 "Seers" or sages and associated with the composition of the Vedas.

4 Likely a misrendering of *Astra Vidyā* ("The Science of Missiles/Weapons"). Contactee George Van Tassel claimed to receive a message from an extraterrestrial named "Ashtar" in 1952. The name may have come from Blavatsky. The term *Astra Vidyā* is traditionally used to refer to the science of weapons but as a text is likely Blavatsky's unwritten invention. A written example of pure invention was her famous *Stanzas of Dzyan*. She elaborates on the nature of the lost text in a footnote in *The Secret Doctrine*:

and elephants, as easily as it would a dead rat. It is allegorised in the *Vishnu Purana*, in the *Ramayana* and other works ...

BLAVATSKY 1888: 563⁵

She describes *vril* as powering vibratory weaponry, rather than the chariot itself as Leslie had described. Her unique interpretation was likely a way to explain the magic weapons (usually arrows) depicted in the Hindu epics, which were invoked by *mantra* (sacred incantations). For Blavatsky, *vril* is more akin to what we might call magic than science; a line the Theosophists frequently blurred. We can see that Blavatsky used myth to elaborate on and validate what is purely fiction: Bulwer-Lytton's *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race*. However, because of the prominent place it holds in her writings, *vril* moved out of the realm of fiction and was regarded as real by early twentieth century occult organizations.⁶ However, Scott-Elliot's discussion of *vril* in "early" Atlantis is expressly concerned with "personal *vril*," a spiritual force rather than a technologically grounded one that later replaces it. In later Atlantis *vril* in nothing more than advanced technology as Bulwer-Lytton had originally intended:⁷

In the earlier times it seems to have been personal *vril* that supplied the motive power whether used in conjunction with any mechanical contrivance matters not much—but in the later days this was replaced by a force which, though generated in what is to us an unknown manner, operated nevertheless through definite mechanical arrangements.

SCOTT-ELLIOT 1896: 53⁸

"Wrote the late Brahmachari Bawa, a Yogi of great renown and holiness: 'Extensive works on *Ashtar Vidya* and such other sciences were at different times compiled in the languages of the times. But the Sanskrit originals were lost at the time of the partial deluge of our country.' (Blavatsky 1888: vol. 2, 427; see also *Theosophist* of June, 1880, 'Some Things the Aryans Knew.')

- 5 Blavatsky also briefly touched on Bulwer-Lytton's *vril* in her 1877 work *Isis Unveiled*, but *The Secret Doctrine* is more relevant for the purposes of this discussion.
- 6 Particularly in Germany, some of these orders profoundly influenced National Socialism and even later Neo-Nazi organizations, such as the Vienna Circle, which directly linked *vril* to Nazi UFOs. For more on this see Clarke 2002.
- 7 "I did not mean *Vril* for mesmerism, but for electricity, developed into uses as yet only dimly guessed ..." (Lytton 1913: 466).
- 8 Even in the title the text presents itself as a scientific account. The Theosophists were keen on presenting their materials couched in such (pseudo) scientific jargon to add an air of authority.

Scott-Elliot mapped a change in mythos, when the mystical power of *vril* transmuted into a force governing “mechanical arrangements.” Surprisingly, his description of how these vessels operated was rooted in the contemporary steam technology of 1896 when the first edition of *The Story of Atlantis* was initially published:

A strong heavy metal chest which lay in the centre of the boat was the generator. Thence the force flowed through two large flexible tubes to either end of the vessel, as well as through eight subsidiary tubes fixed fore and aft to the bulwarks. These had double openings pointing vertically both up and down. When the journey was about to begin the valves of the eight bulwark tubes which pointed downwards were opened—all the other valves being closed. The current rushing through these impinged on the earth with such force as to drive the boat upwards, while the air itself continued to supply the necessary fulcrum.

SCOTT-ELLIOT 1896: 53

This kind of projection of steam-based mechanisms onto descriptions of flying *vimānas* in ancient India is also found in Hindu theological works in India in the 1870–80s. One prominent example was Swami Dayanada Saraswati's (1824–1883) 1878 discussion of steampowered *vimānas*. The Swami, an important Hindu reformer, had a close relationship with the Theosophical Society, until they had a falling out, and he denounced the organization around 1882. Nevertheless, his writings were widely discussed in Theosophical circles. Blavatsky was herself taken by what *vimānas* portended in Sanskrit literature just as these ideas were ‘gathering steam’ in more modern religious discourse in India.

There is a long legacy of these early Theosophical threads that run through even contemporary discussions of *vimānas* in modern UFO literature. But, in returning to Desmond Leslie's theosophical sources, it is important to note that although W. Scott-Elliot used Sanskrit-Hindu sources to discuss *vimānas*, he did not accept that these stories recounted the adventures of gods and heroes. Rather, they were the wondrous inventions of ancient races of humanity who lived in antediluvian utopias that occasionally degenerated into archaic race wars. Secondly, the *vimānas* described by Scott-Elliot were nothing like descriptions of modern flying saucers, the ones he described were slow moving and could barely achieve a high enough elevation to get over a small hill. For example, he offers this description of the movement of the flying vessels of Atlantis:

The maximum speed attained was about one hundred miles an hour, the course of flight never being a straight line, but always in the form of long waves, now approaching and now receding from the earth. The elevation at which the vessels travelled was only a few hundred feet indeed, when high mountains lay in the line of their track it was necessary to change their course and go round them—the more rarefied air no longer supplying the necessary fulcrum. Hills of about one thousand feet were the highest they could cross.

SCOTT-ELLIOT 1896: 54

Although Leslie and Scott-Elliott differed in their understanding of *vimānas*, Leslie nonetheless built on Scott-Elliott's Atlantean armature by fleshing it out with stories of gods and the divine chariots of the Hindu epics, and by directly linking *vimānas* to contact with "space people" (Leslie 2006). This set Leslie on a journey to tease out more ideas by directly examining translations of Sanskrit literature:

So I decided I'd do a bit of research, and I went to the British Museum Library, especially the oriental section, where I got out the whole of the *Mahabharata*. Lovely English literal translation by Pratap Chandra Roy.... There was about twenty volumes and I waded through and picked out everything about these vimanas. I just couldn't believe it! That the ancients had them and they'd been in contact with space people and it said that by means of these wonderful craft, the star people can visit earth and we can visit the stars. And then it described them in Tibet as 'like pearls in the sky' ...⁹ But then I read on and there were things about wars in ancient India and some of the weaponry they used was able to make three-dimensional images of a false army. Holograms, surely! A thing called a Brahma weapon, which had the power of the universe, "a light of a thousand suns," ... [was] the atom bomb and it said that 'the survivors rushed and bathed and threw off their arms, but a few days later their hair fell out, their skin turned red and they died of a horrible sickness. And the army was so burned, [that] ... even the elephants were shadows on the ground. That was Hiroshima, surely! So I said, "You know all

9 He makes passing reference to the *Kangyur* and the *Tengyur*, the two voluminous collections that make up the Tibetan Buddhist canon without citing any specifics (Leslie and Adamski 1953: 91).

this has happened before. Where it was a space war or a war among the Atlanteans, I don't know."

LESLIE 2006

Leslie continued to compile his research on these flying machines in Sanskrit literature for about a year, and as his book took shape, his friend, Sir Richard Williamson, told him that in America there was a man who "had a contact, a landing, and had taken these amazing photographs" (Leslie 2006). So Leslie wrote to this American and a letter soon arrived with photos of a craft that purportedly landed in Palomar Gardens, California on December 13, 1952. These were the famous photographs of George Adamski (1891–1965), whose fantastical and dubious claims of his trips to Venus and Mars inaugurated, what would be called, "the contactee movement." Adamski offered to let Leslie freely use the photos in his book,¹⁰ and later mentioned that he had written an account of the Palomar Gardens' landing. They decided to combine forces and jointly published *Flying Saucers Have Landed* in September of 1953. This collaboration represents a definitive marriage of theosophical ideas about *vimānas*, nurtured in India and Britain, and the UFO movement in the United States. It is in *Flying Saucers Have Landed* that the Sanskrit term, *vimāna*, first begins to be clearly associated with UFO phenomena. Herein Leslie explains that modern UFO sightings are identical with descriptions of *vimānas* in the Hindu epics. This connection was popularized by Leslie and he augments this assertion by also noting how the magical weapons in Hindu mythology seem to anticipate contemporaneous technological innovations of the early 1950s. While Leslie is certainly the first in linking *vimānas* to extraterrestrial aircrafts, several writers quickly followed his lead. In their hands, *vimānas* are part of an elaborate theory of alien contact and alien influence on human history.

Modern interpretations of Hindu myths have increasingly gravitated (or anti-gravitated) towards representing *vimānas* as extraterrestrial, flying saucers, or at least fantastic technologies. But it was Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods? Unsolved Mysteries of the Past* (1968) which is often credited with pioneering the ideas that come to be known as the "Ancient Alien" or "Ancient Astronaut Hypothesis." However, his work was preceded by several notable books that espoused similar ideas about ancient alien contact. These include Robert Charroux's *One Hundred Thousand Years of Man's Unknown History*

10 Leslie claims that he had the photos tested "for atmospheric hazing and recession and all and it came out that they were large objects, quite a long way away and not little models close up" (Leslie 2006).



FIGURE 2.1 A Hindu epic hero runs towards a celestial *vimāna*. The *vimāna* or chariot here depicted is a subject of early advertising in the late 19th century
FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

(*Histoire inconnue des hommes depuis cent mille ans* [1963]), which was itself inspired by Pauwels and Bergier's *The Morning of the Magicians* (*Le Matin Des Magiciens* [1960]). In the same year, W. Raymond Drake's *Gods and Spacemen of the Ancient East* goes beyond India, and presents new material from other parts of Asia. Lastly, an even earlier body of work associated with Ancient Astronauts were three books published by Harold T. Wilkins in 1954 and 1955. But Leslie even precedes Wilkins by a year.

2.3 What Is a Vimāna?: Chariots in Indo-European Cultures

Monier-Williams' *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899) defines the term as stemming from the verb *vi-√māna* meaning, "to measure out, traverse." The noun has a host of meanings including, but not limited to "a car or chariot of the gods, any mythical self-moving aerial car," "any car or vehicle," "the palace of an emperor or supreme monarch (esp. one with 7 stories),"¹¹ or "a temple or shrine of a particular form." In addition to referring to any general form of vehicle, it particularly denotes a chariot, whether it be a terrestrial or celestial form of conveyance. The term also refers to a variety of architectural forms, foremost of which are a host of regional forms of Hindu temples. The term *ratha* ("chariot") is also used to denote a temple or shrine, which are conceived of as a vehicle of the gods. Some temple sites have large sculptured wheels and/or horses to reinforce the idea that temples are vehicles through which the gods come to humanity. Prominent examples include the thirteenth century Surya temple at Konarak and the sixteenth century Garuda Ratha of the Viṭṭhala Temple at Hampi. The rich descriptions in Hindu epic and purāṇic literature speak at length of every detail of encounters with *vimānas*. Chariots, flying or otherwise, pervade Sanskrit literature from the time of the *Rig Veda* onward. But how does the wider history of Indo-European civilization come to associate the chariot itself as a primary symbol of divine power?

Why would ancient Indo-European cultures imagine that their war chariots might fly through the air? Most of us have childhood memories of riding our bicycles so fast that we imagine we are about to lift off from the ground. These fantasies spill over into the stories we tell ourselves: skateboards become hover boards in *Back to the Future* (1985), an old jalopy takes flight in *Chitti Chitti Bang Bang* (1968), E.T. rides in Elliot's bicycle basket across a summer sky framed by

11 Monier-Williams notes that the *vimāna* of Ravana in the *Rāmāyaṇa* was seven stories high and resembled a ship (Monier-Williams 1990: 980).

a full moon in *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). Similarly, our modern personal devices pervade every aspect of our lives and increasingly take on a significant role in movies and media and the stories we tell about ourselves. Such sci-fi imaginings elaborate upon the capacities of our contemporary technologies by de-familiarizing and transforming them into wondrous things. So how are we so different from the storytellers of ancient India?

The creative genius of the myth/culture makers of the past was shaped by the cultural, social, economic and technological forces of the time in which they lived. We have always told myths and made fetishes of our technology. The gods of the Indo-Europeans always rode about in chariots because the light, spoke-wheeled chariot of the Indo-Europeans was the technology that enabled their success and facilitated their diffusion across Europe and Asia. This was the primary symbol of power in these civilizations and in their myths. Thus, to the Indo-European civilizations, such as the Greeks, Helios and Apollo's chariot wheels were the sun seen in the sky, just as it was for Surya, the Sun God of India. Among the Norse gods, Freya rode in a chariot driven by cats, while Thor's was drawn by shaggy goats. This trend is even more elaborate in India where the chariot also became a philosophical metaphor for the embodied soul with the horses as the five senses, etc. (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 1.3.3–4, *Bhagavad Gītā* in commentaries on 6:34). The Buddha used the metaphor of the cart to speak of how we think affects our experience of reality, and the monk Nāgasena used the chariot as a metaphor for how our fixed sense of self is a construct of shifting aggregates (*Dhammapada* 1, *Milinda Pañha* 1). So the ancient Hindus and Buddhists went so far to conceive that, "we ourselves are chariots."

2.4 Astras and Ancient Weapons

A tertiary metaphor of divine power is tied to weapons that in the Hindu epics were imbued with sacred power through ritual worship and *mantra*. But in ufological discourse they become conflated into atomic weapons. This odd pairing was anticipated by J. Robert Oppenheimer when he cited the *Bhagavad Gita* (11:32) to describe his experience of witnessing the first detonation of the atomic bomb on July 16, 1945. Oppenheimer's literary analogy is often appropriated as somehow validating Ancient Alien assertions of ancient atomic weapons.¹² Jason Colavito is an outspoken critic of this particular kind of

12 For further information on Oppenheimer and the Gita see Hijiya (2000).

fantastical revisionist historiography. In his book, *Ancient Atom Bombs: Fact, Fraud and the Myth of Prehistoric Nuclear Warfare* (2011), he writes, “An ancient Indian epic was said (erroneously, as we shall see) to describe a ‘single projectile charged with all the power of the universe. An incandescent column of smoke and flame as bright as ten thousand suns rose in all its splendor.’ To believers, these sound like eyewitness accounts of nuclear bombs being dropped from above. To skeptics, these sound like imaginative interpretations of the equivalent of prehistoric science fiction (Colavito 2011: 1).” He goes on to recount how these inferences develop in ufological discourse:

From the very beginning of the ancient astronaut movement, Hindu mythology, exotic to Western eyes, has been a mainstay of ancient astronaut theories. Ancient Vedic epics, running into the hundreds of thousands or even millions of words each were perfect for out of context quoting since ancient astronaut writers could be fairly certain no one would be able to find and check their accuracy. These theorists wish us to believe that ancient Indian Vedic literature is every bit as true as a modern-day news report. “Researchers” like self-proclaimed “real life Indiana Jones” David Hatcher Childress fervently argue that the flying machines and powerful weapons described in the Indian Vedas were actual airplanes and even nuclear weapons.

COLAVITO 2011: 2

But what do these original texts tell us about the nature of these weapons? Kevin McGrath, in his *Raja Yudhishthira: Kingship in Epic Mahābhārata* (2017), provides clear contextual details indicating the specific kind of technological development deployed by the *Mahābhārata* heroes. He uses the text’s rich descriptive details to demonstrate the metallurgical makeup of the heroes’ mostly bronze and occasionally steel weapons, “Before battle occurs there occurs the kingly rite of *lohābhihāra* (the washing of weapons); the sign for such weaponry here is being given as *loha* (that which is red or coppery), which I take to indicate bronze” (McGrath 2017: 30. fn. 89). Keep in mind that the *Mahābhārata* was based on historical events that took place roughly between the eighth and ninth centuries BCE, but the actual text was composed and compiled over an eight hundred year period, from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century of the Common Era. Thus it also mentions rudimentary steel production, such as the sword of Arjuna which is described as “*ākāśanibhaṃ* (like the sky); that is, the blade exhibits a *blueness*. This would indicate a quality of steel, actually *wootz* or Damascus steel, whose production was only developed in Northern India in the third century BCE” (McGrath 2017: 30. fn. 89). McGrath goes on to

explicitly describe the *Mahābhārata* period as “one that is Bronze Age in material culture and both preliterate and premonetary” (McGrath 2017: 30). Here, in the case of Damascus steel, the *Mahābhārata* reflects the technological development of its period of composition rather than of the historical events that inspired it.

This level of technological development does not tally with assertions that the magical weapons of these heroes were technologies bequeathed by extraterrestrials. Arguments aside akin to *Star Trek*’s “prime directive” which espouses non-interference with pre-warp civilizations, why would extraterrestrials involve themselves in a human war? As several debunkers of Ancient Astronaut theory ask, what would motivate them to engage with Bronze Age humans, in the midst of some small squabbles over primogeniture, by giving them advanced technology a million, if not a billion, years ahead of their ken? Why would ancient astronauts constantly intervene in this way for thousands of years of human history and then suddenly disengage as modernity approaches? Scholars and other critics increasingly regard ancient astronaut theory as being overtly racist as they typically only regard the art, architecture and artefacts of non-white civilizations as being the byproducts of alien intervention (Bond 2018).

If aliens were involved in the *Mahābhārata* war then their cosmic intervention was ineffectual as both sides had magical weapons and even the god Krishna’s kingdom of Dvārakā was ultimately destroyed in the end, and not because of extraterrestrial technology but because of a curse.¹³ These magical weapons of the Sanskrit epics are not atomic or nuclear, but simple arrows and sometimes spears, which achieved their awesome power through magical formulae (*mantra*). This is not a situation like in David Lynch’s film version of *Dune* where Fremen people speak into a technological device called the “Weirding Module” to unleash the destructive power of sound. Rather, Hindu epic heroes win magical weapons from the gods as rewards for extreme acts of asceticism, not as extraterrestrial gifts to shift late Bronze Age politics.

The exemplary account of a magical weapon is the mighty *pāśupatāstra*, which Arjuna, the supreme archer of the *Mahābhārata*, sought in spiritual retreat in the remote Himalayas. When he finally receives the weapon from Śiva, the god does not appear in a flying chariot, but appears in disguise, as an ordinary tribal hunter (*kirāta*). The text and Śiva himself are gesturing to the magical arrow being an archaic technology not an advanced one.

13 This occurs in the Mausala Parvan of the *Mahābhārata*.

2.5 South Asian Religions and the Plurality of Worlds

Hindu cosmology conceives of an infinitude of worlds including those with sentient life. Buddhist and Jain thinkers also relish reflecting on the vastness of a living universe and attest to a plurality of worlds. In these religious systems, multiple worlds and the ability to move between them is fundamental to their theological vision, in which life is as endless as the universe. For Hinduism this becomes increasingly elaborate and meticulously defined in the Pāñcarātrā Saṁhitās and purāṇic literature such as in the *Brahmā Saṁhitā* (5.48), which described Viṣṇu breathing out whole universes, which expand from each and every pore of his cosmic body along with the gods to govern them. Nearly a thousand years before the *Mahābhārata* was compiled, the *Atharva Veda* (1200–1000 BCE) portrays the beginning of creation with a metaphor of the cosmos as a chariot. Here Kāma (“Desire”) gives rise to the fertile universe through sacrifice, while Kāla (“Time”) emerges as a thousand-eyed horse with seven reigns that propels forward the cosmos as a gigantic chariot whose wheels are the various worlds having sentient life:

Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning,
 Desire the primal seed and germ of Spirit,
 O Kāma, dwelling with the lofty
 Kāma, give growth of riches to the sacrificer, (...)
 Prolific, thousand eyed, and undecaying,
 a horse with seven reins
 Time bears us onward,
 Sages inspired with holy knowledge mount him,
 his chariot wheels are all the worlds of creatures.

Book XIX, Hymn LIII, in Griffith 1896: 309

In a much later example, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* (c. 1000–1600 CE) describes Vishnu in the form of a small boy who offers a tough lesson to Indra, the King of the Gods, when he proclaims the infinity of universes and the gods that rule them:

Who will number the passing ages of the world as they follow each other endlessly? And who will search through the wide infinities of space to count the universes side by side each containing its Brahma, its Vishnu, and its Shiva? Who will count the Indras in them all—those Indras side by side, who reign at once in all the innumerable worlds; those others who passed away before them; or even the Indras who succeed each other

in any given line, ascending to godly kingship.... Beyond the farthest vision, crowding outer space, the universes come and go, an innumerable host. Like delicate boats they float on the fathomless, pure waters that form the body of Vishnu. Out of every hair-pore of that body a universe bubbles and breaks. Will you presume to count them? Will you number the gods in all those worlds—the worlds present and the worlds past?

KRṢṢA-JANMA KHAṢṢA 47.50–161, in ZIMMER 1946: 6

South Asian religions not only imagine the Earth and celestial abodes as being populated with all manner of wondrous beings, but the wide whirling universe is filled with life. If they met beings from other worlds, they would simply say so. Unfortunately, those who subscribe to a theory of ancient alien encounter, read descriptions of *vimānas* and magical weapons absent historical, philosophical and social contexts in which these texts were produced, and in doing so not only misrepresent sources, but do so in ways that undermine the complex cultural systems that shaped these accounts.

2.6 Late Nineteenth Century Hindu Accounts of Ancient Advanced Technology¹⁴

The myth-making apparatus of a modern India did not have the luxury of such cosmic contemplation in the face of colonialism. Public displays of new technologies as curiosities of the industrial age and the championing of scientific advancement through elaborate demonstrations were important expressions of colonial power, in South Asia and beyond. By the late nineteenth century, colonial Hindus began to respond to this display by rethinking mythic descriptions of flying chariots and magical weapons in their sacred texts. In India, colonial assertions of cultural dominance were countered by both the Theosophists and Hindu reformers like Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), who sought to demonstrate that ancient India had advanced technologies that far surpassed even those of the contemporary British. In the extensive introduction to his Vedic commentaries, Saraswati presented in elaborate detail the steam-powered flying machines that were the *vimānas* of epic lore. J. E. Llewellyn's study of the Ārya Samāj demonstrated how its founder's colourful descriptions really brought these ancient mechanisms to life:

14 This section is mostly extracted from my Ph.D. dissertation (Little 2006: 98–101).

When one must make the vehicle (*vimān*) go up, then one should keep closed the upper mouth of the steam chamber (*bhapghār*). And when wants to descend from higher to lower, then one should open the upper mouth carefully (*anumān se*). In the same manner when one must make it go east, then one should open the western [mouth] after closing the eastern. And if one must make it go west, one should open the eastern [mouth] after closing the western.

LLEWELLYN 1993: 259, fn. 75¹⁵

Published in 1878, Dayananda's description, eerily similar to those written by Scott Elliot,¹⁶ seems to have inspired other authors, poets and writers to provide their own accounts of ancient flying locomotives. One such work is a long Tamil poem called the *Elāyiram* or "7000," attributed to the Siddha Bhōgar. Although the 7000 appeared in print at the same time as Dayananada's book, its author, Bhōgar, was claimed to have lived centuries before.¹⁷ Bhōgar was presented as a Siddha or "perfected sage" who was thought to have lived on longevity medicines for over two thousand years until he was interred in a state of suspended animation (*samādhi*) in a cave-like sepulchre sometime around the middle of the seventeenth century. These assertions were themselves modern legends as the Tamil text attributed to him was only composed around the time it first appeared in print. Bhōgar too gives a detailed and elaborate discussion of the workings of his own steam-powered vehicle, in which he travelled the world. No doubt influenced by Dayananda's account of a flying steam-powered machine, Bhōgar offers a lively description of "the long chariot that has no horses" (Little 2006: 100), and provides a detailed instructions of its operation that reveal the limits of this purported all-knowing sage's engineering knowledge:

You put the fire in the baking pan, on the side of which water is placed and this will be turned to gas. It will begin to fly upwards and when the fire ignites it the inner-gas connects with the upper-gas. It spreads to where the water is located, then will come billowing through the front tube in abundance. Rotating by hand [the control wheels] you tighten it, then by infusing it with an abundance of steam it flies through the

15 This material is taken from Swami Dayanand Saraswati 1973 (1878): 231–233.

16 See the passage quoted on p. 42.

17 These writing were composed in a very modern form of the Tamil language that indicated that the text was likely composed just prior to its publication in the 1880s. Both works were written around the time that the Theosophists had shifted their headquarters to Madras, India in 1886.

large pipe. There are many formulas at play here, but with a cacophony of noise it will run and [by the flow of] the steam it will operate as if it were flying. So all these gasses will be hiding in the tube and after having suffered much [under the pressure], they will flow out. All the five elements of the world are merged here. In the air the fire is united and in the fire the water is joined and these combining together create steam. In this combination, the sky [itself] is hiding there and the box [comprising its engine] has become the container of All. With each of these Five Creators I have established this divine chariot. No Nātha has uncovered this. Having searched to exhaustion in text after text, I [alone] have discovered it. I built this in China, and there in the country of the Chinese I demonstrated this curiosity.

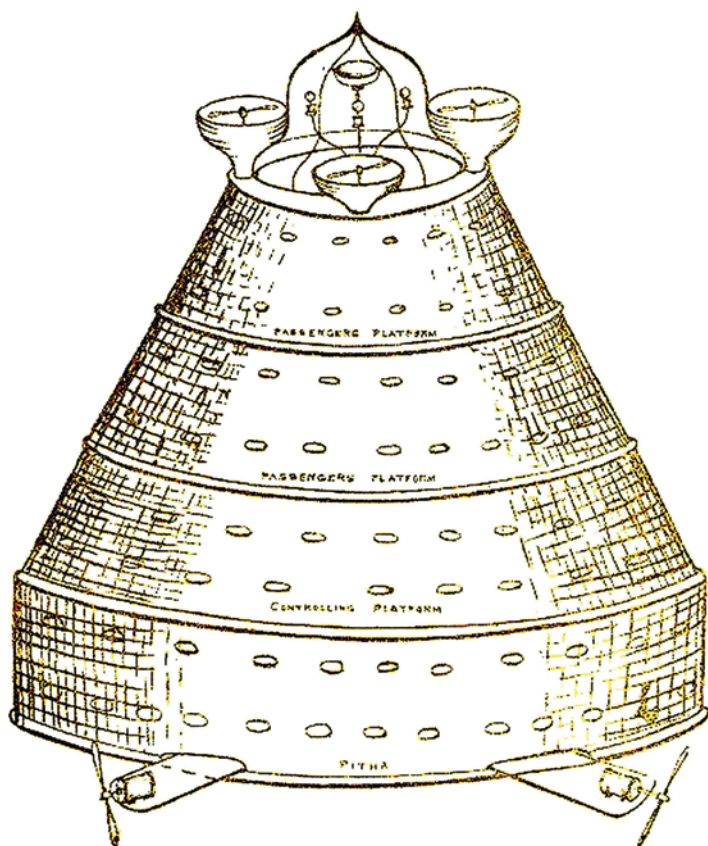
LITTLE 2006: 100–101

Bhōgar's locomotive was a direct response to the train system of the British colonialists that clearly needed no tracks and could roam freely without at will, but he also invented a flying mechanical "green horse" to soar through the air on, the *pacai kutirai*. Neither Dayananda nor Bhōgar claimed an extraterrestrial origin for their flying vehicles. But they did participate in reimagining the depictions of magical objects described in Sanskrit texts. Such creative reinterpretation not only claimed that these ancient inventions preceded those of Europe, but also nativized such technological innovation to India. That is, these writers were adamant that breakthroughs like a flying aircraft were not imported to India from outside—whether from Europe or some other planet—but were very much a product of the ancient seers and sages of the subcontinent.

2.7 The Vymaānika-Shaastra and David Hatcher Childress

Saraswati's theories about *vimānas* in the late nineteenth century continue to be nurtured in contemporary India, and indeed may be seen as forming the basis of ever more fantastical claims. Under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi (2014–present) and the political ascension of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), claims of India's glorious technological past have become mainstream. Instances of fantastic inventions, including *vimānas*, are included in school textbooks revised by his government. But perhaps the most public example of the revisionist reimagining of India's past came at the one hundred and second Annual Indian Science Conference in 2015. Here, two presenters, Captain Anand Bodas and Ameya Jadhav, offered up a controversial

RUKMA VIMANA



PROFILE

Drawn by
T. K. ELLAPPA,
Bangalore.
2-12-1923.

Prepared under instruction of
Pandit SUBBARAYA SASTRY,
of Azekal, Bangalore.

FIGURE 2.2 Rukma Vimāna. An illustration of the “Rukma Vimana” from G. R. Josyer’s *Vymanaika-Shastra*. The illustration was drafted by T. K. Ellapa in 1923

paper entitled “Ancient Indian Aviation Technology.” Their paper was based on a controversial Sanskrit text called the *Vaimānika Prakāraṇam* (rendered in English by G. R. Josyer as *Vymaanika-Shaastra: Treatise on Aircrafts*) and its abstract claimed it would prove that:

Aviation technology in ancient India is not a tale of mythology, but it is a total historical document giving technical details and specifications. Ancient Sanskrit literature is full of descriptions of flying machines, Vimanas. From the many documents found, it is evident that the scientist-sages Agastya and Bharadwaja had developed the lore of aircraft construction ... Great sage Bharadwaja explained the construction of aircraft and way [sic] to fly it in air, on land, on water and use [sic] the same aircraft like a submarine.

BASU 2015

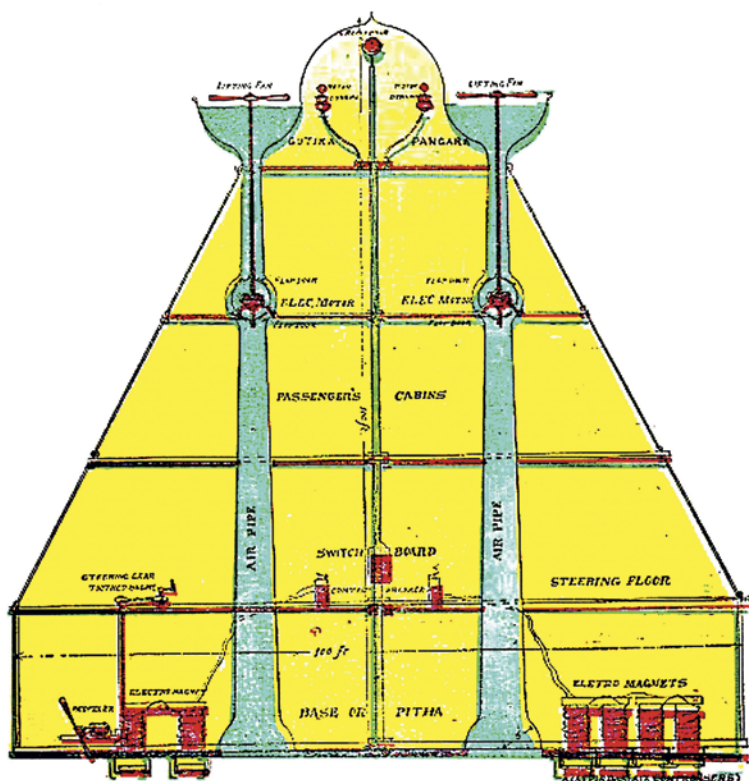
Not all participants, however, were receptive to the Bodas-Jadhav paper. Ramprasad Gandhiraman, a scientist affiliated with NASA, began an online petition, asserting that the paper was pseudo-science, and had no place in a serious science conference. Despite the petition gathering over 1600 signatures and media exposure, it failed to successfully pull the paper from the presentation schedule. Bodas was allowed to publicly proclaim that the *vimānas* described in his mysterious text were being constructed seven to nine thousand years ago (Deb 2015).

Siddhartha Deb’s article, “Those Mythological Men and Their Sacred, Supersonic Flying Temples,” in the *New Republic* expressed great concern about a political climate that so valorises such a fantastical form of revisionist history. It is one where even the Prime Minister personally has no hesitation of flippantly making the most preposterous claims in a blatant attempt to spin myth into science all in service of elevating an imagined Hindu past.

In this paradisiacal ancient India, the Hindu right finds evidence of a wide array of modern devices and technologies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, when inaugurating a hospital last October, added genetic engineering and plastic surgery to the list. “We worship Ganeshji,” he said, referring to the elephant-headed god. “Some plastic surgeon must have been around at that time, who by attaching an elephant head to the body of a human started off plastic surgery.”

DEB 2015

RUKMA VIMANA



VERTICAL SECTION

Drawn by
T. K. ELLAPPA,
Bangalore.
2-12-1923.

Prepared under instruction of
Pandit SUBBARAYA SASTRY,
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FIGURE 2.3 Rukma Vimāna cross-section. An illustration of the "Rukma Vimana" (cross section) from G. R. Josyer's *Vyāmanika-Shāstra*

The *Vymaanika-Shaashtra*, a twentieth century text making false claims of its own antiquity, falls into the lineage of texts pioneered by figures like Bhōgar and Saraswathi. These ideas have a renewed impetus in India's current political climate: distorting history in service of nationalist pride by asserting an ancient cultural superiority. The real history of the composition of the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra* is fully traceable only to 1952 with a few other tenuous threads that reach back to somewhere between 1900–1922 when the original text was essentially channelled by a South Indian brahmin mystic named Subbaraya Sastry (Deb 2015).¹⁸ In the preface to his English translation, Josyer asserts that the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra* was mystically dictated by the ancient Vedic Maharsi Bharadvaja to Subbaraya while he was meditating in a cave. Sounding much like the Theosophists' Akashic Record, Josyer makes this odd claim regarding the process of the transmission of lost ancient texts: "They remain imbedded in the ether of the sky, to be revealed—like television,—to mediums of occult perception" (Josyer 1973: 6). For over two decades Subbaraya would share small passages from the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra* that were slowly compiled by his disciples. Once the manuscript was complete, Subbaraya commissioned a draftsman named T. K. Ellappa to draw up images of the craft it described and, thus, the ancient whisperings were fully rendered tangible to his credulous devotees.

Deb's article speculates as to the social forces that might have motivated the creation of the text:

The traditions of mysticism and Sanskritized knowledge that [Subbaraya] Shastry must have identified with would have seemed particularly ossified under colonial rule, which encouraged the idea of Hinduism as a religion guided by a small priestly sect of Brahmins with specialized knowledge while also denying that knowledge any practical applications beyond the directing of rigid social and religious customs. Sastry responded by conjuring up a world where traditional learning and modern technology could be brought together, where past and future lived simultaneously. What he created, then, was a hybrid, part holy book and part technical manual, with a guru in a cave on one end of its originating spectrum and a mechanical draftsman who had studied at an engineering college on the other.

DEB 2015

18 In Deb's article, all these events surrounding the rising fascination with this text in the early twentieth century is particularly centered among the South Indian Brahmin community and reflects a sense of caste identity and traditional modes of brahminical power becoming increasing unmoored within the colonial context.

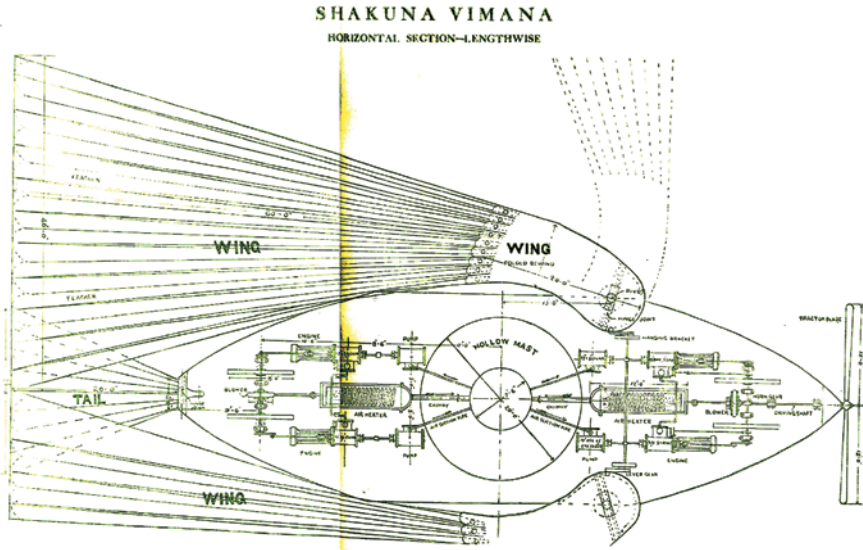


FIGURE 2.5 Śakuna Vimāna cross-section from G. R. Josyer's *Vymaanika-Shastra*

But even this part of this creation story of the text can be considered feeble at best, as it is based merely on hearsay presented in Josyer's own 1973 foreword to the first English edition of the *Vymaanika-Shastra*. Josyer, the founder and head of the International Academy of Sanskrit Research,¹⁹ claims in its preface that he gave an interview to the Press Trust of India in 1952 explaining that his organization had a group of manuscripts, thousands of years old, discussing “things vital for the existence of man and [the] progress of nations both in times of peace and war.” In particular, he mentions the *Vymaanika-Shastra*'s description of “various types of aircraft for civil aviation and for warfare” (Josyer 1973: i). He quotes a lengthy portion of his own interview and relates that he was immediately bombarded by inquiries as the interview appeared in all the leading dailies in India. Deb's *New Republic* article recounts these events saying:

The interview with the news agency (which may never have taken place; the only record of it appears in Josyer's foreword to the v.s.) was a prelude to that process of publication. It brought him “fan mail,” Josyer writes, from air force officials, journalists, Hindu priests, ministers, and civil aviation mandarins. James Burke of Life International wrote to ask Josyer if

19 Though called “academic” there is no indication that this organization created by Josyer ever had any academic affiliation or even a membership beyond that of the man who “created” it.

he could see the manuscript. Josyer replied, “Please wire one thousand dollars, and then come.”

DEB 2015

He also notes an interview he gave to the American author Jean Lyon, which appeared in her 1955 book, *Just Half A World Away: My Search For The New India*, in a chapter entitled “Science by Sutras.” Josyer was troubled when Lyon concluded (even back then) that his assertions were a byproduct of a “rabid nationalism.” There had been an earlier Hindi-Sanskrit edition of the work published in 1959, but Josyer refrained from putting out further editions when Venkatarama Sastry, the owner of the manuscript, complained that Josyer was motivated by personal interest (Josyer 1973: iv).

One year after its 1973 edition in Sanskrit and English, a short paper by five eminent Indian scientists respectfully but emphatically critiqued the origin and content of the text. In the 1974 issue of *Scientific Opinion*, Mukunda, Deshpande, Ngendra, Prabhu, and Govindraju, all from the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, published their “A Critical Study of the Work ‘Vymanika Shastra.’” They open by first pointing out that these same verses appear in a similar treatise, *Brhad Vimāna Śāstra* (The Treatise on Large Flying Objects), which was also published in 1959 (Parivrajaka 1959) and begins by citing passages from Dayanada Saraswati’s *Rgvedabhāṣyabhūmika* (1878), which we have already touched upon, as a means of justifying the subject of flying *vimānas* in antiquity. The scientists noted that the text’s verses were clearly composed in a very modern Sanskrit, challenging its claims to antiquity on linguistic grounds. Despite the team’s efforts and their convincing demonstration of the *Vymanika Shastra*’s recent provenance, it continued to quietly circulate within Hindu nationalist circles, until it made a new flashy debut at the Indian National Science Conference in 2015 (Mukunda 1974: 6).

2.8 Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra: An Authentic Text on Building Vimānas

The concise but convincing critique of Mukunda, Deshpande, Ngendra, Prabhu and Govindraju of the *Vymanika Sastra* ultimately concluded that, “None of the planes have properties or capabilities of being flown; the geometries are unimaginably horrendous from the point of view of flying; and the principles of propulsion make them resist rather than assist flying.” Their critique is also discussed in an article by Mattia Salvini on the *Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra* (“Architect of Human Dwellings”). *Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra* is the only authenticated traditional work that actually discusses the construction of

ancient flying craft. It is attributed to King Bhoja of the eleventh century with interpolations that likely continue being amended to the text through the fifteenth century. In her article on the *Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra* for the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Mattia Salvini notes that while the journal article, “A Critical Study of the Work ‘Vymanika Shastra,’” has exposed the *Vymaanika-Shastra* as a “disappointing fantasy,” their conclusions should not be extended to the *Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra* (because it is not a modern forged text) even though it also never provides any real working descriptions of the construction of these craft. She argues:

Such a discouraging account may tempt one to group the treatment of flying machines in the *Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra* in the same category of potentially disappointing fantasy. Yet, it would be a rather unfair comparison. Being the only unequivocal ancient Indian source on building aeroplanes, Bhoja’s work has attracted considerable attention in recent times (a casual internet search will make this clear). However, I would like to shift the query from the obvious, but strictly speaking unanswerable questions (*did they try? did they work?*) to another set of considerations, that bear upon the entirety of the text.

The author states something that should not pass unobserved: the instructions to make flying machines are, purposely, *incomplete*. Due to ethical considerations, the descriptions are not enough to effectively make any real aeroplane. The construction of the machines has not been explained, for the sake of secrecy, and not due to lack of knowledge. In this respect, that should be known as the reason, i.e. that the details are not fruitful when disclosed.

SALVINI 2012: 41

A little disappointment must attend such promise left unfulfilled. So why the teasing allusion to the construction of *vimānas*, which the author/s admittedly render incomplete and useless? Is it mere affectation? Perhaps the answer may lie in the fact that Bhoja’s *Samarāṅganāsūtradhāra* is primarily a work on civic and temple architecture. Is it simply doing what was being occasionally done in temple design at the time it was written, in essence, making temples in stone with chariot wheels and horses to establish a link with epic and purāṇic sources where gods come to us on divine chariots (i.e. in *rathas* and *vimānas* as temples and shrines are referred to at this time). But even Bhoja’s passing mention of secret techniques of constructing flying aircraft is too captivating a subject to be ignored by ufologists, because it, unlike the *Vymaanika-Shastra*,

is a real medieval work and is the only reference to such technology readily accepted by scholars as not being a modern fabrication.

So the *Samarāṅganasūtradhāra* is a text that is increasingly mentioned by contemporary ufologists, which they invariably link to the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra*. David Hatcher Childress particularly popularized the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra* among Ancient Astronaut Theorists. He reprinted Josyer's English translation in full, inserting it in his *Vimana Aircraft of Ancient India and Atlantis* (1991). The introduction is authored by Ivan T. Sanderson and begins by quoting one of the "authenticated texts" on *vimāna* construction, the *Samarāṅganasūtradhāra*. Here Sanderson is citing from Leslie's *Flying Saucers have Landed*, which provides no indication of chapter or verse, nor does it bother to mention from where Leslie is getting his translation. Nevertheless, we can see why Sanderson is so intrigued:

Similarly by using the prescribed processes one can build a vimana as large as the temple of the God-in-motion. Four strong mercury containers must be built into the interior structure. When these have been heated by controlled fire from iron containers, the vimana develops thunder-power through the mercury. And at once it becomes like a pearl in the sky.

LESLIE AND ADAMSKI 1953: 91

These opening claims of textual authenticity pave the way for garnering his reader's faith as Childress' more fanciful assertions envelope the text of Josyer's *Vymaanika-Shaashtra*. Childress' opening picks up where Sanderson left off, discussing how ancient texts once thought lost have been recovered in secret caches long hidden from invading barbarians, or concealed long ago in secret libraries in Tibet. His list of ancient texts once lost and recently regained culminates in his mention of nine volumes compiled by a secret society that is traced back to the great king of the Mauryan Dynasty, Aśoka (reigned c. 268 to 232 BCE).

Asoka formed a secret society of scientists known as the *Nine Unknown Men*. There were nine books, one written by each of the scientists in the employ of Asoka. Book number six was a treatise on the Secrets of Gravitation! One wonders if this book was perhaps the *Vaiminika Shastra* of Maharishi Bradwaja [sic]?

CHILDRESS 1991: 27

Childress revisits this premise in his *The Anti Gravity Handbook*. Here he claims that this mysterious volume circulates in whispers among historians as a work of legend that is yet to be revealed:

This book, known to historians, but not actually seen by them dealt chiefly with “gravity control.” It is presumably still around somewhere, kept in a secret library in India, Tibet or elsewhere (perhaps even in North America somewhere). One can certainly understand Ashoka’s reasoning for wanting to keep such knowledge a secret, assuming it exists. Ashoka was also aware of devastating wars using such advanced vehicles and other “futuristic weapons” that had destroyed the ancient Indian “Rama Empire” several thousand years before.²⁰

Childress is intrigued by the notion that The Nine Unknown Men was a historically real secret society, which he gleaned from Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier’s 1960 seminal occult work *Morning of the Magicians*. Pauwels and Bergier actually extracted the idea of a secret society of nine powerful mystics from a work of serialized Theosophical fiction by Talbot Mundy, which was published in the 1923 American pulp magazine, *Adventure*. Several of Mundy’s pulp serials were included in the “Book List of Standard Theosophical Literature” alongside the description, “profound truths in the guise of vivid and fascinating fiction.”²¹ Theosophists readily took Mundy’s fiction to heart as a perfect expression of their beliefs in the form of a novel. Thus, Pauwels and Bergier in accepting the truth of the nine secret teachers were simply following in the footsteps of Blavatsky when they insisted that Mundy’s work of literature was actually esoteric truth disguised as fiction.

In a similar vein, Childress builds his entire *Vimana Aircraft of Ancient India and Atlantis* around the *Vaimanika Shastra*, which he mythologizes in the following terms:

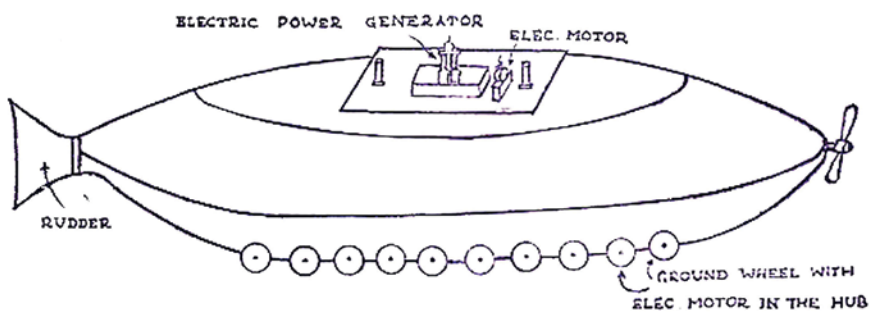
In 1875, the *Vaimanika Sastra*, a fourth century BC text written by Bharadvajy [sic] the Wise, using even older texts as his source, was re-discovered in a temple in India. It dealt with the operation of Vimanas and included information on the steering, precautions for long flights, protection of the airships from storms and lightning and how to switch

20 Cited on Childress’ internet site, https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vimanas/esp_vimanas_7.htm, accessed 03/07/2019.

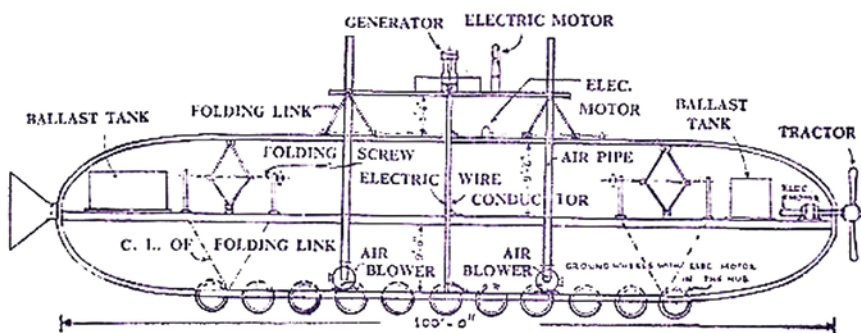
21 From a now defunct web entry on <http://www.talbotmundy.com>, but originally adapted from his book (Taves 2006).

TRIPURA VIMANA

PERSPECTIVE VIEW



VERTICAL SECTION



PLAN

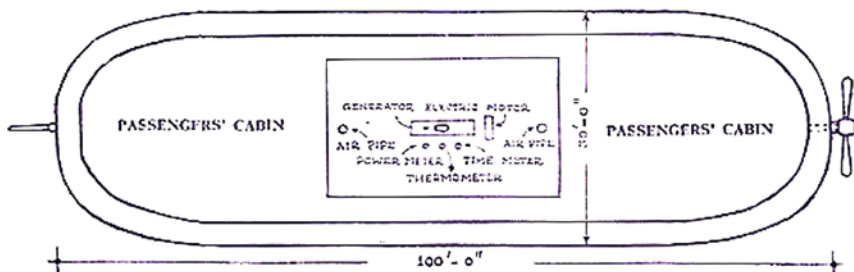


FIGURE 2.6 Tripura Vimāna from G. R. Josyer's *Vyamaanika-Shaashtra*

the drive to “solar energy” from a free energy source which sounds like “anti-gravity.”²²

He augments Josyer’s account to accord with the rediscovered lost texts in his opening saying the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra* was discovered in a temple and it was a craft with an energy source which “sounds like anti-gravity” to better accord with his premise that it is really the Nine Unknown Men’s lost treatise on the Secrets of Gravitation. Nowhere in his book does Childress acknowledge or address the fierce and comprehensive rebuttal of the *Vymaanika-Shaashtra* offered by the team of scientists.

Childress is now royalty among Ancient Astronaut Theorists but while he cites an *ad hoc* array of secondary sources on Hinduism and from the occult fringe, he clearly betrays a lack of knowledge of the Hindu sources so essential to his extraterrestrial revelations. For instance, he says that the *Bhagavad Gītā* is “known as the Srimad Bhagavatam to Hindus” (Childress 1991: 41). These are two very different works, the first being added to the *Mahābhārata* around the second century of the CE, and the latter being compiled around the tenth century CE. He also asserts that “The Mahabharata and the Drona Parva, two ancient Indian epics, speak of the war and the weapons they used” (Childress 1991: 86). But the Drona Parva is itself a chapter in the *Mahābhārata* and not a separate text at all.

Childress’ lack of command of his sources reflects a trend which claims that the general public is just as competent to evaluate archaeological artefacts as formally trained scholars who have dedicated their lives to a highly specialized subject. We see the earliest expressions of this tendency in *The Morning of the Magicians*. Here Pauwels and Bergier are often credited as first introducing the Ancient Astronaut Hypothesis,²³ and in doing so claim that excavated evidence of our ancient past has been misinterpreted by scholars and experts. They also are the first to claim that the uninformed and context-free speculations of non-specialists are equally as valid, as those with specialized knowledge:

Perhaps we have been visited in the distant past? And supposing the palaeontologists were wrong, and that the great skeletal remains discovered by the exclusionist scientists if the nineteenth century had been

22 Cited on Childress’ internet site, https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vimanas/esp_vimanas_7.htm, accessed 03/07/2019.

23 Actually the first proponent of the alien hypothesis was Charles Fort in *Book of the Damned* (1919: 163).

arbitrarily assembled. Were they the remains of gigantic beings, occasional visitors of our planet? What really obliges us to believe in the pre-human fauna talked about by the palaeontologists who know no more about it then we do?

PAUWELS AND BERGIER 2009

2.9 Vedic Creationism: Richard Thompson and Michael Cremo

This critique of mainstream scholarship and science becomes even more refined by two American Hindus with academic backgrounds whose influence extends to both mainstream ufologists and garners influence among Hindu nationalists. Richard L. Thompson (Sadaputa Dāsa) and Michael Cremo (Drutakarmā Dāsa) are both members of ISKCON (The International Society for Krishna Consciousness; popularly known as the Hare Krishnas), which is a sect of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas founded in fifteenth century Bengal. Thompson, who had received a doctorate in Mathematics from Cornell, came to lead ISKCON's critique of modern science in a concerted effort to establish the supremacy of "Vedic science" (Brown 2002). The main thrust of their agenda is essentially an anti-Darwinian evolutionary model that has come to be called "Vedic creationism." The countering of established science based on their specific sectarian viewpoint is most fully articulated in the 1993 book, *Forbidden Archeology*. Historian of science, Meera Nanda, critiques their work, indicating:

Cremo and Thompson claim, in effect, that the rejection of ancient origins of *Homo sapiens* by the mainstream of palaeontology is social construction. They believe that Darwinist palaeontologists have selectively applied very strict standards of evidence in order to discard those fossil data that show a much earlier origins of modern humans. They have, perhaps unconsciously, created a "knowledge filter" which only the data favourable to a naturalistic, Darwinian evolution can pass through and all other suppressed. Hence their book advertises itself as exposing a scientific cover up. Why would palaeontologists want to cover up evidence that contradicts their pet theories? Like some among Christian creationists, Vedic creationists want to establish that evolutionary theory is no different from a religion. Scientists are led by a blind faith in the naturalistic mechanisms of evolution. If scientists act like any entrenched religious community, then religious communities have an equal right to

interpret the existing data to support their own world view, seems to be the driving force behind Forbidden Archeology.

NANDA 2003: 177–178

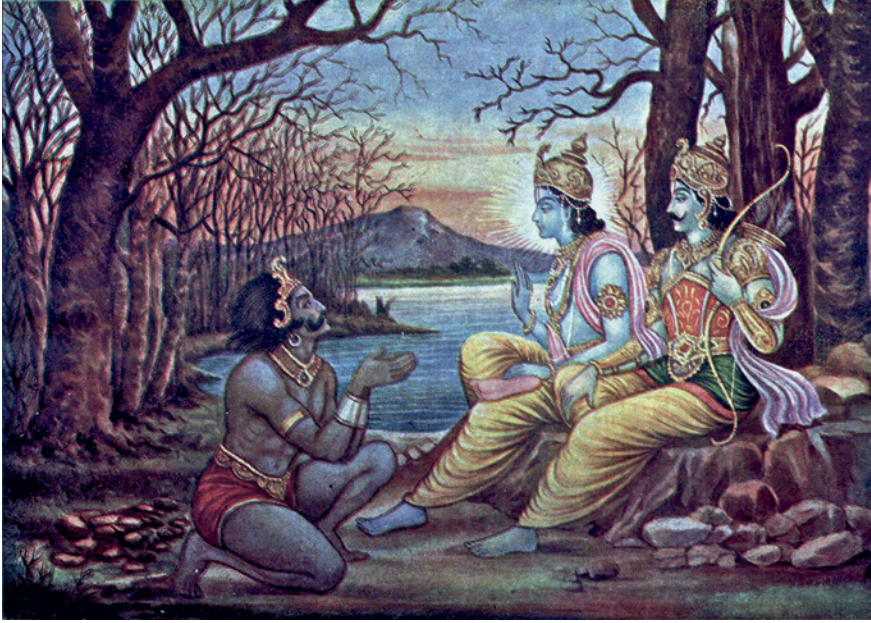


FIGURE 2.7 Kṛṣṇa, while seated next to Arjuna, orders Mayā Dānava to build the Hall of Illusions (Māyā Mahāl) for the Pāṇḍava Princes

Forbidden Archeology comes to assert that mainstream science has the same kind of biased agendas and are just as entrenched in archaic ideas as any religious zealot might be and this being the case, religious worldviews are therefore just as valid. Their unique blending of science as religion also was extended to Thompson's own reading of the similarities between Hindu epic and purāṇic accounts of *vimānas* in his book *Parallels: Ancient Insights into Modern UFO Phenomena*.

The more typical *vimānas* flight characteristics resembling those reported for UFOs, and the beings associated with them were said to possess powers similar to those presently ascribed to UFO entities. An interesting example of a *vimāna* is the flying machine which Śālva, an Indian king, acquired from Mayā Dānava, an inhabitant of a planetary system called Talātala.

THOMPSON 1993: 156

In Hindu mythological texts, Mayā Dānava was often credited with constructing wonders with his magical powers including famous palaces and structures such as the Hall of Illusions in the *Mahābhārata* or the Three Flying Cities or *Tripura* (Thompson 1993: 195),²⁴ as well as various other amazing *vimānas*. But Thompson's startling reference to Talātala as a "planetary system" is clearly a ploy to assert that Māyā Dānava was an extraterrestrial. In traditional Hindu cosmology Talātala Loka is conceived as being a subterranean underworld situated beneath the Earth's surface.²⁵ He makes a similar error when he represents the seduction of Arjuna by Ulūpī, the *nāga* princess, in the *Mahābhārata*, who takes him through the waters of the Ganga River to the serpent underworld as being nothing more than a typical case of alien abduction (Thompson 1993: 173). He does, however, sometimes employ a more direct approach in trying to counter questions raised concerning *vimānas*.

But one might object that there are also Vedic stories about horse drawn chariots that fly through the sky. Surely these stories are utterly absurd, since it makes no sense to say that an animal could fly through air or outer space using its legs ... The answer to this objection is that there are indeed accounts of horse-drawn flying chariots in Vedic literatures, but these stories are not necessarily absurd. To understand them properly, it is necessary to fill in various details that will place them in context within the overall Vedic world picture. When seen in this way, both the horse-drawn chariots and the self-powered *vimānas* make sense.

THOMPSON 1993: 197–198

He here invokes a vague and opaque "overall Vedic world picture" as he homogenizes and essentializes a complex array of distinct worldviews that are perpetually in flux throughout Hinduism's three-thousand five-hundred-year history of textual production.

Thompson clearly wants it both ways. As a devotee of Krishna, he acknowledges that these sources are religious works that delineate a spiritual understanding of the universe. Simultaneously, that they represent a highly

24 Taken from the *Śiva Purāṇa*.

25 See Swāmi Vijñānānanda translation of *The Srimad Devi Bhāgavatam* 8.18.11–8.20.1, "At the lower part of this earth there are seven places (caves or nether regions)." This refers to the seven levels of the underworld leading to Pātāla. See internet site, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/db/bko8chi8.htm>, accessed 12/08/2019.



FIGURE 2.8 Śiva as Tripurāntaka on his Vimāna, battling the demons of the three flying citadels
FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR

advanced science of the gods (*devas*) as well as technologies of extraterrestrials from other planets. His discussion is confounded on one hand by wanting to assert the literal historical validity of the contents of these sacred works, but he also wants to read the present into the past to appeal to his contemporary readers who are interested in UFOs. Unlike typical ancient astronaut advocates where extraterrestrials are mistaken for gods because earlier civilizations cannot help but view advanced tech as anything other than religious phenomena, these descriptions relate to the domain of “mystical powers” which are, at the same time, “architectural constructions”—mystical and material—born both of science and the sacred.

The technology involved in the *vimānas* and the flying horse-drawn chariots is essentially the same. It depends upon the mystic powers and higher dimensional aspects of material energy that are unknown to present-day science but are commonplace to the Devas. The *vimānas* are essentially architectural constructions that can fly, both in three dimensions and in higher dimensions, by virtue of powers that to us seem mystical. The Gandharva horses operate on the same mystical level and the same is true of the chariots they draw. If this is true, one might ask why the Devas and other related beings would bother with horse-drawn vehicles when *vimānas* that move by their own power are available. Judging from the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, the answer is that these beings use horses because they like them.

THOMPSON 1993: 200

The wider implications of this last passage are that aliens yoke horses to their flying vessels simply because “they like them.” Such a pithy explanation is meant to reassure his readers that the variety of descriptions of flying chariots in the epics can be resolved with an all too simple explanation. But the *Mahābhārata* was compiled over a period of eight hundred years and is awash with contradictions both in narrative and in terms of philosophical ideas. For example, the *Mahābhārata* records three completely different myths of the origin of the deity Kārttikeya, for it is interested in documenting the diversity of traditional beliefs, even if that pushes up against a desire to present a homogeneous worldview. This trend towards compiling varied beliefs and viewpoints in the text erode Thompson’s extraterrestrial arguments as the various citations he takes do not tally with his assumption that all references to flying chariots will support his position on the subject. Take for instance the assertion he makes in the previous passage when he says that *vimānas* move by their own

power²⁶ and contrast that with the one that follows, where he writes, “Arjuna is traveling through space in a literal chariot drawn by horses. This description has a number of important features, including travel through space and some kind of roadway” (Thompson 1993: 198).

And on this sunlike, divine, wonder-working chariot the wise scion of Kuru [Arjuna] flew joyously upward. While becoming invisible to the mortals who walk on earth, he saw wondrous airborne chariots by the thousands. No sun shone there, or moon, or fire, but they shone with a light of their own acquired by their merits. Those lights that are seen in the stars look like oil flames because of the distance, but they are very large. The Pāṇḍava [Arjuna] saw them bright and beautiful, burning on their own hearths with the fire of their own. There are the perfected royal seers, the heroes cut down in war, who, having won heaven with their austerities, gather in hundreds of groups.... “Those are men of saintly deeds, ablaze on their own hearths, whom you saw there, my lord, looking like stars from earth below.”

THOMPSON 1993: 198²⁷

Thompson’s citation represents these chariots as powered by a purely spiritual source, merit or *punya*: “they shone with a light of their own acquired by their merits.” Similarly the celestial realm Arjuna traverses is unmoored to even a rudimentary astronomical understanding as the stars themselves are revealed as nothing other than the sacrificial fires of *rishis* (*ṛṣi*: “seers” or sages). Thompson refers to this verse in an earlier section of his book where he tries to explain that these hearths of the seers were not the actual stars but referred instead to the “predominating inhabitant” of that solar system (Thompson 1993: 157).

Thompson’s discussion of important passages from the *Śrimad Bhāgavatam* also struggles with addressing incongruities in the text that clearly juxtapose descriptions of the “advanced technology” of *vimānas* with only the most archaic, if not, primitive technologies. Here we see *vimānas* having not only powers of flight, but also weather manipulation and cloaking technology. However, the same passages have these flying cars literally throwing sticks and stones rather than employing lasers or atomic weapons, a contradiction that Thompson himself notes.

26 Note the reference to “self-powered *vimānas*” on p. 68.

27 Citing Van Buitenen (1975: 308).

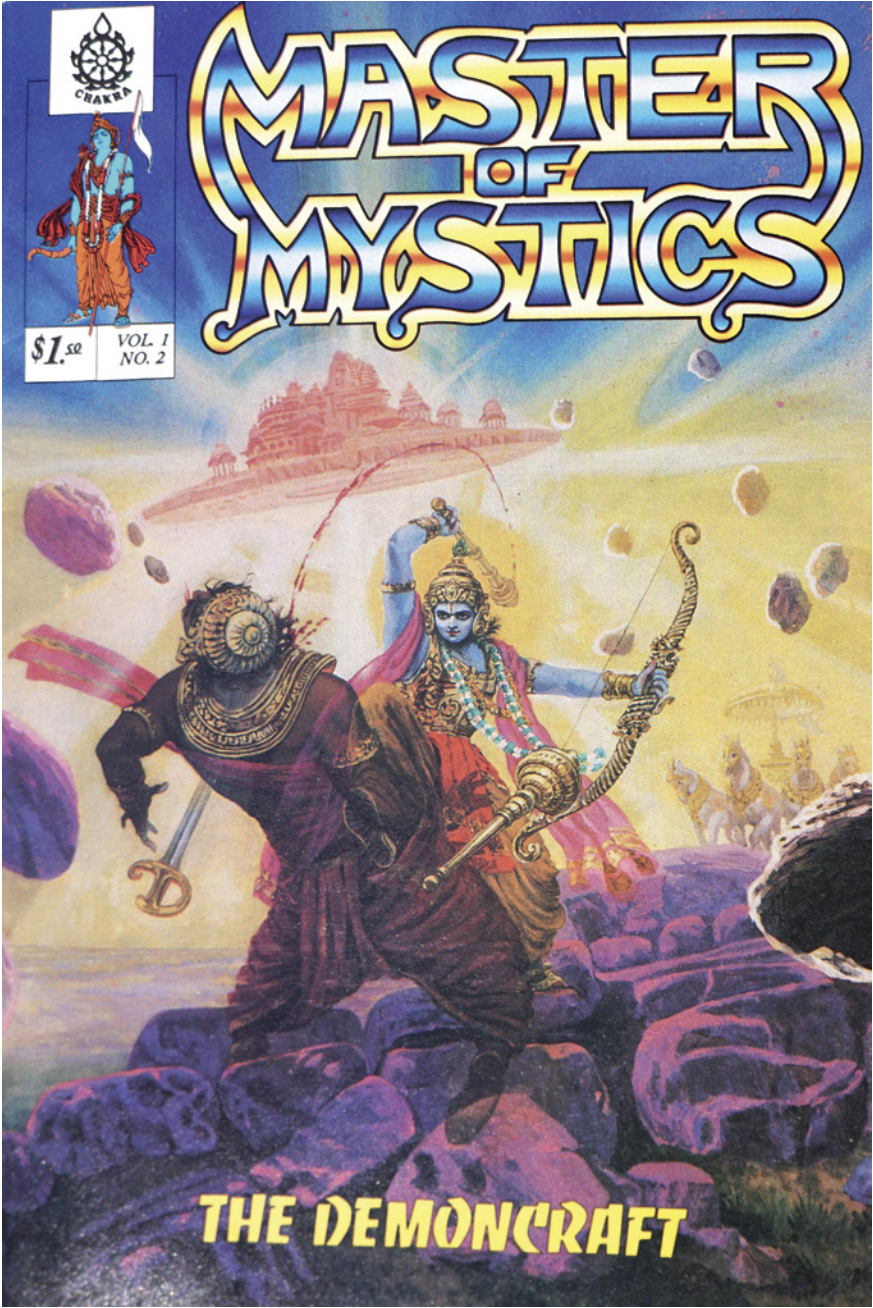


FIGURE 2.9 The Śālva Vimāna in an ISKCON comic-book depicting the *vimāna* of Śālva as a flying disk surmounted with architectural forms based on Hindu temple design

It is significant that Śālva dropped such things as snakes, stones, and tree trunks from his *vimāna*. There is no mention of bombs, and it would seem that even though Śālva possessed a remarkable flying machine, he did not have the kind of aerial weapons technology used in World War II.

THOMPSON 1993: 164–165²⁸

Thompson is admittedly vexed by the incongruities in the famed engineering skills of Māyāsura or Māyā Dānava, who he previously asserted comes from another planet. He clearly wants his ufologist readers to conclude that the text is describing an extraterrestrial craftsman giving a gift of advanced tech in the form of a highly developed flying craft but one oddly equipped with only trees, snakes and rocks to drop on enemy combatants.

There are many problems with Thompson's notion of a "Vedic science" not the least of which is that *Parallels* may have spawned imitative works which seek to fetishize ancient technologies in defence of a Hindu revisionist history. In 2007, P. N. Rangan's Kannada-language *Mahāsamparka: The Great Contact of the Extra Terrestrials in the Land of Bharata* (2002), a massive two volume pseudo-historical compendium, was reissued in English (Rangan 2007). The book is significant, for not only did it revisit well-known claims of India's astonishing technological past, but also associated these with extraterrestrial contact. It is worth considering how a discourse that seeks to claim India as the home for all great technological advancements can at the same time accommodate the gift of the technology from outside, extraterrestrial beings.

2.10 Popular Cultural Osmosis in Hinduism

P. N. Rangan's *Great Contact* marks an important trend, where traditional, metaphysical interpretations for ancient wonders are increasingly replaced with technological explanations, and a substitution of the gods with extraterrestrials. But even in India the prevalence of this kind of nationalistic rhetoric in beginning, more and more, to be combined with the ancient astronaut theory seen on television and the internet. This has led to a newer wave of cultural revisionist sympathy that tends towards rendering mythic accounts of the gods and their *vimānas* as being nothing other than extraterrestrial encounters and UFO phenomena, or at least, as in Thompson, to blur the two together.

28 His discussion of *Bhāgavata Purana* 10.76.4–12. This passage looms out in contradistinction to Desmond Leslie who expressly saw World War II weapons among the battles in the *Mahabharata*.

This move reached a saturation point roughly in the early 2000s when we begin to see the Ancient Alien hypothesis mimetically situating itself in all manner of Indian popular culture. Many Hindus in India and around the world now have blogs and serial YouTube videos on the subject. One prominent example is that of Praveen Mohan, who regularly travels to early Hindu sites and rereads them in line with ancient astronaut theory.²⁹

In the most recent context, the Internet and international broadcasting of shows like *Ancient Aliens* in India, Southeast Asia and in other Hindu diaspora communities around the world have led many Hindus to embrace the ancient astronaut hypothesis. But internal cultural influences within India such as the revisionist history found in school textbooks have brought about the return of flying *vimānas* into the modern theological climate. Here a global trend towards secularism and Hindu nationalism are both pulling the same rhetorical thread in opposite directions.

I would like to close with one intriguing indicator of the cultural saturation point I alluded to earlier in this discussion. The example is of a modern Tamil-speaking Hindu musical artist from Malaysia named MC Sai. In a 2012 song entitled “Ancient Aliens” he invokes the ancient disruption of Tamil culture in South India by the destruction of Lemuria, the fabled continent noted at the beginning of this chapter as popularized by Theosophists such as Blavatsky and Scott-Elliot. The staccato lyrics of his song pithily syncretizes many themes discussed above along with more mainstream ancient astronaut theories. We can see a variety of contemporary issues driving the content of his lyrics: post-modern malaise, cultural diaspora, racial tensions, a nostalgic longing for an imagined past, mixed with eschatological anxieties of the end of the Mayan Long Count Calendar (21 December 2012) all come together in this 2012 song. Its English translation by Aaron Paige of the Department of Ethnomusicology at Wesleyan is presented below:

MC Sai, the one who brings awareness
to those who don't know.
Little Empire, the Mayans, the Tamils.
2012 the full picture.
We are the ancient aliens!

Is it true that the world is ending?
Tell me what is truth from falsehood.

29 Just one of many of his videos can be found at the internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boGIDN-cmbQ&t=495s>, accessed 03/07/2019.

Look what the Mayans wrote
take note, the Kali Yugam is ending.

It is true that the world will end.
And it is true that man's life is a lie.
Half man, half alien.
Ancient all world *desiyam* (civilization):
Babylon, Sumeria, Kush, Eelam (*īlam*)
Kumari Kandam (Lemuria).
Pushpa-vimanam ("Flower Chariot"),
Gold casket chariot.
Super warrior,
the Chola system.
Tenth planet 2012,
all that fake shit go strait to hell!
The rhythm that we're using ...
Listen to the music.
Feeling all emotions.
First to be chosen.
Little bit of attitude.
Little bit ancient.
Little bit of magnitude.
History is facing.
Making y'all understand.
Live it everyday.
Bring it back, bring it back, show you the ways.
A past in disguise,
so true there's no lie.
Gun buck when we rise.
Straight duck when it flies.
Walking, walking, keeping the pace.
Tamils, Mayans show you their maze.
Walking, walking, keeping the pace.
The two were together, we started a race.

(chorus)
The year two-thousand twelve,
that the world will be destroyed is a lie.
Before science,
inscriptions tell us:

Om Namaḥ Śivāya!
 All studies point towards one thing.
 The sciences also point to the same thing.
 Mayans were brown.
 Rāvaṇas's father was also a Mayan (Mayā Dānava).
 Spread by the sciences,
 an army was given to the sun.
 Māmuṇi Mayan!
 Tamil's greatness amasses!
 Let's for once flip back the pages of history.
 Om Namaḥ Śivāya! Om!
 We will know it and realize it (the sound of Om).
 Call upon a conference with the world.
 The sun shines. The world spins.
 Wars, conflicts, my blood is boiling.
 Forehead splits. What is righteous, wins.
 As fairness happens you hear the sound.
 History is born, as good abounds.
 The good rule and the generous conquer.
 For Tamil, my soul.
 For the earth, my body.
 We are the fire. We are the flame.
 The Tamil empire, the Mayan exchange.
 Knowledge is power, the wealth, and the fame.
 Science is the swagger that dealt us the game.³⁰

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30 From the doctoral dissertation research of Aaron Paige, Dept. of Ethnomusicology, Wesleyan University. Personal communication from 12 December 2016. For MC Sai's music video see also internet site, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wDI0IljuE, accessed 19 July 2019.

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Judaism and the UFO; with Emphasis on the Vision of Ezekiel

David J. Halperin

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own ... No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable. It is curious to recall some of the mental habits of those departed days.

H. G. WELLS, *The War of the Worlds*



3.1 Introduction

The mental habits of the Biblical world out of which Judaism had its origin afforded no place for “intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own.” There were no “older worlds of space” because there was no “space” as we now conceive it. There was only a dome arching over the flat disk of the earth, bounded at its edges by impassable waters. At the dome's apex sat the Israelite God, attended by His multitudes of servants and counsellors—“the host of heaven,” the Bible calls them (*1 Kings* 22:19)—certainly including the sun and moon and stars but other supernatural beings as well, human in form but as deathless as God Himself unless He should will otherwise.¹ Outside this dome there was nothing. UFOs as we normally conceive them—visitors from worlds much like our own, mortal like ourselves yet unimaginably more advanced—could have no place in the Biblical universe.

¹ “It was I who decreed that you be gods, and all of you sons of the Most High,” He reminds them in *Psalms* 82:6–7. “Nevertheless you shall die like humans, and fall like one of the princes.”

The rabbinic literature of Talmud and midrash, from the early centuries of the Common Era, knew a cosmology more elaborate and differentiated than that of the Bible but identical in its basic outlines (Sarfatti 1966). The dome is multi-layered: there are multiple “heavens,” usually numbered at seven. Is there some echo here of the Greek system of seven planetary spheres enclosing a spherical Earth? If so, it is so distorted as to be all but unrecognizable. The ancient rabbis, intellectual virtuosi within their enclosed scholastic system, were barely inclined to peek outside it. The Jewish sages, the Talmud tells us (*b. Pesahim* 94b), believe that the sun travels beneath the dome (“firmament”) during the day—that is, through the visible sky—and at night travels via the dome’s upper side back to the east. “But the Gentile sages say, by day the sun travels beneath the firmament, and at night [after it sets in the west] under the ground ... and their opinion is more plausible than ours, for springs are cool in the daytime and hot at night.” Do the authors of these statements have some dim inkling of the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, of the sun orbiting the spherical Earth? Impossible to say.

The dome, admittedly, is vast and can encompass the fantastic and uncanny. The wicked king of Babylon, proposing to “ascend above the heights of the clouds” and “become like the Most High” (*Isaiah* 14:14), is admonished that “from earth to heaven is a five-hundred-year journey. The thickness of the heaven is a five-hundred-year journey, and similarly the distance from one heaven to the next.” Above all the heavens—seven, presumably, although the text does not specify their number—are the “Holy Living Creatures” (*hayyot ha-qodesh*) seen and described in the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. Each part of the Creatures’ bodies—feet, ankles, forelegs, knees, thighs, trunk, neck, head and horns (for they are horned beings)—is equivalent in size to all the heavens put together. Upon them rests God’s throne of glory (*b. Hagigah* 13a).

Still no room for other worlds and alien, mortal creatures that might inhabit them. The question of UFOs’ role in Judaism, at least down to the eighteenth century (see below), would therefore seem entirely out of place. It is only when we question what we mean by “UFO” that we may discover it has a meaning and importance after all.

In 1958, the psychologist Carl Jung published a book entitled *Ein Moderner Mythos von Dingen, die am Himmel gesehen werden*, which appeared in English the following year as *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*. For Jung, to call UFOs a “myth” was not disparagement but a badge of honour. The phrase did not necessarily mean that UFOs did not exist; Jung was open to the possibility that alien spacecraft, capable of aerodynamic feats beyond anything known to earthly physics, might be operating in our atmosphere. But most significantly, he thought, they were psychic projections, products of our

“collective unconscious,” symbolic bearers of healing for the spiritual rifts of our nuclear age. As such, they are essentially a psychological and therefore a human phenomenon. The flying saucer is a disk, not because extraterrestrial technology demands it, but because the circular mandala is a universal representation of “totality whose simple round form portrays the archetype of the self ... uniting apparently irreconcilable opposites” (Jung 1959: 32).

Jungian psychology is hardly less controversial than UFOs themselves. I will not make acceptance of it a precondition for following my argument. But grant, provisionally, that Jung’s approach may be at least thinkable, and “UFOs” will take on a meaning to which extra-solar planets and extraterrestrial beings are tangential. We space-age people, our heads filled with moon walks and Mars probes, impose that conventionalization on them because it is the only model our culture provides for the “alien,” the reality that goes unrecognized by normal consciousness. Earlier cultures may have experienced this “alien” no less than ourselves, but conventionalized it in other ways. Seen this way, the limited cosmology of classical Judaism may not have prevented its encounter with UFOs, but only forced them into different explanatory schemas.

3.2 The Vision of Ezekiel

The books of the Hebrew Bible are filled with flying entities. “Who are these that fly like a cloud, like doves to their cotes?” asks *Isaiah* 60:8, and luckily the answer is clear from the context: the Jewish people, their “flight” a metaphor for their speedy return from exile, as though transported like their ancestors (*Exodus* 19:4) on eagle’s wings.² More literally, the prophets Elijah and Elisha are parted when “a fiery chariot with fiery horses” swoops down upon them, carrying Elijah “with a whirlwind to heaven” (2 *Kings* 2:11).

Contemporary “ancient astronauts” theorists have sometimes claimed this episode as a UFO report. This is obviously false, however. To the ancient Israelites, a fiery chariot from the sky was an IFO (identified flying object); there was never any question what it might be. Like an earthly potentate, the Israelite God was surrounded by His chariotry, made of fire rather than wood and metal, as befits a fiery deity. “The divine chariotry is two myriads, thousands of *shin’an*,” says *Psalms* 68:18; and although we do not know what *shin’an* are, the point is clear. “The Lord is among them, [at?] Sinai in holiness.” What

2 The metaphor could be concretized, as in 1948–50, when the airlifting of the Yemenite Jews to the new State of Israel came to be envisioned by at least some of its participants as “Operation On-the-Wings-of-Eagles” (Meir-Glitzenstein 2011).

wonder that the Lord should detach one of these myriads to carry His prophet bodily to heaven?

Grant that the fiery chariots do not exist, and that Elijah's transport on one of them is a legend. That is beside the point. To the Biblical authors, the fiery chariots were as real and as intelligible a part of their conceptual universe as passenger jets or space shuttles are within ours. Few have seen them—Elisha is singled out for special privilege by his having witnessed his master rising on the chariot—but that also is beside the point.

Things are different, though, when we turn to the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel.

Here we deal, not with a fantasy reported in third person, but with what at least claims to be the first-person account of the experiencer. Bible scholars differ greatly on how much of the chapter is the genuine report of Ezekiel son of Buzi the priest, of what he saw or imagined he saw “in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar” in the fourth month of the fifth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah (July of 593 BCE). But that there is a genuine nucleus of a first-hand report, few have denied.³

It is a strange report, its details so elusive as to defy visualizing. “I looked, and behold, a storm wind come from the north, a great cloud with fire flashing up and radiance all around it, and from its midst like the color of *hashmal* ...” Scholars often link the word *hashmal*, which occurs three times in Ezekiel and nowhere else in the Bible, to the Akkadian *elmešu*, “a quasi-mythical precious stone of great brilliancy” (Greenberg 1983: 43, quoting the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*), and this is surely reasonable. Modern translators give it as “amber” or, following the ancient Greek translation (Septuagint), “electrum.” But for the ancient rabbis who were both frightened and fascinated by Ezekiel's vision, the *hashmal* was something mysterious and terrible. The word translated “color,” *ayin*, could also mean “eye,” and we will see that there were those who imagined an “eye of *hashmal*.”

Four “living creatures” (*hayyot*) emerge from the fire. They are said to be human-like in appearance but each of them has four faces, only one of which is human. The other three are faces of a lion, an ox, an eagle. They have four wings apiece and feet “like the sole of a calf's foot.” Later generations of Jews were to read this last detail, like the ox's face, as a clue to an awful secret hidden within Ezekiel's vision (below).

3 Cooke (1936); Zimmerli (1979–83); Greenberg (1983); Block (1997). These are the twentieth century's major commentaries on *Ezekiel*, which may be consulted with regard to the details that follow.

Up through verse 14, Ezekiel's attention is focused on the living creatures. But then he notices something new "on the earth beside the living creatures," which turns out to be the most UFO-like part of the vision. He sees a single wheel, at once metamorphosing into four, each of them crafted "as though a wheel were in the midst of a wheel" and possessed of "fearsome" rims studded with eyes all around. These wheels move in tandem with the creatures, lifting themselves up from the earth with them, "for the spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels."

Then, leaving the wheels, Ezekiel looks upward to a "sky" (*raqia'*, "firmament") stretched out over the heads of the living creatures. Above that "sky" is an enthroned human-like figure, shimmering in prismatic colours, half its body fire and half the mysterious *hashmal* with which the vision began. In this figure, Ezekiel recognizes his God. He falls on his face; he is addressed in the familiar prophetic language of *Thus says the Lord Yahveh*, charged with familiar prophetic messages of rebuke and (ultimately) consolation for Yahveh's chosen people.

The wheels, the most apparently UFO-like element of Ezekiel's vision,⁴ take on the most diverse forms in the vision's *Nachgeschichte* (history of interpretation and impact). They perhaps appear on a remarkable coin minted at Gaza late in the fourth century BCE, possibly an effort by a pagan artist to depict the Jewish God (Harford 1935: frontispiece; Kanael 1963: 40–41; Keel 1977: 273).⁵ He is a bearded male figure seen from the side, seated on a chariot throne with two prominent wheels. Each has a hub, four spokes, and a huge feathered wing. These wheels are utilitarian: they are there because a chariot needs them. But that is not how Ezekiel describes his wheels.

Rather, Ezekiel's wheels are entities in their own right, junior partners to the "living creatures." There are four of them, as of the creatures, and not two as would be required to keep a chariot rolling. Small wonder that, for the ancient rabbis, the single "wheel" of *Ezekiel* 1:15 was an angel whose height spans the distance from earth to heaven, exemplar of an angelic class called "Ophannim"

4 Singled out, to the exclusion of the rest of the vision, in the African-American spiritual "Ezekiel saw the wheel / Way up in the middle of the air." The spiritual seems to belong with the distinctive African-American UFO tradition, which runs parallel to the white American UFO tradition but diverges from it in significant ways. This issue, which seems to me of the greatest importance, has so far hardly been explored; Michael Lieb (1998) and Stephen C. Finley (2012; 2017) have done important pioneering work.

5 The three Hebrew letters on the coin were read by some older scholars as YHV, an abbreviated form of the name "Yahveh" (Harford 1935). More likely they are YHD, the Persian province of *Yehud*, "Judea."

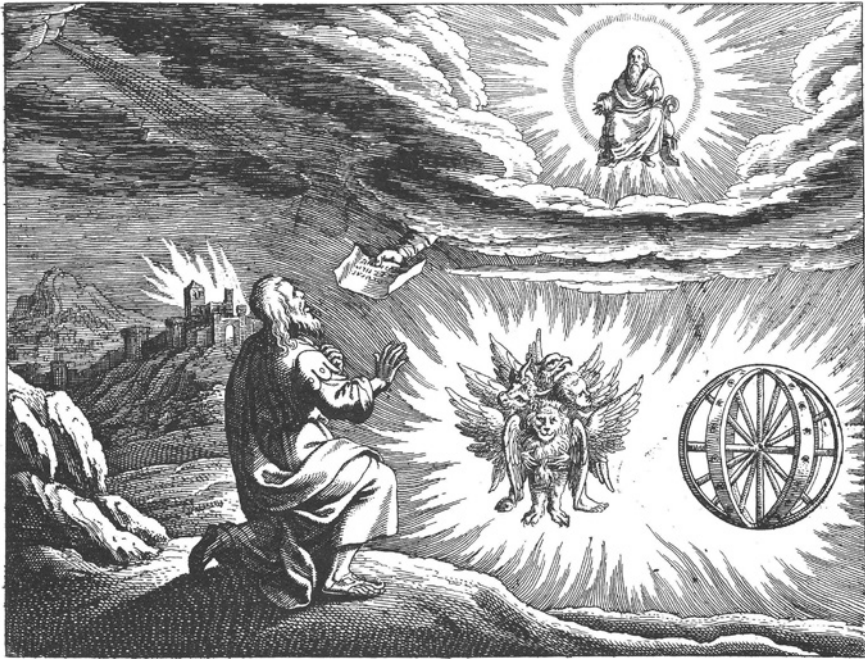


FIGURE 3.1 Matthäus Merian, copperplate engraving of the vision of Ezekiel, *Iconum Biblicarum* (1630)
REPRODUCTION COURTESY OF AVB PRESS

(“wheels”) who take their place beside the seraphim, cherubim and so forth in the celestial hierarchies.

What does Ezekiel mean by calling them “a wheel within a wheel”? The European artistic tradition, from the Bible woodcuts of the seventeenth century (Merian 1981: 297) to the popular astronomy of the nineteenth (Flammarion 1888: 163; “Flammarion engraving” 2019), represents them as two wheels intersecting at right angles, therefore able to move without turning (*Ezekiel* 1:17) in any of four directions. In the bizarre yet meticulous Ezekiel-inspired drawings discovered in a mould-smelling box beside a North Carolina roadway in 2008, they appear as flying gyroscopes (Halperin 2013).

But is all this really pertinent to Ezekiel? The prophet is hardly responsible for what later generations might choose to read into his cryptic language. Or, looking at the question of relevance from a different perspective, is it possible that the *Nachgeschichte* of the text is a part of the text, teasing out and making explicit what was latent in the text itself? This would apply to rabbinic exegesis—of which more below—and also to the artistic tradition rooted in

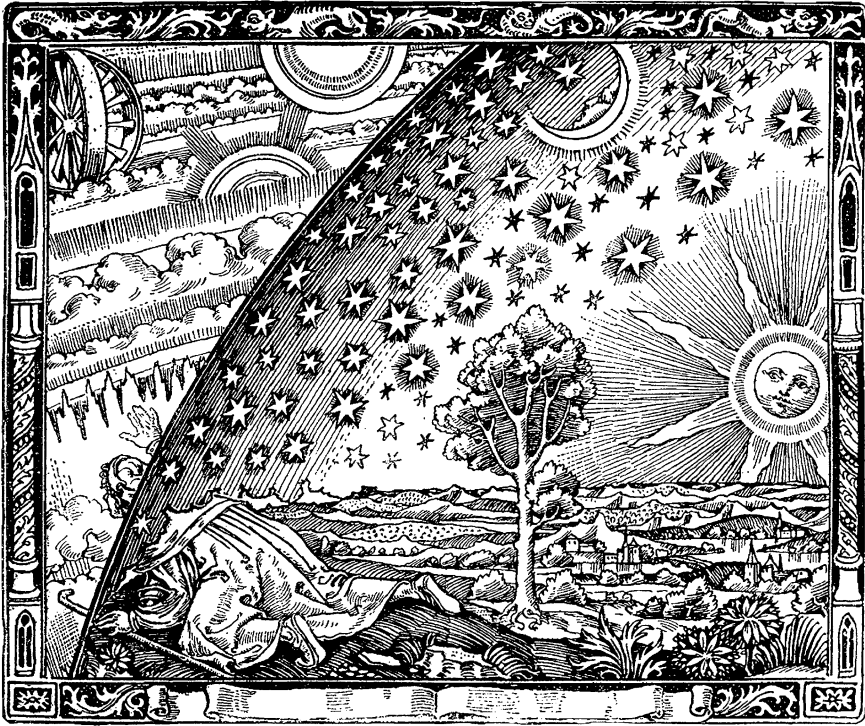


FIGURE 3.2 Anonymous woodcarving, printed in Camille Flammarion, *L'Atmosphère: Météorologie Populaire* (Paris, 1888), pp. 163., Public Domain
REPRODUCTION COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=318054> (ACCESSED 28/08/2019)

Ezekiel, including those offshoots of it that are housed not in museums but in smelly wooden boxes tossed out with the trash.

3.3 *Merkavah and ma'aseh merkavah*

The history of the interpretation of Ezekiel's vision begins in the Book of Ezekiel itself. Chapters 8–11 recount an ecstatic experience which Ezekiel dates to September 592 BCE, a little over a year after his vision by the river Chebar. He is grasped by the hair, feels his spirit leaving his body, lifted “between earth and heaven” and carried to the Temple of Jerusalem, which to his horror he sees polluted by one act of gross idolatry after another. The enraged deity who once established His presence there will withdraw that presence,

and the entities that Ezekiel saw in the Chebar vision are the vehicle for His solemn exit.

That exit is described in chapter 10, where a nucleus of authentic Ezekielian text is overlaid by a series of expansions by its anonymous transmitters. These expansions include verses 9–17, an exegetical paraphrase of the “wheels” passage of the Chebar vision (1:15–21; Halperin 1976). They also include an exegetical key to the identity of the “living creatures,” stated in Ezekiel’s name by some later writer speaking in his persona. “The cherubim lifted themselves up—this is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar” (verse 15). “This was the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar, and I knew they were cherubim” (verse 20).

The latter passage implies, what many readers of *Ezekiel* 1 are likely to sense, that Ezekiel himself initially had no understanding of what those entities were that he encountered by the river Chebar. Only seeing them in context, over a year later, was he able to identify them; that is to say, assign them a niche in the mythic structures that were ancient Israel’s culturally validated understanding of the world. For everyone among Ezekiel’s contemporaries knew what “cherubim” were: human-faced winged monsters on whose back Yahveh rode through the skies (*Psalms* 18:11). Carved from olive wood and overlaid with gold, two of these “cherubim” sheltered with their wings the wooden chest (“ark”) in the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple that was the token of Yahveh’s presence on earth (1 *Kings* 6:23–28, 8:6–8; Albright 1938; Keel 1977: 15–45). Out of context by the river Chebar, they seemed to Ezekiel alien, incomprehensible, hardly susceptible of coherent description. But viewing them in their proper home the Temple, in the process of carrying their Rider away from it, he grasped for the first time—so the anonymous author of 10:15, 20 informs us—what they were.

Never mind that the cherubim, as known from the Bible and the ancient Near East—sculpted, in their grandeur and terror, as guardians at the entrance of Assyrian palaces—bore only a passing resemblance to the “living creatures.”⁶ The cherubim had animal bodies, normally a bull or a lion, and human faces, only one per cherub. The “living creatures” had human bodies and four faces, only one of them human. These were small details that could be overlooked in the interest of explaining away the unknown, reducing it to the known or the imagined known.⁷ The contemporary history of ufology offers parallels.

6 Cf. Keel: “Die vier Wesen haben mit den Kerubim von 1 Kön 6,23 so gut wie nichts gemeinsam” (1977: 253).

7 Ezekiel’s “creatures” remain unidentified even when our full knowledge of ancient Near Eastern iconography is invoked to identify them (Keel 1977: 125–273). Human-faced animals,

With the “living creatures” = cherubim equation, the conception of the ensemble as a chariot for the deity begins to take hold. Of course it is encouraged by the presence of “wheels,” as on the Gaza coin, even though the unnamed interpreters whose essays are deposited in chapter 10 seem to have hewed to the Jewish tradition that makes the wheels (“Ophannim”) a class of angel. (The very late verse 14 gives them four faces parallel to those of the “creatures”/cherubim, with the ox’s face deleted and replaced by “the face of the cherub.”) But unlike the story of Elijah and Elisha, neither *Ezekiel* 1 nor 10 ever uses nouns from the root *rkb* (*rekhev* or *merkavah*, both meaning “chariot”) to refer to the vision or any of its elements.

The first clear evidence of the use of *merkavah*, for *Ezekiel* 1 and the entities there described, is in the Hebrew text of the Apocryphal book known as *The Wisdom of Jeshua ben Sira*. “Ezekiel saw a vision / and declared varieties of chariot” (*zenei merkavah*), although precisely what is intended by “varieties of chariot” remains unclear. Ben Sira wrote these words about 200 BCE, and shortly after 132 his grandson translated them freely into Greek: “It was Ezekiel who saw the vision of glory / which God showed him above the chariot of the cherubim” (*Sirach* 49:8).⁸

In early rabbinic (Tannaitic) usage—roughly, the second century CE—the *merkavah* = *Ezekiel* 1 equation is taken for granted, and the vision treated as an object of dread as well as fascination. An anonymous ruling preserved in the early third-century Mishnah (*Hagigah* 2:1) declares that “the incest laws may not be expounded by three persons, nor the [Biblical] account of Creation by two, nor the *merkavah* by a single person, unless he is wise and can understand on his own.” This seems to demand increasing levels of censorship, as one moves from forbidden sex to the eerie chaotic times before the universe as we know it took form, and from there to Ezekiel’s vision.

The Mishnah gives no clue as to what there was about the vision that aroused such apprehension. On the other hand, a Tannaitic passage quoted in the Babylonian Talmud (*Megillah* 31a) prescribes the *merkavah* as the passage

from the Assyrian palace guardians to the Egyptian Sphinx, are common. Animal heads or faces on human bodies—normally birds’ heads, although lions and rams do crop up—are much rarer. Human figures with four faces are very rare, and in the few examples we know of, the faces are almost always human and identical. (The exception is the Egyptian sun god, sometimes shown as a four-headed ram or a human figure with four ram’s heads.) Even John of Patmos’s vision in *Revelation* 4, which draws heavily on *Ezekiel* 1, recoils at the weirdness of Ezekiel’s conception, substituting four discrete entities in the forms, respectively, of lion, ox, man, and eagle.

8 The phrase “the chariot of the cherubim” seems to reflect 1 *Chronicles* 28:18, *ha-merkavah ha-keruvim*, which may itself presuppose an understanding of Ezekiel’s vision as “the *merkavah*.”

from the Prophets to be read aloud in the synagogue on the Shavuot festival commemorating the giving of the Torah, as complement to the Pentateuch's account of the Sinai revelation (*Exodus* 19–20); and the second-century Rabbi Judah bar Ilai is told, as a fact well known to all, that “many expounded the *merkavah* without ever having seen it” (Tosefta *Megillah* 3[4]:28). It would seem that the *merkavah* has immense power for good, when used in the synagogue as a Technicolor attestation of the power and glory of the God who gave the Torah, as well as for ill when studied (“expounded”) by individuals outside the synagogue's control. For such maverick expositors, the Babylonian Talmud has a horrific warning. “It once happened that a certain lad was reading the Book of Ezekiel in his teacher's house, and he contemplated the *hashmal*” of *Ezekiel* 1:4 (see above)—or else, “he understood the *hashmal*”? the Hebrew can be taken either way—and fire came forth from *hashmal* and burned him up” (*Hagigah* 13a).

At some point or other, the phrase *ma'aseh merkavah* was coined to refer to the thrilling, potentially enlightening, often hazardous enterprise of understanding and interpreting Ezekiel's vision. Literally it means “work of the Chariot,” though it seems to have originated by analogy with *ma'aseh bereshit*, “work of Creation” or “account of Creation,” referring to the similarly though less stringently regulated Genesis 1. “Rabbi Yohanan said to Rabbi Eleazar: Come, I will teach you *ma'aseh merkavah*. He said, I am not old enough. When he was old enough, Rabbi Yohanan had died. Rabbi Assi said to him: Come, I will teach you *ma'aseh merkavah*. He said to him, If I were worthy, I would have learned it from your master Rabbi Yohanan.”⁹

The theme of secrecy and repression, along with that of a body- and soul-destroying enlightenment beyond normal human ken, are reminiscent of modern UFO traditions. We have no way of knowing what Rabbi Yohanan would have taught Rabbi Eleazar had the latter not drawn back. Yet surviving rabbinic interpretations of *Ezekiel* 1 hint at what the ancient rabbis feared to find within the strangest and most powerfully numinous of the Bible's visions, yet believed to be truly there. They drew it forth from the text through the most fundamental method in their exegetical toolkit: using Scripture to interpret Scripture, bringing together seemingly disparate texts and letting a startling new message emerge from their juxtaposition. In this case, the message concerned the

9 *b. Hagigah* 13b. Although the story is written in Babylonian Aramaic, its characters are Palestinian rabbis of the third century CE. It is possible that it is modeled on an earlier story found in Tosefta *Hagigah* 2:1 and parallels, where another Rabbi Eleazar (ben Arakh, ca. 100 CE) expounds *ma'aseh merkavah* before his teacher Rabbi Yohanan (ben Zakkai), to a chorus of supernatural approval and the praise of Rabbi Yohanan himself.

most dismal and shameful episode in Biblical history—the Israelites' betrayal of God for the golden calf—and it spoke a truth that the rabbis, like their Christian counterparts, had no desire to hear. The vision therefore had to be, not suppressed exactly, but tightly controlled, its interpretation kept within orthodox channels.

3.4 Ox, Calf, *Merkavah*

The rabbinic midrashim (expositions of Scripture) that link the *merkavah* to the desert idolatry of the golden calf suggest that the “UFO” equivalent in Ezekiel's vision may be a numinous entity hinted at by that vision, so alien to most contemporaneous Jewish (and Christian) conventions of the deity as to be something truly “unknown” and “unidentified.” The midrashic texts bearing on this issue are reasonably clear. It is necessary, however, to read them through Jungian lenses for their full implications to emerge (Halperin 1988: 157–193).

“You see them coming to Sinai and receiving My Torah,” God tells Moses in one of these texts, speaking of the people Moses is about to lead out of Egypt.¹⁰ “But I see that, after I come to Sinai to give them the Torah, while I am returning with My team of four, they will contemplate it and detach one of them and anger Me with it. So it is written, *An ox's face on the left for all four of them* [Ezekiel 1:10] ... [and] *They exchanged their glory for the likeness of an ox* [Psalm 106:20].”

The reference is to the golden calf, the full story of which is set forth in *Exodus* 32. Its stimulus is Aaron's strange confession that after receiving the people's gold, “I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf” (verse 24). The text does not say *I brought out this calf* but *out came this calf*, hinting that it was not just a hunk of sculpted metal but an animate being capable of emerging on its own. The midrash takes up this hint: the calf emitted bovine sounds; it stood up and jumped about.¹¹ It was natural that the Israelites took it for a living god—*These are your gods, O Israel* (32:4)—because that is what it essentially was: an aspect of deity split off (“detached”) from the rest and turned demonic.¹²

10 *Midrash Exodus Rabbah* 42:5.

11 *Midrash Tanhuma, Ki Tissa* #19.

12 A fragment of a late midrashic text found in the Cairo Genizah spells out what is implicit in the earlier sources. Here the fatal vision of the *merkavah* is located not at Sinai but at the Red Sea, where rabbinic tradition represented the Israelites as witnessing those entities later viewed by Ezekiel. “When they crossed the Sea ... they saw My chariots carried by the four rulers of the world, human, lion, eagle and ox.... The ox was walking

Had Jung been aware of these midrashim, which he apparently was not, he would have nodded his approval. For him, one of the key “archetypes”—patterns that crop up independently in the dreams of different individuals and the mythologies of different cultures, because they belong to our shared human unconscious—is the quaternity, the “four” that when broken down turns out to be a $3 + 1$. That is, three of the four are essentially the same, while the fourth, though related to the others, is in some way distinct. The New Testament Gospels, with their three Synoptics and John as a strangely different Fourth, are a fine example.

Jung found this $3 + 1$ pattern in the vision of Ezekiel, which the early Church declared (via its spinoff in *Revelation* 4) to be a prefiguration of the Gospels. “Ezekiel’s visions,” Jung wrote, “are of an archetypal nature,” the vision of chapter 1 “made up of two well-ordered composite quaternities, that is, conceptions of totality.” The two quaternities were presumably the living creatures and the wheels, with the three animal faces + one human face constituting the “three” and the “one” (Jung 1959: 93; Jung 1984: 32–33, 95–96).

In his *Flying Saucers* book, Jung used this interpretation of Ezekiel as a tool for probing the modern mythology of the UFO. But it had a more important function for him, as a jumping-off point for analysing what for him was a key flaw of historic Christianity: its doctrine of the Trinity, which he saw as a mutilated quaternity (1958). Wherever we find three, was his principle, the question to be asked is, *Where is the Fourth?*¹³ So if God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who or what is the Fourth?

Jung entertained two options. *The Fourth is the female*, represented in the figure of Mary, whose suppression and exclusion from the male Godhead was Christianity’s immense blunder and loss. Or *the Fourth is Satan*, the evil that must be purged from a God who is pure goodness, nothing wicked allowed in these sacred precincts. Which for Jung was an even greater blunder, an even greater loss; for evil is part of reality and therefore must be part of God. Ignore it, deny it, force it into the unconscious, and it takes on a devilish power it would not have had if acknowledged in its proper context.

on the left. After they had crossed, they hurriedly took dust from under the feet of the ox.” (Ezekiel described the feet of the living creatures as “like the sole of a calf’s foot,” 1:7.) This dust, preserved by the Israelites, was the ingredient that conveyed the divine life into the molten calf. “Thus it is written, *And out came this calf* [Exodus 32:24], which shows that the ox emerged in their presence” (Ginzberg 1969: 1:235–245). The evidence that the *merkavah*-calf connection was a focus of rabbinic anxiety is given in Halperin 1988: 157–193.

13 From the beginning of Plato’s *Timaeus*.

No more than the Christians did the rabbis relish the idea of the pure and holy God being tangled, not to say alloyed, with monstrous evil. As the Christian Scripture assured its audience that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 *John* 1:5)—a repression which, Jung thought, allowed God’s unacknowledged darkness to erupt in the lunatic violence of the Book of Revelation—so the Hebrew Scripture insisted that “evil shall not dwell with Thee” (*Psalms* 5:5).¹⁴ The exegetical threads that led from Ezekiel’s vision to the golden calf threatened to expose this as the illusion it was. The *ne plus ultra* of idolatry turned to be, not something external and opposed to the Good Lord, but a “detached” element of the Good Lord Himself.

How much of this was latent and implicit in Ezekiel’s vision itself, waiting to be teased out by keen-eared expositors? The question of the relation of text and *Nachgeschichte* asserts itself once more. It cannot be answered definitively; yet it is curious that centuries before the creation of the rabbinic texts, hints of uneasiness with the ox’s face of 1:10 and the “calf’s foot” of 1:7 crop up in the textual traditions of Ezekiel. We have already noted that *Ezekiel* 10:14 erases the ox’s face, replacing it with “the face of the cherub.”¹⁵ The Septuagint Greek translation of 1:7, of uncertain date but certainly prior to the Common Era, similarly manages to excise the “calf’s foot.”¹⁶

Did the overwhelming vision of chapter 1, erupting from the visionary’s unconscious, contain within it a symbolic representation of a semi-demonic Power who incites the very crimes for which It exacts savage retribution?¹⁷

14 Quoted in *b. Shabbat* 149b, *Sotah* 42a, *Sanhedrin* 103a, *Niddah* 13b.

15 Observed by the Talmudic rabbis in *b. Hagigah* 13b and explained as Ezekiel’s having “asked for mercy on [the ox face] and it was transformed into a cherub. He said to [God]: Master of the universe! can a prosecutor function as an advocate?” i.e., the ox, irrevocably tainted by its associations with the desert idolatry, cannot function as Israel’s advocate. (The Talmud goes on to ask how “the face of the cherub” differs from the human face, and answers that the one is large, the other small. Hebrew *keruv* is etymologized as “like a *ravya*,” “for in Babylonia they call a child *ravya*”—a curious foreshadowing, for which no historical connection can be posited, of the familiar Renaissance conception of the cherub as a plump little boy.)

16 Apparently reading, for the Masoretic כַּף רַגְלֵם כַּף רַגְלֵם עֵגֶל (“the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf’s foot”), וְכַף רַגְלֵם כַּנֶּף רַגְלֵם (“the sole of their feet was a foot-wing”) and translating “their feet were winged.” The Aramaic Targum, similarly, translates עֵגֶל as though it were עֵגֶל, “round.”

17 As in the bizarre and horrifying passage *Ezekiel* 20:23–26, where Yahveh boasts that He gave to the Israelites “laws that were not good and statutes by which they could not live; and I befouled them through their gifts, through their passing [through the fire] all that opened the womb.” That is to say, He Himself commanded the Israelites to make fiery sacrifices to Him of their first-born children, “that I might devastate them, that they might know that I am Yahveh.”

This is a Power that we can suppose to have been outside Ezekiel's normal awareness, as It was later deliberately shut out of the awareness of the religious communities that drew inspiration from Ezekiel. In this sense, yes, *Ezekiel* 1 describes an experience of the unknown and unidentified, comparable to those numinous psychic entities that our contemporaries project into the skies as UFOs.

3.5 One More Quaternity: *Ezekiel* 1:4 and the Zohar

It would require a book-length study to pursue the *Nachgeschichte* of the Ezekiel's vision through the tangles and thickets of medieval and early modern Kabbalah. But it is worth noting that the classic text of the Kabbalah, the Zohar (composed in Spain late in the thirteenth century), picks up on one more quaternity that Jung missed, and thereby lends a measure of support to his "archetypal" reading of the vision. This quaternity consists of (1) the "storm wind," (2) the "great cloud," (3) the "fire flashing up," and (4) the "radiance" of Ezekiel 1:4. All are treated as demonic entities, concentric "shells"¹⁸ encasing the divine *hashmal* within.

Ezekiel sees the storm wind "coming from the north"—why? Because, says the Zohar, north is the direction from which evil comes (*Jeremiah* 1:14); and the wind is called "storm" because "it storms against all, above and below." The "great cloud" is a "cloud of darkness, darkening the whole world ... impeding all lights, which cannot appear in its presence." The "fire flashing up" is the "fire from which harsh judgment never departs." And as for the Fourth ...

And a radiance surrounding it (ibid.)—even though all this exists within it, *a radiance surrounding it*. From here we learn that although this side is nothing but the side of impurity, there is *a radiance surrounding it* ... it has an aspect of holiness and one should not treat it with disdain.

ZOHAR II, 203a–b, tr. MATT 2011: 157–159; cf. TISHBY 1989: 2:463–464, 490–493

"Radiance" (*nogah*) is demonic like its three companions yet not wholly so, its "aspect of holiness" providing a bridge to the divinity within. This foursome emerges as a photographic negative of the four-faces quaternity, in which three are holy and the Fourth as well—recall the "horns" of the Holy Living Creatures in *b. Hagigah* 13a, which can only refer to the ox-element among them—yet the Fourth also having within it an element of the demonic.

18 *Qelippot*, a standard Kabbalistic term for the demonic realms.

And, of course, the demonic quaternity of *Ezekiel* 1:4 is itself one element of the divine vision of the *merkavah*. One more indication that this morally ambivalent numen, mingling good and evil as these mingle in reality, is the “UFO” conveyed through Ezekiel’s symbolic imagery.

3.6 “Space” Travel

Behold clouds called me in the vision, and mist called me, and the path of the stars and flashes of lightning hastened me and drove me, and in the vision winds caused me to fly and lifted me up into heaven.

Book of Enoch (*1 Enoch*), 14:8

The cosmographic text quoted in *b. Hagigah* 13a (above, “Introduction”) uses the immensity of the heavens, and of the “Holy Living Creatures” situated above them, to rebuke the hubris of the tyrant who bragged he could scale those heights. Impossible for a human being, says the Talmud; and yet in ancient Judaism there were those who did achieve this kind of “space” travel, in fantasy and perhaps in hallucination as well. With the caveat that such celestial journeying meant for the ancient Jews something utterly different from what it means for us, some parallel with the modern UFO tradition is discernible.

Thus the antediluvian patriarch Enoch, who lived the same number of years as the solar year has days and who “walked with God and he was not, for God took him” (*Genesis* 5:24), is said to have been begged by the fallen angels to ascend to heaven—that is, for the human being to enact the reversal of the angels’ descent—to intercede for them. He does this, quite explicitly, by dreaming.

The story is told in a very ancient section of the *Ethiopic Book of Enoch* (*1 Enoch*), almost certainly written prior to the mid-second century BCE. This text belongs to the genre of the early Jewish apocalyptic literature, often designated “pseudepigrapha” because of the authors’ habit of hiding themselves behind the personas of Biblical figures who lived centuries earlier—or, like Enoch, never existed. As fictional narrator, however, this “Enoch” comes to life. “I went and sat down by the waters of Dan ... and I read out the record of their petition until I fell asleep” (13:7). Clouds and mist summon him upward; “the path of the stars and flashes of lightning” hurry him along; and “winds ... lifted me up into heaven” (14:8). Proceeding on foot, he encounters a house made of hailstones and snow and fire, all coexisting through a power that can only be supernatural. “Its roof was like the path of the stars and flashes of lightning, and among them were fiery Cherubim, and their heaven was like water” (tr. Knibb 1984).

Shivering in dread, Enoch enters the house. Like Ezekiel he falls on his face, and he sees another house within, paradoxically larger than the house containing it. In that inner house a being “great in glory” sits on a high throne, encompassed by a sea of fire; and for all the exotic furnishings we know exactly where we are: the Temple of Jerusalem, with the Holy of Holies at its heart and God dwelling in the Holy of Holies, all projected by the author’s imagination into the sky. There Enoch, like Ezekiel in his time, is granted a message for those dwelling on earth. (In this case, the fallen angels.)

This “Enochian” brand of Judaism, attested by a string of texts composed in Enoch’s name around the beginning of the Common Era, was eventually superseded by the rabbinic variety. Talmud and midrash kept their distance from anything smacking of it. Yet somewhere within rabbinism there arose a strange and only half intelligible literature that presupposed and sometimes seemed to prescribe for heavenly journeys like those attributed to Enoch. It was called *Hekhalot*, the Hebrew word for “palaces,” referring to the seven concentric structures that ringed about the deity, which in these texts take the place of the traditional seven heavens. But *hekhal* can mean “temple” as well as “palace,” and it seems clear that we are dealing with an extension of the notion found in the Enoch literature (and reflected here and there in the rabbinic writings) that God dwells within a heavenly Temple of which the earthly sanctuary is a pale reflection.

The date and provenance of the *Hekhalot* texts, as well as their and their (anonymous) authors’ relation to the more familiar—dare we say “normative”?—aspects of rabbinic Judaism, remain controversial.¹⁹ So is the extent to which their heavenly journeys reflect, not just the writers’ fantasies as in the Book of Enoch, but ecstatic states in which these fantasies were turned into hallucinatory experience. Much in these texts does have an authentic ring, of something erupting from outside the writers’ conscious control and experienced as terrifyingly real. If the Enoch literature can be seen as a sort of antique science fiction, the experiential substrate of the *Hekhalot* can be likened to contemporary UFO abductions.²⁰

Precisely how the *Hekhalot* writings and the ecstatic vision-quests they seem to reflect—which James Davila (2001) has persuasively identified as a form of shamanism—are linked to the rabbinic *ma’aseh merkavah*, is not quite

19 The classic studies are Scholem (1954: 40–79) and Scholem (1960). My own views are expressed in Halperin (1980; 1988). Important recent studies include Davila (2001), Boustani (2005), Schäfer (2009); Davila’s introduction to his translation of the *Hekhalot* (2013) summarizes the current state of research.

20 Comparison developed in Halperin (2020).

clear. On the one hand, the *Hekhalot* themselves claim such a pedigree. The goal of their visionary journeys is the *merkavah*, which by “a very curious and so far unexplained change of phraseology” (Scholem 1960: 20) is reached by a process of *descent* rather than ascent.²¹ At one point in the process of transmission, one of the amorphous clusters of material that came eventually to be recognized as “texts” was given the title *Ma’aseh Merkavah* (Janowitz 1989; Swartz 1992). Yet interpretations of Ezekiel’s vision, which the rabbinic writings treat as the essence of *ma’aseh merkavah*, are almost entirely absent. One exception, which might be read as a fragment of a mystical midrash on Ezekiel 1,²² stands out:

I saw like the eye of hashmal [Ezekiel 1:27]. It would attend²³ to those who descend to the *merkavah*, continually examining them to distinguish those worthy to descend to the *merkavah* from those unworthy. If one was worthy to descend to the *merkavah*, they [the angels?] would say to him, “Enter,” but he would not enter. They would again say to him, “Enter,” and he would thereupon enter.... But if he was unworthy ... they would say to him, “Don’t enter” but he would enter, and they would thereupon shower him with iron axes.²⁴

Ezekiel’s *ke-‘en hashmal*, normally and reasonably understood as “like the color of *hashmal*,” is here treated in accord with the more usual meaning of עַיִן (“eye”) as a disembodied eye, its size unstated but presumably large, which scrutinizes those who have undertaken the journey to the *merkavah*. An eye of this sort was reported by two of the earliest UFO abductees, a pair of shipyard workers named Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker, who claimed to have been abducted on the evening of 11 October 1973, from a dock in the Pascagoula River, Mississippi, where they had been fishing.

The two men, one paralyzed and the other unconscious, were taken aboard the UFO by three humanoid entities, grey and wrinkled like mummies and apparently eyeless. Thereupon ...

21 The image of descending, which I suspect is a metaphor for the plunge into the unconscious, is paralleled in the UFO abduction experience (Halperin 2020).

22 Gruenwald (1969: 66); I have not been able to find the suggestion in the published editions of Gruenwald’s book (1980 and 2014).

23 Or “attach itself,” with overtones of sexual connection; Hebrew *nizqaq*.

24 Schäfer (1981: #258), conventionally assigned to *Hekhalot Rabbati*; cf. #407 (*Hekhalot Zutarti*). Davila’s translation (2013), which differs somewhat from mine, follows the paragraph numbers of Schäfer’s edition.

Something like an “eye,” the size and shape of a football, floated from the wall to within six inches of Hickson’s face. Hickson lay suspended in the air in different positions (once at a 45-degree angle) as the eye moved around his body. At this point Hickson could no longer see the being who he thought might be behind him, because he was still paralyzed, but he could not determine that for himself.

CLARK 2018: 2:895; cf. NUGENT 1989

Hickson’s and Parker’s “abduction” cannot be regarded either as a literal account of an event transpiring in the physical world—there would have had to be other witnesses to the UFO besides the two men, and there apparently were not—or as a deliberate hoax. A recording of the men’s voices, made on a hidden tape recorder in the local sheriff’s office at a time when they believed they were alone, shows convincingly that they had shared a harrowing encounter with something they could not begin to understand. The sensation of being scrutinized by a disembodied eye links that encounter to the equally harrowing experiences of the “descenders to the *merkavah*” centuries earlier. It suggests that something in the shared human unconscious has emerged in these very different historical contexts. This is the UFO, *not* meaning a spaceship but something mysterious and hidden within our psychic makeup, susceptible to interpretation and conventionalization within the cultural frameworks of ancient Judaism and space-age America alike.

3.7 Discovering the Extraterrestrial

The traditional Jewish mind, ghettoized well into the eighteenth century, could not thrive forever in isolation. Medieval thinkers like Maimonides had long embraced the Ptolemaic system of astronomy and made excuses for the ancient sages’ apparent ignorance of it (Sarfatti 1966: 148). Their successors in the early modern period could be loath to let it go. One early seventeenth-century writer might declare the proofs for the Copernican system to be so convincing that only a “perfect imbecile” could fail to accept them (Joseph Delmedigo, quoted in Neher 1977). Yet as late as 1714 David Nieto, rabbi of the Sephardic community in London, could declare Copernican astronomy unfit for acceptance by God’s people on account of its contradiction to the miracle of the stalled sun in *Joshua* 10:12–14.²⁵

25 Nieto, *Matteh Dan* (London, 1714), IV, paras. 130–144; cf. Ruderman (1995: 324).

Yet, perhaps inconsistently, Nieto was open to the possibility that living beings might exist somewhere outside this terrestrial globe. Could the stars be inhabited worlds like our own? he asked; and he answered with a qualified yes. God could not have created the magnificent heavenly bodies only for the sake of us lowly earthlings. Perhaps each of the innumerable stars that we see fixed in the eighth (and outermost) of the planetary spheres functions as a sun to an earth, invisible to us on account of its distance, that lies beneath it? God will then have created the stars to benefit the dwellers on those earths, just as He created the sun for our benefit.

Why not? Yet direct evidence for this conjecture was sparse. The Mishnah indeed testified that in the messianic future God would “bequeath three hundred and ten worlds to each and every one of the righteous” (*Uqzin* 3:12), but Nieto conceded that these “worlds” might just as well be spiritual as physical. It was left for a writer at the end of the eighteenth century to discover convincing Talmudic proof for the existence of extraterrestrials.

His name was Rabbi Pinchas Elijah Hurwitz (1765–1821). In 1797 he published a book called *Sefer ha-Brit*, “Book of the Covenant,” a compendium of scientific, geographical, and Kabbalistic knowledge, designed to give his readers a sense of the new world they were living in—Jewish style. Written in Hebrew, it was “a popular bestseller in Eastern and Western Europe, as well as in North Africa and the Middle East” (Matveyev 2011). Clearly, Jews the world over were thirsty for the information and ideas that Hurwitz could provide.

On the subject of extraterrestrial life, Hurwitz took his cue from a Talmudic passage (*Mo’ed Qatan* 16a), itself an interpretation of the Biblical text *Judges* 5:23. The Scripture had proclaimed, in celebration of the Israelites’ victory over the superior forces of the Canaanite general Sisera:

“Curse Meroz,” said the angel of the Lord,
 “Pronounce a great curse on its inhabitants,
 For they did not come to the help of the Lord,
 To the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

But what is “Meroz”? (The name occurs nowhere else in the Bible.) Here the Talmud steps in: “Some say, He was an illustrious man, while others say, It was a star, as it is written, ‘The stars fought from heaven’ [*Judges* 5:20].” In other words, at least some of the Talmudic sages believed that Meroz was a star; and since the Bible curses its “inhabitants,” it follows that at least some of the stars are inhabited.

Although Hurwitz never says so explicitly, I would guess that he imagined “Meroz” to be Mars. The beings who dwell there are cursed by the Lord’s angel

because “they did not come to the help of the Lord” as all good Martians, and extraterrestrials in general, are bound to do, “spilling out evil upon Sisera and his army” from their distant perches. For Hurwitz, in opposition to Nieto, is convinced that “all things were created for the sake of earthly humanity,” and it is the extraterrestrials’ obligation to serve God’s ends here on earth.

The ETs, Hurwitz thinks, must be beings utterly unlike ourselves. His Martians, unlike those of H. G. Wells, are immortal, surviving as individuals and not (like us) only as a species. Extraterrestrial beings “may be endowed with intelligence and knowledge.” Yet they are without free will, which is a property unique to us humans.²⁶ This is our superiority over them, “just as the tiny mosquito is superior to all the mighty and many trees of the forest in that it has the power of life.” “[H]ow are all things made for man?” Wells quotes Kepler in his epigraph for *The War of the Worlds*; and Hurwitz assures his readers: they are, absolutely.

None of us, to be sure, knows what benefit accrues to us from those [extraterrestrial] creatures. Similarly, we do not know what benefit we gain from the celestial creatures, such as the angels and the wheels and the living creatures [of *Ezekiel* 1], yet all experts in Kabbalah agree that humans indeed derive benefit from them.

So we are back with Ezekiel’s vision. The dwellers on other planets are qualitatively different from the entities of the *merkavah*, yet functionally the two groups are more alike than one might have anticipated. If Hurwitz could have foreseen, one hundred and fifty years after he wrote *Sefer ha-Brit*, the appearance in the skies of things supposedly witnessed yet baffling and indeterminate—to which category would he have assigned them? The “celestial”? Or the extraterrestrial?

3.8 Conclusion

It hardly matters. The splendid, dazzling house of mirrors called Kabbalah, which for the past few centuries had held the Jewish mind in thrall, was starting to crumble even in Hurwitz’s day. Soon it would be dismissed, as far as “emancipated” Western Jewry was concerned, to the trash-heap of outmoded superstitions, in favour of the supposedly more authentic Judaisms of Bible and Talmud. Ezekiel’s *merkavah* would fall into obscurity, read yearly in the

²⁶ Then how could the Martians have refused to “come to the help of the Lord”? Hurwitz does not seem to have noticed the inconsistency.

synagogue on Shavuot but paid little attention. Only with the coming of the UFOs, and the “ancient astronaut” theorizing inspired by them, would it recover some measure of its ancient fascination.

To judge from their web postings,²⁷ contemporary Orthodox Jews, when they think about extraterrestrial life at all, think about it along the lines laid out by Hurwitz, rehearsing his Biblical-Talmudic proof of its existence or at least its possibility. But what of the unorthodox? Is it possible that the ancient Jewish engagement with the alien, the unrecognized and unacknowledged, crops up among them in up-to-date disguises?

Here we have questions and speculations, hardly anything more. Is it significant that it was a Jewish filmmaker, deeply engaged with Jewish issues and haunted by memories of his *alienation* as a solitary Jewish boy facing cruel anti-Semitism (Gluck 2013; Applebaum 2018), who created the enduring UFO classic of our time, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? That it was a pair of secular Israeli astrophysicists who made headlines in 2018 with a paper arguing that a mysterious object that had penetrated our solar system—“Oumuamua,” a Hawaiian word meaning “scout” or “messenger”—was an interstellar probe from an alien civilization? The *New Yorker*’s Isaac Chotiner, interviewing the lead investigator Avi Loeb, seems to have sensed a religious motivation behind this fantastic (and almost universally rejected) hypothesis, and asked Loeb a question about his religious beliefs. Loeb responded with huffy defensiveness. “I am not religious. Why do you make that assumption? ... My work as a scientist is purely based on evidence and rational thinking. That’s all” (Chotiner 2019).

Only “rational” thinking? I wonder.²⁸

27 E.g., Freeman (n.d.), citing the Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson (I owe this reference to Professor Benjamin E. Zeller); Laura (2012), citing Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan.

28 I wonder, similarly, whether some unconscious religious agenda was operating in the mind of Paul Kurtz, a self-proclaimed atheist of Jewish origin, who in the 1970s helped to found the “Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal” to combat what Kurtz regarded as the pernicious influences of an “occult revival” (including UFOs) in the United States. “As an organization, CSICOP is formally allied with atheistic groups. It shares a building, personnel, office equipment, and fund raising with the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH). The two organizations overlap extensively, and both are headed by Paul Kurtz.... Some might be puzzled why such a long cumbersome name was selected for the Council and also why the acronym CODESH was used, rather than CODASH, with ‘A’ for ‘and.’ When one knows that ‘kodesh’ is Hebrew for holy, it makes sense” (Hansen 2001: 154). Hansen suggests that “[t]he acronym was obviously chosen as a slap at the Jewish religion.” To me, it seems more likely to have expressed an atavistic sense on Kurtz’s part that his anti-religious, anti-occult campaign was, paradoxically, a crusade made “holy” by Jewish tradition. The possibility of subterranean influences of this sort, on contemporary debates concerning religion, UFOs, and kindred topics, should never be discounted.

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Unmasking the Alien Deception: Why Evangelicals Are Studying Ufology

Joseph P. Laycock

4.1 Introduction

In January of 2018, my friend Blake Smith of the podcast “Monstertalk,” emailed me about a documentary called *Alien Intrusion* that promised to “unmask a deception” about extraterrestrials. The documentary is based on the book *Alien Intrusion: Ufos and the Evolution Connection* by Gary Bates of Creation Ministries International (CMI), a group that split off from Ken Ham’s creationist ministry Answers in Genesis (AiG) in 2006. At my local theatre, less than a dozen people showed up for the one-night-only showing, some of who were hardcore UFO enthusiasts who arrived wearing jackets for their investigative groups. The nearly two-hour documentary began by discussing the UFO phenomenon and showed the many problems with the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH)—the assumption that UFOs are spacecraft visiting us from another world. The film then advocated for what has been called the inter-dimensional hypothesis (IDH). This view draws on such ufologists as Jacques Vallée, J. Allen Hynek, and John Keel who suggested UFO sightings are more likely an experience of a psychic or inter-dimensional phenomenon than normal physical objects.¹ The strength of the IDH is that it credits witnesses with experiencing *something* extraordinary while simultaneously excusing any missing or contradictory evidence. After introducing the IDH, the documentary was ready to “unmask the deception:” the “aliens” are really just demons who, since 1947, have been masquerading as extraterrestrials in order to deceive humanity, promote belief in the theories of evolution and the Big Bang, and found false religions. The scientific register of the film dissolved, triumphalist music came up, and Bible verses began to appear on the screen. A weepy abductee explained that he was saved from a painful anal probing only when he called on the name

1 John Keel suggested that UFOs are far stranger beings that merely pretend to be from other planets in his book *Operation Trojan Horse* (1970). Vallée and Hynek first advanced a form of the IDH in their book *The Edge of Reality: A Progress Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (1975).

of Jesus. This, according to the documentarians, proved definitively that Jesus is Lord, that the aliens are demons, and—most importantly—that the scientific paradigms allied with the ETH are actually demonic deceptions. At this, several of the jacketed ufologists walked out in disgust. My wife spotted one disgruntled audience member complaining to the poor ticket-taker that the theatre should not be spreading false information about UFOs. Blake Smith, however, reported that the screening he attended was packed with local church groups, who presumably enjoyed the film more.

Alien Intrusion is part of a North American milieu of what might be described as conservative evangelical ufology. Featured prominently in the documentary are Joe Jordan, a MUFON researcher, and Guy Malone, an abductee. Both are now evangelical Christians and run a ministry called “Alien Resistance” based out of Roswell, New Mexico, that teaches Christians to resist alien abductions using the techniques of spiritual warfare. (The group’s slogan is “resistance is fertile”—a reversal of the phrase “resistance is futile”—which was repeatedly uttered by the Borg, a race of invading aliens from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.) In a story that appeared on June 27, 2008, in *Florida Today*, Jordan stated, “I can honestly tell you I came to Christ through UFOs.” I would also locate within the milieu of conservative evangelical ufology such titles as Bob Larson’s *UFOs and the Alien Agenda: Uncovering the Mystery Behind UFOs and the Paranormal* (1997), *Lights in the Sky & Little Green Men: A Rational Christian Look at UFOs and Extraterrestrials* (2002) by Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples, and Mark Clark, and Timothy Dailey’s *The Paranormal Conspiracy: The Truth About Ghosts, Aliens, and Mysterious Beings* (2015). This chapter argues that, since the 1970s, conservative evangelical ufology has developed alongside and in dialogue with ufology, particularly those writers who advocate the IDH. While “mainstream religion” is sometimes imagined as something exclusive or even opposed to so-called “paranormal discourses” such as ufology (Bader, Baker, and Mencken 2017: 29–30), at least in this area there is a form of hybridity (Johnson 2016: 770–771) in which some evangelicals have advanced their own agenda by actively borrowing from ufology.

4.2 Characteristics of Conservative Evangelical Ufology

The claim that UFOs are demonic is hardly new. As recently as 1997, Pat Robertson stated that according to the Bible, abductees or anyone who believes UFOs are extraterrestrials should be stoned to death, because such individuals are actually trafficking with demons (Denzler 2006: 150–51). There are a variety of sociological as well as theological reasons why Christians might

wish to frame UFOs as demonic. Christopher Partridge (2004: 173) compares this move to the demonization of elves in late Saxon England, noting that, “extraterrestrials have been demonized in order to fit the good–evil dualism of the Christian world view.” Daved Anthony Schmidt (2016: 71) notes that conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals felt especially compelled to explain UFOs because their arrival seemed to confirm eschatological expectations.

There have also long been concerns about the theological implications of extraterrestrial life. Early modern astronomer Johannes Kepler wrote, “If there are globes in the heaven similar to our earth ... Then how can all things be for man’s sake? How can we be masters of God’s handiwork?” (Quoted in Davies 1996: 6). However, these concerns are far from universal. In 1952, one year after the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* portrayed an enlightened being emerging from a flying saucer, Catholic theologians were quoted in *Time* magazine explaining that extraterrestrial life would *not* challenge Catholic theology. Theologian and ufologist Ted Peters (2014: 262–267) builds on this argument, pointing out that extraterrestrial life is only a problem for a theology that holds humanity, rather than God, as the centre of the cosmos.

But for the conservative Christian ufologists, extraterrestrial visitors cannot be reconciled with a Christian worldview and those who think otherwise are not proper “Bible-believing” Christians. Evangelical exorcist Bob Larson muses:

If God did choose to create intelligent beings on other planets, they too would be tainted by Adam’s sin which affected the entire cosmos. They would be fallen creatures like mankind and thus have the same technological limitations that we do. If sin’s retrogressive impact on man’s advancement has prevented us from going to visit them, how could they possibly visit us? If for some reason sin has not invaded their race, would God permit such an unfallen civilization to contact us and thus be contaminated by our sin? The answer to both of these questions is decidedly negative.²

LARSON 1989: 433

² Christians interested in extraterrestrial life do not necessarily share Larson’s assumption that the Fall affected all life in the cosmos. In C. S. Lewis’s *Space Trilogy* (1938–1945), visitors to Venus and Mars discover that Earth is the only planet whose inhabitants have fallen to sin. Furthermore, beings in a state of grace have no desire to visit other planets because their own world was created as a paradise and they lack the sinful impulses toward greed and conquest.

Gary Bates is even blunter: “Of course, you can be a Christian and believe that aliens do exist on other planets, but it would imply that you have not taken the Bible’s history of origins seriously” (Bates 2011: 261).

While evangelicals have posited many interpretations of UFOs, claiming that they are actually demons is one of the most expedient ways of neutralizing these concerns. Indeed, this move can be done in a very lazy fashion. In his best-seller *Planet Earth 2000 AD: Will Mankind Survive?*, dispensationalist author Hal Lindsey concedes that he believes in UFOs, then adds, “To be blunt, I think they are demons” (1994: 68). However, I argue that what figures such as Bates and Larson are doing is distinct from this sort of lazy demonization for two reasons. First, rather than using demonology to make a facile dismissal of UFOs, they are, in a real way, ufologists. They are familiar with all of the sightings, abductions, and conspiracy theories of ufological lore. They are also invested in the work of secular ufologists associated with the IDH. Second, for most of these writers, UFOs are not perceived as a threat to their conservative Christian worldview but rather an *asset*: demonized ufology provides a framework from which other cultural opponents may be implicated in a demonic conspiracy. Furthermore, demonized ufology allows them to make such attacks in a dual-register of both scientific “research” and spiritual warfare—an evangelical concept that calls on Christians to engage in daily battles against demons.

There is, in fact, an affinity between paranormal research and spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is associated with so-called “Third Wave” neo-charismatic movement that formed in the 1980s. The term “Third Wave” was coined by C. Peter Wager, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a proponent of spiritual warfare (McCloud 2015: 6). The first two “waves” were the birth of Pentecostalism and the rise of the charismatic evangelical movement. David Frankfurter links the emergence of spiritual warfare in the 1980s to a preoccupation with “discernment” or the ability to detect the hidden presence of spiritual evil, especially among lay Christians (2006: 68). An important innovation of 1980s spiritual warfare was the idea that there are historical causes to demonic influence such as curses or sins committed by previous generations. These causes can either be spiritually “discerned” or, in theory, discovered through conventional research. Wagner introduced the concept of “strategic-level spiritual warfare” in which Christians are called on to discern and combat “territorial spirits” that hold dominion over cities, nations, and other geographical areas. Identifying territorial spirits often entails research into the history of the area. Anything that occurred in previous centuries from the massacre of slaves and Native Americans to the practice of indigenous religions could have

given power to a territorial spirit causing the area to become “defiled land” in need of spiritual warfare (McCloud 2015: 51–57).

Conservative evangelical ufology retains many of the assumptions of spiritual warfare, particularly that Christians are threatened by hidden demonic forces and that uncovering the nature of this threat requires both research and spiritual discernment. Sean McCloud has argued that the theology of spiritual warfare “both complements and contests discourses concerning agency, structure, history, and conceptions of the individual” (2015: 3). Much as Wagner’s strategic-level warfare simultaneously engages with and transforms conventional understandings of American history, conservative evangelical ufology complements and contests traditional ufology. In both cases, the function of the discourse is not to defeat the demons (the influence of the demons never seems to diminish) but rather using discernment and prayer to firmly establish certain ideas, practices, and institutions as demonic.

This is the case with Bates, who is not at all worried that Christians will become obsessed or distracted by UFOs. On the contrary, he writes, “Unfortunately, many Christians believe the whole ET scenario is nonsense” (Bates 2011: 268). For Bates, a creationist, the significance of UFOs is not that they are demonic, but rather that they prove the scientific paradigms of evolution and the Big Bang are demonic deceptions. Timothy Dailey makes a similar move to target a different cultural opponent. He uses the IDH as a stepping-stone to demonize all “paranormal” phenomena. For example, he cites crypto-zoologists who claim that a Bigfoot carcass has never been recovered because Bigfoot is an extra-dimensional being. Thus for Dailey, Bigfoot and the UFOs are two forms of the same demonic deception. For Dailey though, demons are masquerading as paranormal phenomena for the purpose of destroying “the divinely ordained family” (2015: 189). He argues that paranormal entities inspire obsessive behaviour in order to disrupt families. Once again, demonizing the paranormal is only a means to an end: Dailey’s real goal is to defend conservative notions of “family values” within the double framework of scientific research and spiritual warfare.

Another interesting characteristic of conservative evangelical ufology is that they insert their demonological argument into the UFO debate by “playing the ends against the middle.” On the one hand, they draw heavily on the work of sceptics such as Joe Nickell to debunk claims of UFO sightings. Several of these writers (Bates 2011: 79–81; Dailey 2015: 53–56) cast doubt on the ETH by explaining the Fermi paradox—named after physicist Enrico Fermi who noted that with the number of stars in the galaxy similar to our sun, a space-faring civilization *should* have visited Earth by now, if any such civilizations exist.

They also cite the findings of physicists to explain the problems inherent in faster-than-light-speed travel that could make extraterrestrial visitation possible. In fact, Bates' debunking is so thorough, it seems surprising he believes there is anything to the UFO phenomenon at all. But then, after demolishing the ETH, they will abandon this scepticism and argue that the evidence *does* show something extraordinary is happening. For example, Larson makes a strong case that crop circles are the product of human hoaxing and not evidence of alien visitation, but then he immediately points to evidence suggesting they are *not* a hoax in order to present a demonic explanation: "When the devil saw that the circles were a clever way to draw attention to the paranormal, he sent demons to help do what man had started. That's why the crystal spun, why radio waves were detected, and why some say they actually saw UFOs near the circle sites" (Larson 1997: 102).

The IDH is especially conducive to this dual project of refuting the idea of extraterrestrials while preserving the idea that UFOs are real and supernatural. And in some ways, the work of ufologists such as Vallée, Hynek, and Keel mirrors that of the conservative evangelical ufologists in that they too vacillate between being sceptical and open to extraordinary possibilities. By the end of the 1960s, these thinkers had concluded that the UFOs being sighted could not possibly be spaceships from another planet or even physical craft of any kind. But they were convinced that *something* was happening and began to speculate that UFOs might be the most recent manifestation of a much older phenomenon.

Significantly, the IDH approach to ufology gained popularity in the 1970s. This coincided with conservative Christians taking aim at UFO culture, in part as a reaction against the popularity of Erich von Däniken and similar authors who had reinterpreted the Bible as an account of ancient encounters with extraterrestrials. But the 1970s was also a decade in which creationists were responding to battles over science education in secondary schools by reframing creationism as a scientific theory rather than a religious belief. In other words, the luminaries of ufology became interested in demonology just as creationists were becoming increasingly interested in the authority of science. This situation created a strange alignment of interests that ultimately gave birth to the sort of conservative evangelical ufology on display in *Alien Intrusion*.

4.3 A Short History of Conservative Evangelical Ufology and the IDH

The IDH is nearly as old as ufology itself. Meade Layne was a mid-twentieth-century English professor who became interested in the UFO mystery and consulted mediums to communicate with the UFO occupants. He wrote a series of

pamphlets that were eventually compiled into a mimeograph entitled *Flying Discs—The Ether Ship Mystery and Its Solution* (1950). Here he explained that the UFOs are from another plane of existence he calls “Etheria.” He wrote, “Etheria is here—if we know what here means! Along-side, inside, outside of our world” (1950: 5). Layne went on to relate how the Etherians have always been with us and their visitations were the basis of ancient mythologies and religions. All the ingredients of the IDH are here, although it would be another twenty years before others popularized this idea.

The ETH was the dominant paradigm through which the public thought about UFOs throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This was partly due to the influence of Donald Edward Keyhoe, a marine corps major, whose book *Flying Saucers are Real* (1950) suggested that the air force knew flying saucers are extraterrestrial in origin but dismissed reports of sightings in order to avoid a panic. Hollywood films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) cemented the ETH in the public consciousness. Keyhoe was even credited as a consultant for *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers* (1956). The 1950s also saw the first claims that the Bible is a record of contact with “ancient aliens.” Morris K. Jessup’s *UFO and the Bible* (1956) preceded the theories of Erich von Däniken by over a decade.

The demonization of UFOs also began quite early. In 1954 a preacher from Dallas named Walter Vinson Grant published his booklet *Men in Flying Saucers Identified: Not a Mystery!* The pamphlet takes statements made by UFO contactees and debates them line by line to argue that the UFOs are actually a demonic deception being used to herald in the anti-Christ and a one-world government. Significantly, Grant uses this demonic conspiracy theory to take aim at a whole host of social and theological issues. In a classic Cold War jeremiad, he writes

RUSSIA IS NOT GOING TO INVADE AMERICA BECAUSE RUSSIA HAS ALREADY INVADED AMERICA. She has invaded America through the textbooks in our schools, which teach Evolution, dancing, sex-freedom, and free love.

Russia has invaded our nation by introducing dope and liquor, and by introducing a new bible and denying the Church of Jesus Christ.

GRANT 1954: 7

He then goes on to demonstrate how each of these ideas—from evolution to progressive Christianity—are promoted in messages received by contactees from the UFOs. Thus only seven years after the Kenneth Arnold sighting, evangelicals were deploying demonic interpretations of UFOs to critique such issues as teaching evolution in schools.

4.3.1 *The War of the Chariots*

A “flap” of UFO sightings in the mid-1960s helped create a larger market for UFO books and the 1970s saw increased interest in ufology. Ted Peters notes that this decade was also the peak of conservative Christian condemnation of UFOs (1994: 198). (In the 1980s, New Age spirituality and Satanic conspiracies usurped UFOs as targets of Christian jeremiads.) The opening salvo of this period was *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968), published by Swiss author Erich von Däniken, which theorized that extraterrestrials visited the Earth thousands of years ago, were worshipped as gods, and their technological displays became the basis for many world religions. It was an idea that had been around at least since Meade Layne, but von Däniken’s book took popular culture by storm. There was a film adaptation in 1970 and the documentary television series “Ancient Aliens” based on von Däniken’s ideas is currently in its thirteenth season. (For more on this, see the chapter in this book by Hammer and Swartz.)

Chariots of the Gods suggested that numerous miracles described in the Hebrew Bible, including the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Ark of the Covenant, and the visions of Ezekiel actually describe encounters with alien technology. A school teacher from Portland, Maine, named Robert Dione took this idea to its logical conclusion. His book *God Drives a Flying Saucer* (1969) stated that “God” is simply an extraterrestrial who has gained immortality through the use of advanced technology and who impregnated the Virgin Mary using artificial insemination. In 1976 Dione published a sequel entitled *Is God Supernatural?: The 4,000 Year-Old Misunderstanding*.

Unsurprisingly, many Christians found these theories offensive. Von Däniken’s ideas did not hold up well to scrutiny by trained historians, archaeologists, or Bible scholars, but this hardly mattered to his audience. Peters himself describes developing a “furious rage against the scholarship of Erich von Däniken” that ultimately led him to create a course on UFOs in the 1970s (2014: 122). For more conservative Christian apologists, combating von Däniken’s pseudo-scientific claims required a response that invoked scientific research. An Australian apologist named Clifford Wilson was one of the first to formally rebuke von Däniken’s scholarship with his book *Crash Go the Chariots* (1972). Wilson would go on to be one of the first Christian apologists to draw heavily on the IDH.³

3 Zecharia Sitchin is considered the other father of the ancient alien hypothesis. His book *The 12th Planet* (1976) claims that Sumerian mythology actually describes an ancient collision with an unknown planet named Nibiru. Nibiru was inhabited by a race of aliens called the Annunaki whom ancient Mesopotamians worshipped as gods. While Christian apologists have joined professional historians and archaeologists in rejecting Sitchin’s theories, Sitchin has not received the same ire as von Däniken. This may be because Sitchin draws only a

4.4 The Emergence of the IDH

Jacques Vallée's *Passport to Magonia* (1969) was one of first major works to promote the IDH. Vallée noted that sightings of UFOs and their inhabitants had much in common with fairy lore as well as biblical literature describing the *nephilim* (offspring of “the sons of god and the daughters of men” first mentioned in Genesis 6). The name “Magonia” references a French medieval legend about a realm in the clouds, from where strange people in magical airships come to steal crops. He also observed that many of the details of sightings were preceded by fictional accounts of UFOs, causing him to suspect some mysterious force was appearing to people and mimicking science fiction tropes. Vallée also holds graduate degrees in astrophysics and computer science and worked for NASA. These scientific credentials lent weight to the IDH.

Peters described Vallée's project as “incorporating religious testimony into a scientized metaphysics” (2014: 161). I find it significant that *Passport to Magonia* was published in the same year that Ronald Numbers cites as the approximate date when creationists began to reframe creationism as an alternative science, largely in response to debates about the California science curriculum that occurred that year (2006: 244). He quotes creationist Henry M. Morris, “Creationism is on the way back. This time not primarily as a religious belief, but as an alternative scientific explanation of the world in which we live.” The 1970s became a decade in which both ufologists and conservative Christians sought to creatively redefine the boundaries between religion and science.

Ufologist John Keel helped to popularize the IDH throughout the 1970s, emerging only slightly behind Vallée with his book *Operation Trojan Horse* (1970). Keel's rejection of the ETH was part of a larger contempt for “scientism” that in some ways mirrored creationist critiques of the scientific establishment. He wrote

Scientism dominates the UFO movement and the study of myths, religion and occult phenomena, being generally unacceptable to the scientific establishment, is even more unacceptable—even odious—to the aspiring pseudo-scientists of ufology. Their view is totally materialistic. Very few have the ability to deal with abstractions. Many laboriously study astronomy, but few are interested in—or can deal with—philosophy.

KEEL 1975: 874

little from the book of Genesis for his theories while von Däniken offers a more extensive re-interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.

Keel also wrote that he was better equipped to think of about UFO sightings than other ufologists because he had read the Bible several times (1970: 26). He used the term “demonology” frequently and stated that ufologists and medieval demonologists are both studying the same phenomenon. All of this made Keel quite popular with conservative Christians interested in ufology. In 1974, Clifford Wilson published *UFOs and Their Mission Impossible* in which he suggests that UFOs are actually demons who are preparing for a final apocalyptic battle by helping to popularize séances and other heretical doctrines and possibly by planting hypnotic suggestions in the public. In making this argument, Wilson cited Keel 69 times.

J. Allen Hynek completes the trinity of the IDH. Hynek had perhaps the best credentials of any ufologist. In addition to being a professor of physics and astronomy at Ohio State University, he was recruited by the air force as a science advisor on its investigations into UFOs: Project Sign (1947–1949), Project Grudge (1949–52), and Project Bluebook (1952–1969). Hynek began as a sceptic but by the late 1970s he had become more of an advocate for UFO belief due to the quality of some of the witnesses and his distaste for the overly dismissive attitude of the air force. He also became interested in reports of psychic experiences or poltergeist phenomena that were reported by many contactees. In 1977, Hynek spoke at the First International UFO conference in Chicago. There, he expressed that he believed in UFOs but was uncertain what caused the phenomenon or even if there is a single cause. He did however, put forth a hypothesis that splits the difference between the ETH and IDH:

I hold it entirely possible that a technology exists, which encompasses both the physical and the psychic, the material and the mental. There are stars that are millions of years older than the sun. There may be a civilization that is millions of years more advanced than man's. We have gone from Kitty Hawk to the moon in some seventy years, but it's possible that a million-year-old civilization may know something that we don't.... I hypothesize an 'M&M' technology encompassing the mental and material realms. The psychic realms, so mysterious to us today, may be an ordinary part of an advanced technology.

Quoted in FULLER 1980: 164–165

Hynek's speech at the First International UFO conference became more amenable to a demonological interpretation after the media boiled it down. Bates quotes an article that appeared in *Newsweek* later that year: “UFO's, he says, may be psychic phenomena, and the ‘aliens’ may not come from outer space but from a parallel reality” (2011: 153). Nearly all conservative evangelical

ufologists cite Hynek, not because they need Hynek to tell them that aliens are demons, but because his scientific credentials and history as a sceptic make him the ideal candidate to lend authority to their demonological discovery. Simply mentioning Hynek caused demonological explanations of UFOs to appear scientific and objective rather than merely theological and partisan.

For Bates, the Bible is the “missing piece” to the UFO puzzle that could otherwise have been solved through scientific research. He writes

They are from another dimension, just as Vallée, Keel, [John] Mack, and so many other UFO researchers, from differing sides of the fence, have concluded.... Unfortunately, most of these modern day researchers have embraced a human-based view of the world, with the theory of evolution serving as the creator of both them and the aliens.... I suggest the answers they have been looking for but do not want to hear may be—“God is real, and the Bible is true.”

BATES 2011: 264

Here the “double-register” is perfected: The demonic origin of UFOs is presented as simultaneously good science and good theology. Furthermore, the flawed ETH points to the “bad science” of evolution and the Big Bang.

4.5 Conclusions

While much of this could be read as merely a convoluted bit of theological rhetoric or perhaps a callous attempt to evangelize UFO-enthusiasts, I believe these evangelical writers and filmmakers have a sincere interest in ufology. It is not insignificant that some of the most outspoken advocates of spiritual warfare have described being interested in UFOs before their call to the ministry. Bob Larson describes being fascinated by UFOs as a child in the 1950s (1997: 24). William Schnoebelen, known for his elaborate conspiracy theories on such topics as Satanism, vampires, and *Dungeons and Dragons*, also describes searching for UFOs as a youth (1993: 15–16). (In 2016, Schnoebelen travelled to Roswell, New Mexico, to give a lecture for Alien Resistance on the connection between UFOs and the occult (Alien Resistance 2019). It could be argued that these individuals are as much ufologists as they are Christians.

Cultural hybridity need not occur on friendly or cooperative terms. Catherine Albanese frames American religious history as a “dance” in which different religious cultures exist side by side and exchange “gifts” of ideas, practices, and traditions. Sometimes, this exchange can get rough. She writes: “At

other times the dance has looked more like a martial arts ‘push hands’ demonstration between opposing but intimately connected actors: the harmony has arisen out of a balance of tensions” (1997: 225). This seems like an apt metaphor to think about this strange alignment of interests on display in films like *Alien Intrusion*.

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Aliens among Native Americans?

Paul O. Myhre

5.1 Introduction

The question of aliens among Native Americans is not new. Each generation of non-indigenous people have alleged that Native Americans could not have come up with their various forms of sophisticated cultures without help from an alien force. This force has been regarded as coming from pre-historic Europe, Christian claims of fallen angels or the Biblical Nephilim and their offspring called the Anakim, creatures that seem non-earthly as in the Thunderbirds, more recently Mothman, and Native American stories of people who came from the stars. There are no shortage of ideas circulating about alien forces shaping ancient and contemporary North America. Some aver that the religious motivation for the great earthworks of Ohio, effigy mounds of the upper Midwestern United States that can only really be seen in their entirety from the air, and petroglyph writings and images, along with pictoglyph images scattered across North America owe their inspiration and religious connotations to alien influences and contact rather than to the indigenous people of North America.

That said, the fields of archaeology, anthropology, and religious studies would offer alternative explanations for a range of ideas about Native Americans and their earthen constructions, pictoglyphs, petroglyphs, and artifacts associated with well over five hundred tribal groups in North America that span well over 10,000 years on the North American continent.

This chapter will explore the question of aliens and UFOs among Native Americans in primarily three ways. The first section, “Giants in the Earth: Adena Hopewell Giants,” will explore the phenomena of claiming that aliens from foreign lands or from space populated the Appalachian mountain regions of eastern North America, and that such beings were the Anakim or Nephilim of the Bible. This was a popular assertion within 19th and early 20th century North America. It was common for European American scientists and others to excavate native mounds, take photographs of what they discovered, and to make various claims about what they had found. Sometimes the excavations were regarded as curiosity sites for which the person who owned the land or who had undertaken the excavation might charge admission to

see Native American skeletons. The Smithsonian would also pay for artefacts from Native American digs. Hence, there was a profit motivation interlaced with curiosity, and a desire to explain how the indigenous people came to be located in North America. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century Christians were also interested in determining how to align the inhabitants of North America with what they read within the Bible. As there was no mention of the North American indigenous people in Christian scripture, they were hard put to come up with reasonable explanations for their existence. Hence, the rise of the giant origin theory as one way to begin to make sense of the gap in the word of God. Coupled with this there was also a desire for learning about who the past inhabitants were who built the millions of mounds and earthworks across the continent. Christian researchers were not alone in their inquiries into who these people were. They were joined by treasure hunters looking for precious objects within mounds and earthworks.

The second section, "Twentieth and Twenty-first Century assertions about Aliens in North American history and cultures," will explore the question of the Star People or Sky People. There are a number of stories among Native American groups that claim some type of connection with shapeshifting beings who brought to them an environmental and relational ethical system. The beings are also seen as those who brought to the people sacred rites and rituals. The Lakota, Oglala Sioux, Pawnee, Cree, and Cherokee tribes all had stories connected with sacred figures that either were associated with the sky or sacred animals. The stories of the star people, the givers of wisdom, are latticed through a range of stories. Perhaps one of the most common is that of the White Buffalo Calf Maiden or White Buffalo Cow Woman. Some also assert that the Mayans, Mississippians, Adena, and Hopewell were particularly interested in the movements of the stars, sun, and moon and as such developed elaborate rituals and funerary customs associated with the equinoxes, solstices, and eighteen-and-one-half year cycle of the moon's rising and setting. Many of their earthen works, pyramids, and sacred objects are directly associated with movements of the planets, sun, and moon. Some even assert that Mayan, Hopi, and Rocky Mountain tribes created pictoglyphs, petroglyphs, and low relief sculptures that depict spaceships and alien bodies.

The third section, "Pictoglyphs, Petroglyphs, and Earthworks," will consider the vast array of North American petroglyphs, pictographs, and earthworks. There are various forms of glyphs scattered across North America and some of the images are associated with Kachina figures of the Hopi. Other indigenous art looks like stylized insects that some ufologists want to claim are of alien beings instead. The question of effigy mounds continues to cause some to wonder about who was viewing them as they can only really be discerned



FIGURE 5.1 An alligator effigy mound, found in Newark, Ohio
 PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

from a sky vantage point. The alligator mound in Ohio (or perhaps underwater panther mound) is one such example. The shape of the low relief mound cannot be discerned by walking around it (See Figure 5.1).

The question of UFOs (unidentified flying objects) and aliens among Native Americans has gained higher visibility and interest over the past several decades. There are no shortage of ufologists, alien hunters, and curiosity seekers who travel to various locations around the North American continent in search of evidence and proof of contact with beings with non-planetary origins. Much of the twentieth and twenty first centuries have been mostly concerned with notions of aliens among Native Americans. Predecessors in the eighteen and nineteenth century were more intent on reconciling the presence of Native Americans with what they read within the pages of the Bible. Given that they are not mentioned in the Bible and neither is North America, the rise of theories about the origins of the indigenous people of North American emerged from those newly associated with the land. One of these theories was centred on the claim that the Anakim had made their way to the North American landscape after having been driven out by the ancient Israelites from the promised land.

5.2 Giants in the Earth: Adena Hopewell Giants

Prior to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (Public Law 101-601; 25 U.S.C. 3001-3013) passed on November 16, 1990, indigenous graves were subjected to curiosity seekers, grave robbers, scientific investigations, and those interested in proving theories about alien origins for Native Americans. One of the theories that was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries centred on the idea that the Adena mound culture was populated by giants. In this period, Christian scientists and others were interested in finding links between Native Americans and the Nephilim or Anakim (mentioned in Genesis 6 and 23). According to Genesis 6 in the pre-flood era of Biblical history:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

Genesis 6:1-4, KJV

This is not the only place in the Bible where a race of giants are mentioned, the book of Deuteronomy also refers on several occasions to giants (Deuteronomy 1:28; 2:10-11; 2:21; 9:2). The people were great and tall. According to Deuteronomy 1:28, "The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there" (KJV). The book of Joshua also mentions the Anakim and that Joshua with the forces of Israel destroyed them (see Joshua 11:21-22; 14:12, 15).

Since many European Christians in the United States of America after the Civil War were interested in determining the origins of various people groups, there was a heightened fascination with the people who populated the North American continent prior to the coming of the Europeans in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth centuries. Perhaps this rise of interest coincided with a sense of guilt and shame over the forced relocation of indigenous people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rise of boarding schools that sought to eradicate all vestiges of indigenous culture and languages, or perhaps it was the United States policies of systematic genocide of the original inhabitants of the land that had preceded their generation and

thereby given rise to effort for coming to terms with who these people were. In conjunction with the invention of race and efforts to explain who these people were, it was only a few steps further for them to claim that the immense mounds, earthwork complexes, and effigy mounds had to have been made by an advanced race that would have had to come from outside of North America since they often regarded the indigenous people as incapable of any type of creative genius or complex cultural systems that could build monuments of earth and stone. It seems colonized minds could not reconcile the creativity and genius of the people whom they abused and sought to destroy. Subsequent excavations of burial mounds, earthworks, and effigy mounds were undertaken in order to discover the origins of the people who created the earthen structures. Efforts to make sense of artifacts through religious lenses were also common.

The rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the early nineteenth century provided yet one more wrinkle in colonized reflections about who the indigenous people were and their origins. Joseph Smith, founder of this church movement, on the title page of the Book of Mormon claims that the indigenous people were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. He wrote on the title page that the book's purpose was "to [show] unto the remnant of the house of Israel what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; ... and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations" (Book of Mormon 1830). The Book of Mormon also references Giants walking the earth at the time of Enoch. This reference would find its way back into popular imagination in connection with the ancient structures and mounds of Native Americans.

The theological biases of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were not the sole domain of those associated with various religious moments and bodies. They were also worn by European American Christian scientists. Since the commonly held notion that all people groups are referenced in some way within the Bible, it was common to try to connect the people who made the mounds with some European or Middle Eastern antecedent that had been mentioned in the Bible.

One way by which to do this was to assert that the Anakim had been found on the continent. Newspapers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries across North America make reference to giant skeletons discovered in the mounds primarily associated with the Adena people. This woodland group of people thrived during the period of roughly 800 BCE to 300 CE. Photos from the nineteenth century purport to show scientists and investigators next to the skeletal remains of giant people who stood seven to nine foot in height. Some were said to even have had enormous skulls and others with

elongated heads. Giant weapons and tools are also part of the collection of artefacts that researchers have claimed provide support for their Nephilim and Anakim theories. These details are of particular interest to contemporary ufologists and those who still want to reconcile details in the Christian Bible with North American history and peoples.¹ Perhaps contemporary ufologists are influenced by the materials of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or perhaps their interest in the Anakim is linked with contemporary efforts trying to prove the existence of aliens in North America for millennia. Clearly the artefacts and imagery of Mayan culture, Mississippian culture, and Adena cultures provide a range of imagery and structures that are foreign to modern Western minds and interpretative frameworks.

Contemporary archaeologists are less inclined to claim an alien or Anakim origin theory for the rise of Native American peoples in North American and their advances in earthen mounds and earthwork complexes. According to Patrick D. Trader's article (2017) in the *West Virginia Encyclopaedia*, "archeologists divide prehistory in the eastern United States into several cultural periods. The majority of mounds identified in West Virginia were constructed during the Early Woodland Period (1000–200 BC), primarily in the period referred to as *Adena* (500 BC–AD 200). Because much archaeological data in Appalachia is still elusive, little is known of everyday Adena life." Archaeology is generally interested in piecing together the artefacts and physical remains of the past with the people who constructed them, who were buried in a place, and correlate that with what we might know of the history and pre-history of a given people.

What we know comes largely from the mounds and earthworks they left behind. The Adena were hunters and gatherers. They built mounds over the remains of chiefs, shamans, or other people of high social standing. The remains of the common folk were burned and buried in small log tombs. Skeletons of Adena people reveal that they were unusually tall and powerfully built. Women over six feet tall and men seven feet tall

1 See the following links for a sampling of the types of online articles available: "Giants on Record: America's Hidden History, Secrets in the Mounds and the Smithsonian Files," *Graham Hancock*, at <https://grahamhancock.com/vieiranewman/>, accessed 27/10/2015; L. C. Geerts, "Giants: Nephilim and Anakim," *Biblical Pleyades*, at https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vida_alien/alien_watchers10.htm, accessed 07/04/2019; Aaron Halim, "Weapons of the Biblical Nephilim Discovered in North America," at <https://aaronhalim.wordpress.com/2013/10/08/weapons-of-the-biblical-nephilim-discovered-in-north-america/>, accessed 08/10/2013.

have been discovered. The Adena lived in circular houses made of wickerwork and bark.

TRADER 2017

Skeletons of these proportions are not unknown elsewhere around the earth. Hence, archaeologists are just noting their size and seeking to discern something about their lifeways from what they left behind.

The Adena people at the height of their population had a vast trading network that stretched from Northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico and to the southeast as far as Florida. Trade goods were found in numerous mound excavations. None of the goods as of this date suggest any alien presence however. That said, those interested in asserting an alien connection will reaffirm the Nephilim as the progenitors of this group of people primarily because of their purported immense size and of some indigenous stories of giants with red hair and light skin who populated the eastern woodlands of the United States of America. Such stories themselves have been passed from one generation to another through oral tradition. At the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries some of these stories were written down. Archaeologists and anthropologists of the time were fearful that the stories, languages, and rituals of the people would disappear as the various indigenous groups either lost their languages or assimilated with European cultures in North America. Hence, some stories remain.

One such example can be found in Horatio Bardwell Cushman's book, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians* (1899). In this book he claims, "The tradition of the Choctaws ... told of a race of giants that once inhabited the now State of Tennessee, and with whom their ancestors fought when they arrived in Mississippi in their migration from the west ..." The web site "Ancient Origins: Reconstructing the Story of Humanity's Past" also provides a number of indigenous examples of stories recounting giants living in North America, showing the enduring interest of these stories (Ancient Origins 2016). There are well over twenty names for Giants among the indigenous people of North America. Not all were associated with the red-haired people of Appalachia. The non-profit Native Languages of the Americas (2015) provides a list of well over twenty names and stories associated with Native American Giants.

According to amateur researcher Graham Hancock's essay, "November 2015 AOM: Giants on Record: America's Hidden History, Secrets in the Mound and the Smithsonian Files,"

The historical record certainly seems to support this reality. Over a two hundred year period, more than 1000 accounts of seven-foot and taller

skeletons have been reported unearthed from ancient burial sites in North America. Newspaper accounts, town and county histories, letters, scientific journals, diaries, photos and Smithsonian ethnology reports have carefully documented this. These skeletons have been reported from coast to coast in burial chambers, stone crypts, caves, ancient battlefields and massive mounds. Strange anatomic anomalies such as double rows of teeth, jawbones so large as to be fit over the face of the finder, and elongated skulls, were documented in virtually every state. Smithsonian scientists identified at least 17 skeletons that stood at over seven feet in their annual reports, including one example that was 8 feet tall, and a skull with a 36-inch circumference (an average human skull has a circumference of about 20 inches). The Smithsonian Institution is mentioned dozens more times as the recipient of enormous skeletons from across the United States.

HANCOCK 2015

There are scores of nineteenth and twentieth century newspaper articles that assert the remains of giant skeletons having been sent to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C. However, as of this date, no giant skeletal remains have been acknowledged to have been received by the Smithsonian, nor have they been repatriated to any Native American group. So what might we say about the disparity between the early photographic images that claim a giant origin to the mound builders and the lack of contemporary evidence to support such claims? Perhaps those who were finding the skeletons in mounds were more intent on proving their hypothesis of the existence of Anakim in North America than they were in the truth. There is some evidence that they also engaged in photographic tricks to enlarge the skeletons to support such claims. Or one may choose to accept that perhaps the skeletons of giants were really sent to the Smithsonian and that they have been subsequently misplaced or purposely hidden. Or perhaps the Skeletal remains were just one more piece of a giant elaborate scheme to gain funds from the Smithsonian for indigenous artefacts. One such artefact that received some attention was the San Diego giant "... purchased by the Smithsonian for \$500 (\$14,000 in today's money) in 1895, although they later claimed it was a hoax" (Hancock 2015).

This interest of finding giants in North America has not subsided. As recently as 2016 a team of researchers sought to use magnetic imaging technology to peer into the contents of an unexcavated Adena mound in West Virginia.

Kaylin Searles and Fallon Pierson assert in a 29 January 2016 WCHS: ABC 8 tv online article, "The History Channel's 'Ancient Aliens' to explore 'Shawnee Mound' in Dunbar, WV," that "The mound at Shawnee Park is a Native American



FIGURE 5.2 A Native American mound in West Virginia
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

burial ground. The show, *Ancient Aliens* focuses on the idea that extraterrestrials came to earth and helped advance early civilizations.... crews will be exploring it with a ground penetrating radar camera.”² As of this writing I have been unable to locate the History Channel’s video of this event or to see what their findings may have entailed.

5.3 Mounds

The mounds scattered across North America and the people who built them will continue to be sources for continual research, writing, claims, and imagination about who it was that build them, why they built them, what religious purposes did they serve, and do they contain the remains of giants who once walked the earth. In Trader’s above-mentioned article (2017), the author claimed,

² Internet site, <https://wchstv.com/news/local/the-history-channels-ancient-aliens-to-explore-shawnee-mound-in-dunbar>, accessed 14/05/2019.

There are 424 recorded prehistoric mounds in West Virginia, left by ancient people who once occupied the region. Most are constructed of earth or stone or a combination of both. The majority of mounds in the state are concentrated along the major river valleys, including the Kanawha, Ohio, and Potomac. Major mound groups cluster near South Charleston, Moundsville, and Moorefield. A significant number of rock mounds are found along ridgetops in Nicholas County. The largest earthen, conical mound in North America is the *Grave Creek Mound*, located in Moundsville.

There are literally millions of indigenous mounds scattered across North America. Most of the mounds are found in regions east of the Mississippi river and correspond to particular indigenous groups. The woodlands tribes, along with subsequent cultures along the major eastern United States river systems along with the Mississippi river system are responsible for creating the majority of the mounds. Appalachia has a large number of mounds as does the upper mid-western region of the United States. They were created at various times over the past ten thousand years. The Adena were some of the most prolific mound builders of the early period.

Archaeologists divide prehistory in the eastern United States into several cultural periods. The majority of mounds identified in West Virginia were constructed during the Early Woodland Period (1000–200 BC), primarily in the period referred to as *Adena* (500 BC–AD 200). Because much archaeological data in Appalachia is still elusive, little is known of everyday Adena life. What we know comes largely from the mounds and earthworks they left behind. The Adena were hunters and gatherers. They built mounds over the remains of chiefs, shamans, or other people of high social standing. The remains of the common folk were burned and buried in small log tombs. Skeletons of Adena people reveal that they were unusually tall and powerfully built. Women over six feet tall and men seven feet tall have been discovered. The Adena lived in circular houses made of wickerwork and bark.

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Fascination with the people who created the mounds gained momentum in the nineteen and twentieth centuries. The European immigrants to North America were keen on determining who they were and what their lives may have been like in the period prior to the settling of Europeans on the North American continent.

During the 19th century, the Myth of the Moundbuilders was a popular notion. It was thought that a lost race or civilization, such as the Lost Tribes of Israel, had built mounds in North America. Many people believed that American Indians were savage and primitive, and would have been incapable of constructing large earthworks.

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What were the religious reasons for creating mounds? The alignment of mounds and the direction in which various earthworks were created indicate that clearly there was a connection with the movement of the sun, moon, planets, and stars. The Serpent Mound in Ohio has coils that align with the eighteen and one-half year movements of the moon's rising and setting. At the very least, the indigenous people of North America were well acquainted with astral events and movements of the moon, planets, and sun. Many mounds are aligned with the Winter Solstice.³

With the advent of the Internet and self-publication, there also has been no shortage of websites and social media sites dedicated to asserting that giants roamed the earth and that they were the offspring of humans and angels or aliens. A few of these webpages are provided in the references section at the conclusion of this article. According to the webpage, "Giants of North and South America—Nephilim Hunters," the author claims, "We also know that the time line of the 'Hopewell Indians' was about 2,500 to 3,000 years ago. This is the same time period that the Hebrews were chasing down the Nephilim in the Promised Land. We know they did not destroy them all. So it makes perfect sense that these giants of North and South America were Nephilim tribes that fled the Middle East (as well as Europe where giant remains have been found as well)" (Nephilim Hunters 2014).

Unfortunately, the author has misplaced the Hopewell in his timeline however, as they were inhabitants of North America around 2,200 to 1,600 years ago. They inhabited the Midwest through the Eastern Woodlands regions of North America. They were preceded by the Adena people in the same regions of North America. This is the people group with whom greater fascination with giants has been associated. Their culture thrived roughly from 2,800 to 2,000 years ago in the Eastern Woodlands of North America.

3 A number of recent texts and websites provide helpful background reading and imagery for the correlation of mounds and earthworks with movements of the sun and moon. See Ohio History Connection (2013) and Ancient Ohio Trail (2019). Additional webpages include Heartland Earthwork Conservancy (2019) and World Heritage Ohio (2014a; 2014b). A particularly good electronic resource that shows various alignments with earthworks of Ohio is Hancock (2005).

The Anakim or Nephilim comprise one area of research for those interested in linking indigenous peoples with an alien or non-North American heritage. There are other efforts also to provide tangible links between extraterrestrial beings with Native American people and their histories. One set of these claims is associated with the twentieth and twenty-first century assertions that indigenous stories of the star people provide proof of alien connections. There are no shortage of such stories to consider. These stories are part of the cultural histories and ritual practices of Native American people who lived in the Great Plains and eastern Rocky Mountain regions of North America.

5.4 Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Assertions about Aliens in North American History and Cultures

Indigenous North American epistemologies are markedly different from those of Western Europeans. As such, to a non-indigenous person the stories can be difficult to understand. In part, this is due to different conceptions of time, persons, animals, beings, the environment, the sun, the moon, and anything and everything observable and non-observable to the human eye. For much of indigenous North America, Western European categories and labels are not integrative, and as such, are insufficient to grasp the complexity of their thought systems. This section is an effort to weave both in and out of indigenous stories as a way to try to glimpse something of what they would assert is true about their histories and stories in relation to the topic under consideration. It is also an effort to contend with the power of story itself to carry the weight of a truth that for outsiders may not be readily apparent, but for insiders would be relatively clear. Hence, there is a need to tread lightly and carefully among the sacred stories and rituals of the indigenous people who have and continue to inhabit North America. Some of the stories told in the following section are from contemporary Native Americans, others from historic figures, and others recount parts of the stories themselves. They weave back and forth like strands on a basket. Hence, I have sought to honour the stories, the story tellers, and the ways by which different indigenous people have made sense of their sacred stories. In addition, as a non-indigenous person I am cautious about making any claims concerning their stories and rituals. Hence, I endeavour to tread lightly in this section.

With the advent of the space age also came the concomitant rise of books and articles that suggested aliens were and are among us. Hence, it isn't any surprise that researchers and others would seek to find connections between Native American artefacts, earthworks, petroglyphs, rituals, and sacred

stories with what they thought might be alien representations or connections. Timothy Green Beckley's edited and annotated book, *The American Indian Starseed Connection* (1982) is one such book that supports an alien connection. (For more on the "starseed" concept, see the chapter by Crockford in this volume.) Beckley combined the research of a number of UFO researcher/writers into one volume to make a variety of claims about alien people referenced in Native American stories. One of the authors in this book, Diane Tessman, opens her chapter "American Indians: How Do they Fit into the UFO Puzzle?", with a poem by C. Hart Merriman called Annikadel that states,

I am in this world, I travel in the air, I was not born in the earth, I was born
in the sky, My father is the North Cloud, My mother, the South Cloud.
I will come to call you from the ocean. You will be needed in this world.
When the trees come, you will quicken them. When people come, you
will comfort them. You will make the life of the people. Do not refuse me,
I am not deceiving you.

BECKLEY 1982: 5

She then asserts that the poem "... reflects the mystical quality which has always existed in the American Indians' way of living. And beyond that, it strongly suggests that American Indians have had on-going contact with Space Intelligences. In fact, one might read this poem as a message from a space brother or sister, being given to an enlightened human down on Earth." (Beckley 1982: 5). The author also claims that Native Americans have an advanced form of mysticism that links them to what she asserts is an alien capacity for mystical encounters involving telepathy, healing, prophesy, and other paranormal abilities" (Beckley 1982: 6). She and others who claim an alien connection and possible antecedent indigenous mystical practices and capacities tend to align with earlier nineteenth century writers who claimed that the indigenous people could not have developed these capacities on their own without some outside intervention. The highly attuned nature connection and mystical relationship with the natural environment shared among many Native American cultures is alleged to have been received rather than conceived or emerging from within the cultures themselves.

There are Native Americans who would also assert an alien or other worldly connection with the original inhabitants of North America. In the book, *Black Elk, The Sacred Ways of a Lakota* (1990), Wallace Black Elk and William Lyon, claims that "... the shaman does not mince words, having said, 'So when I went to vision quest, that disk came from above. The scientists call that a ... Unidentified Flying Object, but that's a joke, see? Because they are not trained,

they lost contact with the wisdom, power, and gift ... So that disk landed on top of me. It was concave, and there was another one on top of that. It was silent, but it lit and luminesced like neon lights. Even the sacred robes there were luminesced, and there was tobacco ties lying there lit up like little light bulbs. Then these little people came, but each little group spoke a different language. They could read minds, and I could read their minds. I could read them. So there was silent communication. You could read it, like when you read silent symbols in a book. So we were able to communicate ... They are human, so I welcomed them. I said, "Welcome, Welcome ..." (Black Elk 1991:91).

A recent popular media article also asserts that Standing Elk (also known as Chief Golden Light Eagle) is someone who offers "wisdom teachings purportedly emanating from 'Star People,' of the 'Star Nations,' who include everyone from White Buffalo Calf Woman to other religious figures like Buddha, the Egyptian God Thoth, and Krishna. The writers of this article also offer a degree of scepticism about his claims in asserting "... the 'Chief' seems to have take up [*sic*] with Star People owing to their popular cachet, as a means through which to create an eclectic new age religion suitable to the Sedona set" (Lewis 2015). Whatever, the origin of the stories the Native American referenced in the article affirms a particular connection with other beings known as Star People. Wallace Black Elk and William Lyon represent one of many perspectives within Sioux culture for the identity of White Buffalo Calf Woman. There are no shortage of ideas about who she was and where she came from among the indigenous people.

The stories of the Star People or Sky People are common among tribes of the Western United States and Canada. In the book, *Encounters with Star People: Untold Stories of American Indians*, Ardy Sixkiller Clarke stated in the preface, "I first learned about 'Star People' when my grandmother told me the ancient legends of the indigenous people of the Americas to the Pleiades, stories of little people who intervened in people's lives, and legends about the magical gift of Dan of the 'Star People' that flowed in the veins of the indigenous tribes of the Earth" (Clarke 2012: ix). He goes on to say that later after becoming an Assistant Professor at Montana State University in 1980 he began to do research on the stories associated with the Star People. This led him to student stories from not only North American indigenous people, but also Central and South American, as well as Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific. The author provides a helpful distinction when thinking about indigenous people's stories and how to engage them. Using the work of anthropologists who use terms of "etic" and "emic," the author suggests that both are valuable for research as the "etic" refers to what can be know from outside of a cultural group. And "emic" being that which can be known within a particular cultural group

(Clarke 2012: x). This is often the dilemma for non-indigenous researchers in that the “emic” is often illusive for the researcher and often hidden from view to those not within the cultural group. With regard to identification of entities within stories it becomes quite complicated for those outside of the cultural system to understand what indigenous thought would make of them. There is often more of a fluidity of definition rather than a reduction as is common among contemporary non-indigenous researchers.

How do stories of Star People correspond to indigenous religious imagination and practice? Among the Sioux and Lakota, there are stories of shape shifting people who are the givers of sacred rites and rituals. The stories of Native Americans are replete with examples of sky beings or sacred figures who can shape shift or appear out of thin air. For example, the story of White Buffalo Calf Woman, common among the Lakota people, is one such story.

According to Joseph Epes Brown's *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Sacred Rites of the Oglala Sioux*, Black Elk, the Oglala Sioux holy man, recounted a story that had been passed on to him about the seven sacred rites of the Oglala Sioux that were passed on to them by White Buffalo Maiden within narrative and song. Other Sioux people would offer additional information about White Buffalo Woman and claim that her sisters that were Star People.⁴ According to the additional Sioux stories as recounted by Chief Golden Light Eagle she came from the stars of the Pleiades and originally came from the region of the Big Dipper. According to one, she came in order to help the people flourish by giving them the seven sacred rites. These rites are considered to be the pathways by which one might have a good life and by which the Oglala Sioux might corporately have a good life together.

Kevin Locke recounts a song received from White Buffalo Calf Maiden, which he credits as deriving from Joseph Flying Bye, who, as a youth, had attended sun dances conducted by One Bull (nephew of Sitting Bull), the “Song of the White Buffalo Maiden”

Niyáŋ thaŋíŋyaŋ **with visible breath**
 mawáni ye **I am walking**
 oyáte waŋ **this nation (this Buffalo Nation)**
 imáwani **I walk toward**
 na **and**
 ho'thaŋíŋyaŋ **my voice is heard**

4 This is not a claim made by Black Elk himself. See internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq8AGMgZqmo>, accessed 04/15/2019.

mawáni ye I am walking
 niyáŋ ǰaŋǰyaŋ with visible breath
 mawáni ye I am walking
 walúta waŋ this scarlet relic
 imáwani ye (for it) I am walking

BUCK 2015

The book, *The Sacred Pipe*, also provides additional stories that Black Elk related to Brown about White Buffalo Calf Maiden or Cow Woman. According to the story Black Elk claimed that, “a Lakota by the name of Slow Buffalo (*Tantanka Hunkeshne*) once had a vision of a buffalo calf who was being cleansed by her mother, and through the power of this vision Slow Buffalo became a holy man (wichasha wakan) and understood that he had been given rites which should be used for the benefit of the young women of his nation.” And later in the same story Slow Buffalo sang another of the holy songs which he had received that name the sacred person of White Buffalo Calf Woman and how she figures as a central person in the Lakota’s rites and stories. In the song he states, “These peoples are sacred; From all over the universe they are coming to see it. White Buffalo Cow Woman Appears is sitting here in a sacred manner; They are all coming to see her” (Brown 1953: 117, 125).

At a foundational level the person of White Buffalo Calf Maiden or White Buffalo Cow Woman is a figure that is central to Lakota and Sioux traditional cultures. She is a sacred and holy figure. She is of the earth and also of the sky. She straddles both worlds and appears in places and in ways that may seem odd to Western European ears and imaginations. Yet, she is the giver of rites and rituals by which the people might find harmony with the environment and one another. Outsiders are sometimes prone to make associations between her and their own sacred figures or to want to quickly dismiss the indigenous narrative as fanciful, false, or other worldly. This tendency may be related to an “etic” perspective that seeks to know about something from outside of a cultural context. The “etic” viewpoint requires careful self-editing as what is perceived may be entirely incorrect. Perhaps a high degree of humility is warranted. There is a constant risk of reading a cultural figure or story through a non-indigenous lens and thereby potentially misunderstand or distort the figure or story in some way.

The Bahai provide one such example where the story has been appropriated and aligned with Bahai worldviews. As far as I know they make no assertion that she was alien, but they do claim that she is a holy figure who is different from ordinary human beings and that she may be connected to religious stories around the earth among diverse cultures and peoples. A Bahai

webpage relates a conversation with Kevin Locke, Lakota hoop dancer, where he is quoted as saying,

To anthropologists, White Buffalo Maiden was a Lakota 'culture hero.' For the indigenous people here in South Dakota, White Buffalo Maiden is the one who, long ago, delivered my people, the Lakota, from their wretched condition of darkness, despair, poverty and remoteness—and summoned them to arise to become noble grandchildren of the 'Heavenly Grandfather' above." There is clearly a spiritual association for the Lakota and Locke, but to assert any alien connections isn't considered. He asserts, "Speaking personally as a Native American Baha'i, White Buffalo Maiden could be thought of as a holy soul, a divine being, an emissary from God, perhaps even a Prophet or Manifestation of God."

BUCK 2015

Other religious groups have also appropriated the song or have interpreted it through their own religious perspectives and ideologies. The Bahai website called "Bahai Teachings" contains a narrative about the place of White Buffalo Woman within their religious imagination.⁵ Another group has appropriated her stories as indications of a goddess like figure who has been involved with various people around the planet and shows up across religions as something of a protector or saviour figure.⁶

The desire to associate this figure with alien hunting enthusiasts is widely shared among them as evidence in support of their claims for alien encounters. Some tie her to apocalyptic visions in which alien figures settle earth's problems and set all things right in the future. According to ufologist Robert Sickler's book *Ancient Alien: Theory Decoded*, "In Native American Sioux eschatology, this age will end with tribulation, and then a White Buffalo Calf Woman will purify the world and bring back harmony and spiritual balance." The author states, "We must ask ourselves, 'How is it possible that cultures divided by space and time could have come up with this one common eschatology theme?'" (Sickler 2015: n.p.). Scholars of religion might answer that the intersection of religious ideas has been going on for some time and it wouldn't be surprising to be able to trace a Christian or non-Christian origin to the stories that seem to have some resonance around the world. However, to assert a non-indigenous origin to the story would be one more example of seeking

5 Internet site <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq8AGMgZqmo>, accessed 03/07/2019.

6 Internet site <https://journeyingtothegoddess.wordpress.com/tag/turquoise/>, accessed 03/07/2019.

to realign Native American cultures, histories, and religious imagination with that of Europeans or non-indigenous people. It could also represent one more way by which non-indigenous people appropriate and use Native American stories and rituals for their own purposes.

That said, there are Native American people who would also want to claim an alien origin for White Buffalo Calf Maiden and perhaps other figures within Native American stories and rituals. For example, "In June 1996 at the Yankton Sioux Reservation, South Dakota, a landmark conference called the 'Star Knowledge Conference' was convened by Lakota medicine man Standing Elk to share secret tribal traditions about the 'Star People' (Extraterrestrials) with a prestigious group of prominent UFO researchers" (Missler and Eastman 1997: 29).

Some may contend that if the Oglala Sioux and Lakota versions of the stories associated with White Buffalo Calf Woman are thought of as stories about an alien encounter, then one might also aver that the stories not only provide a glimpse into alien values, but perhaps they may also contain specific religious implications for the practices of the people themselves.

The Dakota people (along with the Oglala, who make up two of the seven Sioux tribes) have a story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman as a shape shifter who came to give the people the sacred pipe and the ceremonies associated with it in order for them to live in harmony with the four sacred directions and to the sky and earth. According to an account by H. B. Alexander,

Now we shall smoke the pipe. Then she took the buffalo chip which lay on the ground, lighted the pipe, and pointing to the sky with the stem of the pipe, she said, 'I offer this to Wakantanka for all the good that comes from above.' (Pointing to the earth:) 'I offer this to the earth, whence come all good gifts.' (Pointing to the cardinal points:) 'I offer this to the four winds, whence come all good things.' Then she took a puff of the pipe, passed it to the chief, and said, 'Now my dear brothers and sisters, I have done the work for which I was sent here and now I will go, but I do not wish any escort. I only ask that the way be cleared before me.' Then, rising, she started, leaving the pipe with the chief, who ordered that the people be quiet until their sister was out of sight. She came out of the tent on the left side, walking very slowly; as soon as she was outside the entrance she turned into a white buffalo calf.

ALEXANDER in ELIADE 1967, 231-234

How to interpret Native American stories about Star People and how to understand the rites, rituals, and stories associated with White Buffalo Calf Woman vary with the aims and purposes of those who write about them. Perhaps one

might leave these interpretations to the indigenous people themselves who regard the stories as sacred and central to their own life histories and religious worlds. They are the ones who have received and retained the stories and they are the ones who can find meaning through them. Indigenous interpretations will be more fluid than Western European perspectives and as such could accommodate multiple interpretations of an event or a sacred person at the same time. Hence, a variety of stories with multiple layers may not be seen as competitors or as providing conflicting interpretations. Instead, they could be seen as entirely both correct and multiply correct on a range of levels. Whereas, a non-Indigenous North American may want to assert that there were aliens present where none existed and perhaps miss the places where aliens may reside within stories and rituals. As an outsider I walk lightly here.

5.5 Pictoglyphs, Petroglyphs, and Earthworks

There are literally millions of Native American mounds, remnants of mounds and earthworks, and thousands of pictoglyphs and petroglyphs scattered across the North American continent. They range in size, style, and iconographic themes. Pictoglyphs are created with some type of paint or dye on the surface of a rock while petroglyphs are carved into the stone itself. Petroglyph images of thunderbirds, birds, and sky creatures are often located on the top of hills or mountains and images of water related figures near water sources. Earthworks are constructions of earth and rock that are shaped into mounds, animal figures, geometrical shapes, and mound complexes, usually quite large. What they meant for the people who created them we can only guess. Some will read into them meanings that may either align with the indigenous perceptions while others are clearly efforts to support an exterior argument, like that of seeing aliens or ancient travellers to the North American continent in the images themselves.

Pictoglyphs, petroglyphs, and earthworks throughout North America are alleged by those who see an alien or other worldly connection with the indigenous inhabitants as proof of this connection. At the beginning of the sixteenth century CE there may have been well over one million earthworks and mounds in North America. Many of which have been destroyed to make way for farming and buildings.

There is a particularly good set of petroglyphs in Wyoming at an undisclosed location that could be interpreted in a range of ways (See Figure 5.3). According to confidential sources there have been visitors to this site, who like those who've visited similar pictoglyph and petroglyph locations in Utah



FIGURE 5.3 A petroglyph panel in Wyoming, location undisclosed
PHOTOGRAPH BY WENDY BELKIN, USED WITH PERMISSION

(particularly Utah's Nine Mile Canyon), assert that these images document an alien presence in ancient North America. Like the pictographs of Utah, the curious correlation that is drawn between the images and possible aliens is largely conceived without Native American input, support, or affirmation. The association between Native American art and earthworks, pictographs, and petroglyphs is often made by those who see the images from a twentieth or twenty-first century perspectives. Part of the dilemma stems from the fact that contemporary imagination has been formed in part by television, the Internet, and other media that claims aliens are among us and have visited the planet frequently over time. Ideas about alien beings, their physical form, and so on have followed common iconic themes that include little green or grey people, reptilian formed individuals who hide beneath human forms, shape shifters, or beings of light. It is also curious that the Native American images and earthen constructions are interpreted through twentieth and twenty-first century perceptions of what types of technology would be required in order for alien beings to exist or move about on earth—space suits, rocket ships, and so on. There is no physical evidence to support the claim that they did travel in space ships, wear space suits, or brought alien technology to the planet. We have no evidence that alien beings left a space suit, space ship, or any other items that could be considered as other worldly. What we have are images on stone and earthen ware that are enigmatic to outsiders and for those not connected to the people who created them in the first place.

Perhaps seeing images of aliens within petroglyph and pictograph images is a form of pareidolia, like seeing the image of the Virgin Mary in a cheese sandwich or remnants of a former Martian civilization in Mars Rover images of broken rocks on the planet Mars. Other claim to understand and interpret

the Native American images in particular ways so as to suggest they could represent images of specific beings or entities that were part of indigenous religious understanding. Additional claims argue that they represent beings on the earth like butterflies, moths, and other insects and animals in a stylized and often geometric format. The images in and on limestone are also regarded as people and entities with which one might have conversations, provide gifts, and so on who are sacred figures. Any assertions about the images, their meaning, possible religious connections, and so on may better fit within the realm of the unknown or unknowable. Contemporary indigenous explanations may or may not align with the ideas of those who made them. Outsider interpretations may be even more problematic as they don't share the indigenous perspectives, cultural knowledge, or story narratives that insiders could potentially possess. At the end of the day, we really don't know exactly how to interpret the images. We can only make guesses based on what we do know of Native American stories or rituals. And then educated guesses would need to remain tentative.

The encouragement toward cautious interpretative approaches is not shared by everyone studying the images and earthen structures, however. There are no shortage of people claiming to know how to interpret the images and declare what they mean. This is often found among non-indigenous people who are intent on proving their specific claims for alien origins. For example, according to an article on the *Futurism* webpage,

There has always been a connection between Native Americans and beings from other parts of the universe, referred to as Star People or visitors from space. In Utah's Nine Mile Canyon lies the heaviest concentration of rock art in the world. These depict beings that appear to be not quite completely human. They can be seen next to a disc-shaped object. Other beings of a more human form are raising their hands to these beings near the object. Near Christina Lake, British Columbia, Canada, there is a picture of a white disc with black wings hovering over four human figures on their knees. There are lines coming from the top of the disc which could be rays of light. Longer, more irregular lines come down from the bottom of the object. A rock painting at Cayuse Creek, Idaho, depicts what appears to be a cone shaped rocket with smoke or flames trailing behind it. In the cone is a humanoid figure apparently holding on to the inner walls.

LEE 2017⁷

7 Images associated with these locations can be found on various internet sites: "Nine Mile Canyon: Guide and Information," at <http://climb-utah.com/Misc/ninemile.htm>, accessed

The undisclosed location for the Wyoming pictoglyph referenced above is one such example that bears a close affinity with Utah's Nine Mile Canyon iconography.

The hope of finding evidence of aliens, writings of non-indigenous people like the Anakim or Nephilim, and associations with specific star constellations and planets or even the moon has been part of the North American story over the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The rise of the space age and advances in technology have given rise to an abundance of theories about alien connections with the people who have inhabited the North American continent for well over ten thousand years.

It is easy to ascribe to Native American images meanings that may or may not cohere with the meanings with which the people had imbued them. Take for example the Leo petroglyphs of southeastern Ohio. Some might assert that the face is that of a shaman or medicine person wearing deer antlers to assure a good hunting outcome. Yet others may contend it is the image of Mothman who was allegedly sighted in the same region in the 1960s prior to a bridge collapse over the Ohio river.

Mothman is the name given to a figure that appeared to a number of people from Point Pleasant, Ohio during the 1960s. According to eye-witness accounts, Mothman was a creature who was a human sized birdlike creature with large red eyes. The story of the sightings and bridge collapse were the subject of a 2002 film entitled, *The Mothman Prophecies*. I have not uncovered any Native American stories about Mothman, but one might suggest there could be some correlation to the Thunderbird or other large flying creatures within indigenous stories. Still others might assert that it is a contemporary emoji that found its way into the imagination of ancient peoples in the region via alien transportation. Whatever the original association was it cannot be discerned today since the people who made it are no longer living within the region and the stories associated with it were not written down and have not be shared with non-indigenous people.

Looking for signs of aliens in rocks and petroglyphs is one example of a common contemporary phenomena. The practice shares some affinity with those who were looking for evidence of giants and proof of a Biblical connection to the original inhabitants of North America. For example, there is a large

14/05/2019; "Pictoglyphs and Petroglyphs," at <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/pictographs-and-petroglyphs>, accessed 14/05/2019; n.a., at <https://www.pinterest.com/jamikasutton/petroglyphs/>, accessed 14/05/19. These images are reflective of an iconographic set of images that are found in various locations across North America.



FIGURE 5.4 A petroglyph in Ohio

PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

rock with writing on it in Kentucky that some claim contains ancient Hebrew, Greek, Iberian-Punic, and other languages. It fell from a rock shelter onto a highway and was later moved to Manchester, Kentucky. It is currently located within a public park underneath a covered shelter. Some claim the writing on it is Cherokee and numerous attempts have been made to decipher it. Others claim it is evidence of Irish Monks among the indigenous people because of an association with particular symbols and those that are associated with Christ.

A sign at the site reads:

This is the famous Red Bird Petroglyph known since pioneer days and enrolled on the National Register of Historic Sites. On December 7, 1994, this historic stone fell from a sandstone cliff and rolled onto Highway 66 on Lower Red Bird. On December 9, 1994, it was transported here and set up in its home. At least 8 Old World alphabets are engraved on it. These alphabets were extinct when Columbus arrived in the New World in 1492. The alphabets are first century Greek and Hebrew, Old Libyan, Old Arabic and Iberian-Punic which probably dates from the 9th century BC. Ogam, Germanic Runes, and Tifinag-Numidian are also on this stone. Of all the hundreds of important, translatable, and published inscriptions in the U.S.A., this is the first one to have been given official protection. Clay County and the City of Manchester have granted protection to this Stone. In doing so, they have obtained a good name and public esteem worldwide.

My Old Kentucky 2017

An exact translation has not been accomplished. Neither has the origin of the language or marks on the stone been determined despite what the sign claims.

Along with petroglyphs a large amount of earthen effigy figures can be found in Mississippi and Ohio river watersheds. Images of bear, eagles, and snakes abound. They are often constructed on top of mountains and may or may not be burial mounds. For example, the great serpent mound in Ohio that is one fourth of a mile long and whose coils correspond to the eighteen and one-half year cycle of the moon's rising and setting has no burial associated with it. What its religious meaning was we can only guess. In 2014 it was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Who built it has been the subject of some speculation. Recent radiocarbon dating suggests a date within the third or fourth century BCE (Sea 2017). A great introduction to the Native American mounds and the building of them is George R. Milner's *The Moundbuilders: Ancient Peoples of Eastern North America*. This book traces some of the historical evidence



FIGURE 5.5 The rock containing the Red Bird River shelter petroglyphs
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR



FIGURE 5.6 Red Bird River shelter petroglyphs
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR



FIGURE 5.7 An informational sign at the Red Bird River shelter petroglyphs
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR

linked with the indigenous people who built mounds at different times within North American history. Another good book about mounds is *Indiana Mounds of the Middle Ohio Valley* by Susan L. Woodward and Jerry N. McDonald.

Tying the serpent mound to some alien inspiration has also been the subject of some speculation. In a conversation with an individual at the cultural centre associated with the site I was told that there are mystical properties associated with the location. I have also been told the same thing by someone working at a different earthworks location in Indiana. The notion of some spiritual or other worldly connect with the various earthworks is shared by tourists and workers associated with various Native American mound and earthwork locations.⁸

Effigy mounds represent a specific type of mound found throughout the Midwestern United States. According to George R. Milner, “Often they have animal-like shapes—they are customarily referred to as birds, bears, panthers, turtles, and lizards—while others take on more fanciful forms or are simple linear ridges or domes of earth.” (Milner 2004: 107). The shapes relate to specific animals within the region and may suggest particular affinities or relationships with the specific animal spirit, person, or power.

Some maintain that aliens helped Native Americans construct various earthworks and effigy mounds. The Serpent Mound in Ohio is one example of a mound structure that has received considerable attention. The video “Serpent Mound—Ancient Aliens in America?” claims that those who built the serpent mound, similar to claims about the Adena people, were giants living in Ohio that could be identified as the Nephilim. Crop circles have been created near the mound and the author of the video claimed the crop circle was of extraterrestrial origin. The video suggests that the serpent mound acts as a beacon or marker for alien beings.⁹

The earthworks of Ohio are primarily associated with the Scioto, Little Miami, and Ohio river valleys and represent some of the largest geometric structures made of earth on the entire planet. The reasons for constructing the earthworks are not known. However, archaeologists assert that the people who made them were particularly interested in the movements of the sun, moon, and planets. According to Bradley T. Lepper, “Hopewell architects and engineers built nearly perfect circles and squares to precise dimensions. For example, the circle connected to the octagon at Newark [Ohio] is 1,050 feet in diameter. Astronomer Ray Hively and philosopher Robert Horn have shown

8 For images of Serpent Mound see the World Heritage Ohio “Serpent Mound” webpage <http://worldheritageohio.org/serpent-mound/> and “Serpent Mound” <http://arcofappalachia.org/visit/serpent-mound/>.

9 Internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVnUZ1kAGLs>, accessed 14/05/2019.

how this unit of measure was integral to the plan of the Newark Earthworks. The distance between Newark's two largest circles and between the centres of the octagon and square are both precisely six times the diameter of this circle." (Lepper 2005: 164). Part of the enigma surrounding the construction of these earth works concerns the fact that the actual geometry of the earthworks cannot be seen except from the air. The circle at Newark for example has a fifteen feet deep pit dug around the exterior of the circle that is over three football fields in diameter and fifteen feet in height. There are no hills near the area from which to view the circle. A small collection of mounds exists off centre within the middle of the perfect earthen circle and the perfection of the circle itself cannot be discerned from on top of these mounds either (See image of Newark Mound). The same could be said of the perfect Octagon earthwork located in Newark as well. Causeways and paths connect the great earthen circle to other earthen geometric forms of an octagon and circle. No one knows why the people created them or for what religious or ceremonial purposes they served. Hence, speculation abounds as to how to interpret the earthworks. Lepper and others maintain they were ancient astronomers and from the alignments of the constructions and portals into them one might agree that their alignment with the eighteen and one-half year movements of the moon's rising and setting can be discerned. (Lepper 2002: 16–17).

However, mainstream archaeologists note that this does not support an alien involvement within the culture. Instead it suggests a well-developed culture that was highly observant of object movements within the sky created various earthen mounds, geometric forms, and effigies to mark the interconnection of the sky with the people and beings that populate the world. That said, the archaeological evidence doesn't sway those who choose to assert an alien influence in the construction of the mounds. For example, UFOTV The Disclosure Network as recently as August 12, 2014 maintained an alien or old-world involvement with the construction of the Ohio earthworks in the video "Ancient Alien Mystery—Mound Builders."¹⁰

There is no shortage of books on the subject of mounds and earthworks in North America. (Milner 2004; Squier and Davis 2007) None of the archaeological evidence at the time of this writing supports any connection with aliens or other worldly beings for their construction. There is nothing that supports alien technology for building of the mound structures or earthworks. In essence, there are no smoking guns to provide proof of alien involvement with Native American cultures. The only evidence may exist within the stories of the people themselves. However, among the Eastern Woodlands people of two

10 Internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=341hIOKs094>, accessed 14/05/2019.

millennia ago there are no stories that have been passed down that provide support for ideas about alien involvement with the people themselves. As shown above, this is not necessarily the case with the Lakota, Oglala Sioux, Cree, Pawnee, or other tribes of the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain regions of North America who claim connection with the Star People and White Buffalo Calf Maiden.

Earthen mounds, petroglyphs, and pictographs are interwoven with the North American landscape. Many of the mounds along the Mississippi river are indistinguishable from the rises and falls within any hilly landscape. Add in the presence of trees and one can quickly miss their presence. Archaeologists like R. Clark Mallam documented well their existence through the use of flour marking out their locations, photographing them, and then letting nature cover and remove the flour naturally so as not to disturb or draw attention to their respective locations. His work on the serpent intaglio located near Lyons, Kansas is particularly enlightening and has some connections with the imagery of the great serpent in Ohio. For him, the serpent is a metaphor of life itself (Mallam 2017).

5.6 Conclusion

The question of aliens among Native Americans will continue to populate the Internet, social media, literature, and contemporary imaginations as long as there are those who believe it to be true. The common refrain of non-indigenous people often circles back to the claim that Native Americans could not have come up with their various forms of sophisticated cultures without help from alien forces to move massive amounts of dirt, create sophisticated imagery, or develop complex ethical and religious systems. It seems that each generation produces a new crop of writers in North American contexts that are anxious to posit different theories as to what external forces might explain Native American ingenuity and creativity. As I indicated in this chapter, there are no shortage of ideas circulating about alien forces shaping ancient and contemporary North America. What the future might uncover we have yet to discover. Will there be announcement from the Smithsonian that missing giant bones and artefacts from thousands of Native American mounds have been discovered and will be repatriated to their respective homelands? Will there be more Native American writers asserting direct conversations with Star People for the good of the planet that may yet save the world from environmental collapse? Will artificial intelligence be able to decipher the various stone markings on

petroglyphs across North America and create a translation that we might be able to read? Were there aliens among Native Americans and did they shape religious imagination and practices? Clearly a case can be made for the Lakota, Oglala, and others who claim connection with sacred beings that brought rites and rituals for right relations with the land and others. Many of the indigenous people would claim that they've learned much from various people in the form of bears, salmon, spiders, and other creatures. This doesn't make them alien however. It makes them part of the matrix of the whole environment and realigns how one might perceive what these creatures are and how they may interrelate with human beings. The notion of "alien" may be primarily a Western European construction to differentiate themselves from everyone other than themselves. For the indigenous people it seems that the shapeshifters, the animal and insect people, the Star People, the beings of the rocks, land, and sky are all part of a worldview in which very little could be considered alien. All are included in a matrix of life. Perhaps the only thing that might be alien for North American indigenous people would be those who disregard the natural environment in pursuit of profit, those who disregard animals and animal spirits/people in favour of the sport of killing them, and those who dismiss a proper regard for all life as being sacred as somehow unnecessary.

Finally, the question of aliens among Native Americans will remain unresolved and unanswered. We live with tentative conclusions and perhaps may be able to assert that the indigenous people who comprised more than five hundred tribes on the North American continent and lived on this continent well past 10,000 years ago owe much of their inspiration and religious practices not to alien influences and contact, but rather through the experience of the indigenous people themselves in relation with the created world.

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PART 2

Methods and Themes



Ancient Aliens

Olav Hammer and Karen Swartz

6.1 Ancient Alien Mythology¹

According to Erich von Däniken and a number of other authors, those who believe that flying machines were invented by the Wright brothers in 1903 are, as it turns out, mistaken. Instead, they report, it is the case that such vehicles were known thousands of years ago to several cultures belonging to the ancient world. In India, for example, so-called *vimanas* were seen crisscrossing the skies; the *Mahabharata*, their readers are told, when properly understood, alludes to nuclear strikes carried out by the pilots of these vessels. Further, models of airplanes that have been found in locations as diverse as Egypt and Colombia, they point out, attest to how widespread flight technology was in times long since passed. Already at this point a question might arise in the face of such declarations, namely: How did our ancestors come to master heavier-than-air flight? Such technological breakthroughs, producers and purveyors of these theories insist, became available to humankind following visits to Earth made by extraterrestrial beings. Claims are made that rock art from the Sahara depicts what these aliens looked like. Humanoid and of gigantic proportions, they had large rounded heads, or, alternatively, they bore space helmets that covered their faces. Such assertions have, on the other hand, been refuted by more or less every archaeologist and historian who has taken it upon themselves to review the evidence offered. Notions of this sort and their promoters are thus part of a broad and diffuse field sometimes referred to as alternative archaeology or less charitably as pseudo-archaeology or cult archaeology.²

1 Although they are often referred to as “ancient astronaut theories”, the narratives surveyed here are more aptly characterised as ones that feature ancient aliens. Some do describe beings who pilot interstellar vessels and wear spacesuits, but many concern extraterrestrials bearing little resemblance to astronauts. The same goes for the term *Präastronautik*, which commonly appears in German literature.

2 As one can likely deduce from the terms used to describe its import, literature on ancient aliens tends to elicit extremely hostile reactions from academics. The aim of this chapter is to trace the history of a modern form of folklore and to place it in its socio-historical context, not to debunk it, but interested readers may consult such discussions as Feder (1996: 165–193) and Fritze (2009: 201–214). Approaches inspired by the study of religion are so far rare, but the journal *Nova Religio* published a thematic issue on alternative archaeology in

The field of alternative archaeology is distinguished from its academic counterpart by a number of factors. These include 1) the controversial topics it treats; 2) the social setting in which it is generated, maintained, and developed; 3) the methods employed in it; and 4) the way in which its narratives are emplotted.³ Theories concerning ancient aliens involve all four. They are *controversial* in the sense that the relatively few academic archaeologists who address these claims do so merely in order to reject them as completely unfounded. Their *social setting* is quite distinct from that of their academic counterparts in that advocates of ancient alien theories rarely if ever have any training in conventional archaeology. Furthermore, they range in terms of profession from hotel manager (Erich von Däniken) and shipping company executive (Zecharia Sitchin) to chemical engineer (Jacques Bergier) and body-building promoter/television personality (Georgio Tsoukalos). Their theories are presented on television and the Internet as well as in mass-market paperbacks and other non-academic publications. In terms of *methodology*, while “conventional” researchers of the distant past attempt to interpret numerous and often mundane findings (pottery fragments, stone tools, and so forth) within the context of what is generally known about a past epoch, culture, or specific site, the methods of alternative archaeologists, on the other hand, typically consist of reading myths as if they were factual accounts and reinterpreting what are considered to be striking, unique objects and sites. The marked focus put on the unique and unusual is reminiscent of what Ann Taves (2010: 27) regards as the core characteristic of religion: its emphasis on “specialness”.

Like their academic counterparts, writers whose works can be assigned to the alternative archaeology genre craft narratives. In this sense, both camps are engaged in linguistic and rhetorical emplotment as described by Hayden White (1973). According to White, as language is never neutral, there can be no such thing as an objective and accurate representation of the past. It follows, then, that historians, rather than *finding* history, instead *create* it by turning data into stories which they do in part by making decisions about such matters as which facts are to be included and which are to be excluded, which of those that do make it to the final cut are to be emphasised and which are to be subordinated, and, moreover, precisely how they are to be sequenced. Our subject matter at hand, narratives about ancient aliens, are also plots that exist in the minds of their tellers and consist of various kinds of data that have been arranged in various ways. White, it must be noted, was no relativist, and

May 2019 which unfortunately was too late for the contributions to that issue to be fully incorporated here.

3 The first three factors are inspired by the discussion in Asprem (2015).

therefore, from his perspective, the data of historical narratives is comprised of events that actually did take place in a very real text-external world (White 1973: 6 n. 5). The facts and data of ancient alien narratives, on the other hand, are of a different order entirely. The authors of these narratives emplot elements culled from earlier texts and data that arise through the intuitive and imaginative reinterpretation of artefacts and myths. The case of the flying machines that constituted our example above illustrates how such elements are created.

Although one does indeed encounter chariots called *vimanas* in early Sanskrit epics, the UFO-like vehicles referred to by modern alternative archaeologists in actuality made their first appearance in an early twentieth century text, the *Vaimanika Shastra*, which was purportedly received by paranormal means and attributed to the ancient sage Bharadvaja.⁴ The *Mahabharata* quotes about ancient nuclear strikes also stem from more recent times. They make their debut in a French bestseller from 1960, *Le matin des magiciens*; its authors, Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, combined several unconnected sections of text that they uprooted from the original, and they subsequently presented their French-language version as if it were a faithful translation.⁵ After having first taken shape in these sources, both the *vimanas* and the nuclear strikes went on to develop full-fledged lives of their own. Dozens of authors have since referred to these flying machines without mentioning the fact that the narratives that supposedly document their existence were crafted around 1920 and 1960, respectively. The objects from Egypt and Colombia mentioned above are archaeological artefacts that a fertile imagination could view as being representations of aircraft. On the other hand, it could naturally also be the case that they were intended to portray birds or other creatures of flight. Such explanations, however, are seldom if ever given any space in literature on ancient aliens. These and other striking or “special” objects and sites so often treated in the works of those who write about ancient aliens are thus not interpreted in terms of their own contexts or in discussion with scholarship on them. They are instead read through the lens of a “common sense” understanding (Jüdt 2003: 168–178). A distrust of institutional authorities and a displacement of that authority onto the individual leads to a fundamental principle of interpretation: if an object according to the subjective common sense of a

4 On the contents and origins of this text, see Mukunda et al. (1974).

5 Jason Colavito has documented the story of the *vimanas* in a post at <http://www.jasoncolavito.com/blog/vimana-aircraft-of-india-more-sloppy-scholarship-from-david-childress>. As for the supposed nuclear strikes carried out by pilots of these *vimanas*, see his post <http://www.jasoncolavito.com/the-case-of-the-false-quotes.html>, accessed 05/02/2019.

particular author seems inexplicable unless one assumes that advanced technology was involved, then that is reason enough to assume the existence of such technology.

A further example of an ancient alien staple having its origin in a bestseller is the idea that specimens of prehistoric rock art depict these early visitors to our planet. Henri Lhote (1903–1991) conducted an expedition to the Tassili region in southern Algeria and published in 1958 *A la découverte des trésors du Tassili*, a book that brought the rock art of the Sahara to the attention of a large international audience.⁶ Of greatest interest for our discussion are the descriptions and reproduced images Lhote supplied of the Jabbaren site where large humanoid creatures with round, cyclopean heads are depicted. On page 80 of this book, facing a reproduction of one of these paintings, Lhote remarks that the beings portrayed resemble popular fantasies of what Martians would look like and that the images are amongst the oldest examples of Saharan rock art. This initial mention is followed by a few additional references to “Martians,” several of which are sandwiched by quotation marks. Le Quellec (2009) demonstrates how this tongue-in-cheek remark was picked up by ancient alien writers who took the epithet at face value. (See also the chapter in this volume by Paul O. Myhre on alternative archaeological interpretations of Native American indigenous sites.)

Borrowing a distinction from Pauliina Remes (2008), writing about the past can follow either a bottom-up or a top-down approach. In the case of the former, an ever-increasing number of individual data is collected, and attempts are made to piece together a broader picture of a site or culture by relating these data to what is already known about the relevant cultural context. In contrast, theories about ancient aliens are the result of a top-down approach. Here, what is taken to be common sense is an *a priori* adoption of a master narrative, that is, that past cultures were granted access to advanced technologies by extraterrestrial visitors. This master narrative is bolstered by means of creatively recycling a restricted number of references to striking objects and suggestive myths and assembling them in such a way that serves to support the initial thesis. The roots to the references in question can ultimately be found in a number of areas and elements such as Theosophy, science fiction, anecdotes about curious events, innovative understandings of Biblical passages and other ancient myths, fiction, ufology, and earlier books about ancient aliens.

6 As a measure of its success, the book was widely translated, including into English as *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes: The Story of the Prehistoric Rock-Paintings of the Sahara*. In his book, Lhote promotes himself as the one who discovered this rock art. A very different and highly critical perspective is presented in Keenan (2003).

The emphasis on specialness and the imaginative reusing of already existing cultural elements, reminiscent of the *bricolage* referred to by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966: 16) as a primary mechanism in the construction of myths, places ancient alien narratives in the category of mythology. The impression that we are dealing with myth is further reinforced by the fact that even fictional narratives can enter into the bricolage. In the history of religion in the West, this mechanism is a familiar and deeply rooted one. For instance, the mythical account Plato provided in the *Timaeus* was used in later years by various entrepreneurs to construct medieval cosmologies and occult depictions of Atlantis. Fictional Rosicrucian texts led to the emergence of actual Rosicrucian movements. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's novels became a major point of departure for nineteenth-century occultism. The movie *Stargate* was interpreted by the Heaven's Gate movement as being a depiction of an actual episode of interference by aliens in human prehistory. To this compact list many further examples could be added. Ancient alien mythology is thus a modern continuation of a well-established mechanism of religious innovation.

It is not only in a chronological sense that ancient alien mythology is a product of the modern age. Following Lambert (1999: 311–2), modernity impacts religion (and thus mythmaking) *inter alia* by giving religion a this-worldly dimension, an emphasis on rationality, science, and technology that results in parascientific narratives, individualisation, dehierarchisation, and relativism. This-worldliness is a striking trait that is characteristic of the entire genre. Whereas more traditional myths speak of gods and other transempirical agents who exist in a different ontological dimension than the one in which humans live their lives, ancient alien mythology denies the supernatural character of the mythic narratives it recycles and reduces gods to material creatures from other parts of the cosmos.⁷ The pararationalistic nature of these modern myths is furthermore apparent from the fact that proponents of ancient alien mythology rather than perceiving their own narratives as myths instead see them as being factually true and based upon empirical evidence. This, then, according to their way of viewing the situation, means that they are in a sense competing with mainstream archaeologists on their own turf. Such a stance, however, serves to awaken the at times vitriolic contempt of mainstream archaeologists who dismiss this evidence as completely fallacious. The purveyors of ancient alien mythology, finally, function as individual entrepreneurs in a free market. This leads to a characteristic balance that will be one of the leit-motifs of this chapter: a balance between stability (a largely unrecognisable

7 For an early study that similarly remarks on the rationalism of such popular narratives, see Ashworth (1980).

mythology would presumably attract few people) and innovative claims (each entrepreneur needs to brand herself or himself as an expert having a unique take on the shared material).

6.2 Early Precursors

6.2.1 *From Swedenborg to the Theosophical Family of Religions*

The idea that other planets are inhabited by beings with whom humans can establish contact was developed by the Swedish visionary Emanuel Swedenborg in his book *De Telluribus in Mundo Nostro Solari, Quæ Vocantur Planetæ* (1758). Swedenborg claimed that he personally had seen and visited such extraterrestrial lifeforms. Similar statements were thereafter made by mesmerist somnambules and spiritualist mediums. The most celebrated case, one involving medium Hélène Smith and her visions of Martian civilization, is discussed in the Swiss psychologist Théodore Flournoy's book *Des Indes à la planète Mars* (1899). The decisive innovation that transforms stories of contact with beings on other planets into narratives about past visits by the denizens of other worlds to Earth, however, can be traced back to the Theosophical movement.⁸

Helena Blavatsky presented an elaborate Theosophical cosmology in her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), allegedly a commentary on an ancient manuscript by the name of the *Book of Dzyan*, written in the mysterious Senzar language. Studded amongst the far lengthier discussions of human prehistory on Earth, and in particular on sunken continents such as Lemuria and Atlantis, one finds a number of passages covering the topic of extraterrestrial life. She asserts (1888 vol. 2: 699–709), for example, that while most planets are inhabited, not all of their occupants possess physical bodies. According to Blavatsky, ancient occultists knew more about them than modern scientists do. Humans, if one is to accept her account, originate from such beings, who in the distant past came from an earlier incarnation of the Moon (Blavatsky 1888 vol. 2: 115). While the concept of these extraterrestrial visitors who made their way to Earth is assigned a rather marginal place in Blavatsky's *oeuvre*, they subsequently become a significant theme in the works of later Theosophical writers. In their 1913 volume *Man: Whence, How and Whither*, Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater, Blavatsky's successors as leaders of the main (Adyar) branch of the Theosophical Society, expand upon the idea that Earth was visited by Venusians in the distant past. These beings, the Lords of the Flame,

8 A useful summary of Theosophical ideas about extraterrestrial life with a collection of source texts can be found in Colavito (2012).

made the journey in order to “quicken mental evolution [and] found the Occult Hierarchy of the Earth” (Besant and Leadbeater 1947 [1913]: 76). Their voyage is described in terms that recall modern conceptions of spacecrafts, since they arrived “with the mighty roar of swift descent from incalculable heights, surrounded by blazing masses of fire which filled the sky with shooting tongues of flame” (Besant and Leadbeater 1947: 98). Their leader is Sanat Kumara, a figure who would come to be absorbed into various new religious movements inspired by the Theosophical message. Alice Bailey, who became a member of the Theosophical Society in 1917 but fell out with the movement in 1920, wrote about Sanat Kumara in her first book, *Initiation: Human and Solar* (1922). In it, she describes the involvement of various extraterrestrial beings in human history and places Sanat Kumara in an elevated position as Lord of the World in what might be described as a bureaucracy of cosmic proportions. Sanat Kumara reappears in the mythology of the “I AM” Activity, an American Theosophically based new religion founded in the 1930s by Edna and Guy Ballard, as the leader of seven Kumaras whose mission it is to protect the Earth. The Summit Lighthouse, another Theosophically inspired religion founded by Mark Prophet in 1958 and headed by him and his wife Elizabeth Clare Prophet after their marriage in 1961, similarly includes in its sizeable pantheon of Ascended Masters the figure of Sanat Kumara, who, in their version of events, came from Venus in order to aid creatures on Earth at a time of crisis.⁹ In the contemporary New Age or occult milieu, some channellers present Sanat Kumara as the source of their teachings. The Lords of the Flame, their origins on Venus, and the migrations of their descendants across continents such as Lemuria and Atlantis became common references in the works of many later authors whose works belong to the ancient aliens genre.

6.2.2 *Charles Fort and the Search for Anomalies*

Theosophical versions of theories about ancient aliens are normally legitimised in terms of the prophetic insights had by the leaders of various religious movements within the broader Theosophical current. Ancient alien theories in the strict sense of the term, on the other hand, tend to find part of the evidence they claim supports ideas espoused about such purported early visits in the form of objects that are either out of place or seemingly inexplicable. An important precursor in this respect is the work of Charles Hoy Fort (1874–1932). Fort collected tens of thousands of reports of anomalous events ranging from sightings of fish and frogs raining down from the skies to stories of

9 Prophet (2003) provides an alphabetical dictionary of the personages in the vast pantheon of the Summit Lighthouse movement. See the entry “Sanat Kumara and Lady Venus”.

spontaneously combusting human beings. Fort saw his own all-encompassing view of the world as a truly mysterious place as a new approach to reality, one that could supplant the dogmatic perspectives of religion and materialistic science. He included accounts of such anomalies in four books, the first of which was *Book of the Damned* (1919). Of most immediate relevance here is his tendency to resort to using extraterrestrial forces as a possible explanation for some of the strange phenomena he catalogued. One category of anomalies that he discusses at length contains reports of strange matter or even animals raining from the sky. Rather than dismissing such events (as debunking scientists might be inclined to do) as the result of violent winds innocently carrying matter aloft and then depositing it elsewhere, would it not be more likely that such peculiar happenings are instead caused by an extraterrestrial entity or force (Fort 1995 [1919]: 35, 129–130)? Another category is the presence of objects that are, or so it would appear, in terms of the technology that would have been needed for the purposes of their construction, out of place at the sites where they were found, an example being cases involving metal objects seemingly manufactured by some means found fully encrusted in lumps of coal (Fort 1995 [1919]: 123–128). As science of course tells us that no humans were around when coal was formed, Fort thus tentatively speculates that alien visits may have taken place in ancient times and perhaps continue to do so today and that such occurrences could account for these anomalies (Fort 1995 [1919]: 136–137).

6.2.3 *Ancient Alien Fiction*

Jason Colavito (2005; 2013) identifies fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937) as a crucial link in the transmission of ancient alien mythology. Colavito notes that Lovecraft was aware of Theosophical writings and of Fort's collections of mysterious anomalies and that his fiction, beginning with the seminal short stories "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) and "The Whisperer in Darkness" (1930), is in part an amalgamation of themes found in both of these sources. Lovecraft's fiction was in turn mined by later authors, including the previously mentioned highly influential Pauwels and Bergier, who will also be discussed later in this chapter. Colavito may, however, overstate the role Lovecraft played for later ancient alien mythologists. There are, for instance, few direct references to him in Pauwels and Bergier (1960). Moreover, the mythology that they developed, and which was later picked up by such writers as Erich von Däniken, has few points of immediate overlap with Lovecraft's *oeuvre*. That being said, Lovecraft's work did indeed become the point of departure for its own distinct subgenre of ancient alien narratives: fiction concerning a group of sinister creatures from outer space who took themselves to Earth in bygone days and came, despite

the horror they inspired, to function as divine beings who were worshipped by the denizens of our planet. Some individuals have even taken this mythos to be an account of real events, and the Cthulhu mythos has for them morphed into an invented religion in the sense of Cusack 2010.

6.3 Ancient Aliens in the Age of UFO Sightings

A more direct link between Theosophical precursors and the fully developed ancient alien mythology of the 1960s is made up by books produced in the UFO milieu. The first UFO sighting is usually dated to June 24, 1947, when Kenneth Arnold reported that he had seen saucer-shaped objects flying past a plane that he was at that moment piloting. Very shortly after this initial report was made, a number of individuals came forward and claimed that they had been contacted by beings who had arrived in alien craft of the kind Arnold had spotted. These visitors from space often functioned, like Theosophical Masters, as the purveyors of spiritual messages. The most prominent contactee, George Adamski (1891–1965), had a long-standing interest in Theosophy and had founded a Theosophically inspired movement, the Royal Order of Tibet, in the 1920s before he in 1952 was supposedly contacted by a being from Venus. One year later, Desmond Leslie wrote *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (1953). It relates, intertwined with elements of Theosophical doctrine, the story of Adamski's Venusian contact. The reader of the twentieth chapter of the book, for instance, is treated to a summary of the Theosophical myth of the Lords of the Flame who arrived from Venus exactly 18,618,793 years ago.

The diversity of the forms given to the ancient alien narrative is apparent from the very start. Whereas Leslie reproduces Theosophical ideas, one finds a very different approach in the writings of the British author Harold T. Wilkins (1891–1960). Wilkins, who penned a number of occult and pseudohistorical volumes, produced some of the earliest work of the UFO epoch that purports to investigate the presence of alien beings in the distant past. His book *Flying Saucers on the Moon* (1954) notes that there had been an abundance of “flying saucer” eyewitness accounts during the immediately preceding years and suggests that many earlier reports, if interpreted correctly, document the presence of UFOs in far earlier times. Its title refers to his conviction that the alien visitors who have come here throughout history have used the Moon as an observation post. Contrary to the other authors surveyed in this chapter, most of the reports of alien visits in this particular case are not placed in prehistoric times. Large sections of Wilkins' book read like a Fortean survey of alleged sightings in previous centuries as documented in written sources. Only

rarely does he venture into the far past. One such example is when he takes up the Nazca lines, a set of gigantic prehistoric geoglyphs found in Peru (Wilkins 1954: 159–60). Wilkins is also atypical for the ancient alien genre in the sense that he presents the extraterrestrial beings as a potential threat. While most other accounts chronicle a chain of events in which they introduce advanced technology and are then deified, Wilkins' aliens are not infrequently decidedly hostile (Wilkins 1954: 278).

A story that more fully integrates Theosophical ideas about past continents and races with ufology and ideas about technologically advanced aliens was introduced into the contactee milieu a few years later with the work of George Hunt Williamson (1926–1986). Williamson became interested in UFOs in 1951 and began a series of experiments in automatic writing that resulted in him becoming the recipient of messages from a purported extraterrestrial source.¹⁰ For a number of years, Williamson collaborated with Adamski. In 1956, he co-founded a small contactee cult known as the Brotherhood of the Seven Rays (Lewis 2000: 56). He subsequently began to write a number of volumes that in part deal with the occult history of mankind. In three of these books, *Other Tongues—Other Flesh* (1957), *Secret Places of the Lion* (1958), and *Road in the Sky* (1959), classical occult motifs such as the existence of the continents of Mu, Lemuria, and Atlantis are merged with ufological concepts of guests from other planets visiting the Earth in the distant past and intervening in the affairs of various human civilizations. According to Williamson (1958: 229), technological wonders like the Egyptian pyramids were built by such visitors; they moreover even buried one of their spaceships near the structures. The belief that the Nazca lines of Peru had been constructed by visitors from space is also discussed at length by Williamson (1959). In his occult historiography, alien visitors were taken to be gods by early humans, and many motifs encountered in myths are, from his point of view, renderings of actual events that took place involving these alien creatures.

A much more rationalistic approach was adopted by Russian mathematician Matest M. Agrest (1915–2005). In 1959, Agrest launched an idea that von Däniken would succeed in popularising nearly a decade later, namely that the construction of a number of ancient monuments would have required such massive feats of engineering that thinking that humans had managed to do so unaided is in essence nothing short of absurd. It was therefore reasonable, according to Agrest, to conclude that they had been assisted by extraterrestrials. His ideas inspired later authors, including Pauwels and Bergier. His 1961 text *Kosmonavty dvernosti* (Cosmonauts of Yore), published in an edited volume

10 On Williamson, see Lewis (2000: 216–7).

entitled *Na sushe i na more* (On Land and Sea), summarises his main ideas.¹¹ Considering the vast number of stars in the cosmos and the probability that some of them are orbited by planets inhabited by beings with technologies superior to our own, and bearing in mind the fact that time slows down for those who travel at velocities near the speed of light, it would be perfectly possible for extraterrestrials to traverse immense distances and visit Earth. Various artefacts become explicable if one assumes that such visits took place in the distant past. The ruins of Baalbek in Lebanon, for instance, are made of stone building blocks so massive that human technologies of past ages would not have been able to manage them. Myths, as well, can be reinterpreted in naturalistic terms if one reads them as veiled accounts of the technical capabilities of ancient alien visitors. Agrest suggests that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah described in Genesis chapters 18 and 19 fits what had become known about nuclear blasts in his own lifetime: the residents of the cities die, a pillar of fire, smoke, and dust rises, and the area become uninhabitable. The editors of the volume note that while Agrest's hypotheses are controversial, they nonetheless have the advantage (viewed from the perspective of the ideology that was imposed in the Soviet era) of providing a materialistic account of Biblical passages.

6.4 UFOs and the Bible

Agrest's suggestion that Biblical narratives make sense when the notion of extraterrestrial visits is seriously considered belongs to a minor genre of writing that began to surface around the same time that both contactee literature and the widespread fascination with UFOs in general appeared. Such interpretations are characteristically endorsed in this literature because they are, in the eyes of the authors who write such books, the best of three alternatives: 1) denying the truth of the Bible, 2) accepting it but suggesting that events referred to in it are supernatural, or 3) accepting it and finding a "scientific"—or rather parascientific—explanation (cf. Jessup 1956: 49–50). Speculations of this kind seem to have been known in UFO circles already by the early 1950s. An anonymous review (Anon 1953) of Howard Menzel's book *Flying Saucers*, for example, commends Menzel on debunking the (already at that time apparently well-known) claim that the prophet Ezekiel saw a spaceship.

Probably the earliest example of a book dedicated exclusively to a ufological exegesis of Biblical passages is *UFOs and the Bible* published in 1956 by Morris

11 Internet site, <http://miger.ru/agrest61.htm>, accessed 05/02/2019.

Jessup (1900–1959). Rather than being miraculous, divine interventions, the ascensions of Elijah and Christ are described by Jessup as having been teleportations possibly involving UFOs (Jessup 1956: 37–8, 60). A great deal of space is devoted to the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1–28), a staple of much later ancient alien mythology (Jessup 1956: 55–9). The stormy wind seen by the prophet, within which a fire and several wheels appear, is here seen as a description of an alien vessel. Most controversially, perhaps, is the suggestion that Jesus was a representative of a higher, alien race (Jessup 1956: 116). How else could one account for the apparent miracles and the prophetic abilities that he displayed?

A common claim in this literature is that the deity of the Bible is in fact a highly advanced alien life form. Yonah Fortner (1939–2004) began his publishing career in the late 1950s with articles appearing in magazines (Östling 2014, 2018). He developed a theory inspired in part by Theosophy and in part by what seems to have been his own Biblical interpretation, according to which interplanetary contacts between Venus and the Earth had been established some 18 million years ago. According to Fortner, the word Elohim, usually understood as merely a term used to refer to the deity, designated in fact an entire extraterrestrial collective that arrived around that time.

If ‘God’ is an alien, what, then, are the implications for the creation narratives that are related in Genesis? Brinsley Le Poer Trench (1911–1995), for example, an Irish peer who had an interest in ufology and who promoted Hollow Earth theory, claimed in *The Sky People* (1960) that Adam and Eve had been created by such extraterrestrials. He crafted an elaborate myth that combined Theosophical themes with his own quite distinct ufological reading of the Bible. The two stories in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 represent distinct phases in the creation of mankind. The first chapter is a symbolic retelling of the creation of so-called Galactic Man by a race of celestial beings called Elohim. The second represents the creation of material human beings by yet another collective of extraterrestrials known as Jehovah. Trench suggested that the Jehovah beings at first kept these humans in a Garden of Eden that was located on the planet Mars.

Jean Sendy (1910–1978) wrote at great length on such themes in several books, the first being *Les cahiers de cours de Moïse* (1963).¹² Like others who read the Bible ufologically, Sendy suggests that one can reach a more rational interpretation if key narratives are understood as references to visits made by extraterrestrials. *Les cahiers de cours de Moïse* is a book that adamantly resists any attempts to summarise it. One of its main themes is that the creation story told in the Book of Genesis can be more rationally understood if

12 On Sendy's work, see the detailed analysis in Bigliardi (2017).

one approaches it with concepts of ancient aliens in mind. According to such ideas, as we have seen, visitors from outer space came to Earth once upon a time and subsequently influenced the course of human civilization via their superior technology. Various striking prehistoric monuments, ranging from the Egyptian pyramids to the Tiahuanaco complex in Bolivia, are thus the result of this alien intervention. Similar to Fortner's understanding of the term, the word Elohim is also here regarded as referring to one such group of extraterrestrials. A later work, *Ces dieux qui firent le ciel et la terre, le roman de la Bible* (1969), adds both detail and narrative coherence to such accounts of these extraterrestrial visitors. In it, Sendy reviews myths recorded in the earliest civilizations and claims that one thing they have in common is that they all tell of the arrival of alien gods. According to his account, humanoid extraterrestrials came to our planet in the aftermath of a cataclysm that took place around 21,500 BCE. After first restoring life, they set the wheels of civilization in motion. Biblical narratives provide valuable clues also in this case: the chaos described in Genesis 1:1 is the state the Earth was in during the cataclysm, and the days of creation that follow are veiled allusions to the processes undertaken by the alien "gods" to restore order.

Similar attempts to rationalise stories of divine, miraculous, or supernatural events are undertaken in other books from the same period. In *The Bible and Flying Saucers* (1968), for example, Presbyterian minister Barry Downing (b. 1938) ponders what may lie behind the events of Exodus 13:21, in which one can read about the Israelites who fled from captivity in Egypt and who, when wandering through the desert, were aided by a mysterious object that appeared in the daytime as a pillar of cloud and at nighttime as a pillar of light. According to Downing, such a sighting could have involved the presence of a UFO. Moreover, his way of interpreting the Gospel narratives of the life of Jesus includes extraterrestrials playing parts in several key episodes. For instance, the shepherds who followed a star upon the birth of Jesus may have seen a UFO. A UFO sighting may have occurred in connection with the baptism in the Jordan River, an event that included a mysterious dove appearing overhead. The Transfiguration narrative (found in all the synoptic gospels, see Matthew 17: 1–8, Mark 9: 2–8, Luke 9: 28–36) features a Jesus who alters his appearance so that his face and clothes seem to glow; this, Downing tells us, is a sign that—once again—a UFO was present. Similar interpretations of scriptural passages were compiled by Robert Dione (1922–1996), a school teacher from Connecticut, in *God Drives a Flying Saucer* (1969). God, according to Dione, produced the so-called miraculous events in the Bible by means of his advanced technology, not least the "flying saucers" mentioned in the title of his book. Not only did divine UFO technology play a role in the history of

Israelite religion and Christianity, it, according to Dione, has continued to be a central *modus operandi* in Christianity up to the contemporary period. As an example, he suggests in the sixth chapter of his book that the Marian apparitions reported as having taken place at Fátima, Portugal, could have been the result of such technology.

Austrian-American NASA engineer Josef Blumrich (1913–2002) goes to even greater lengths to rationalise Biblical narratives. His book *Da tat sich der Himmel auf* (1973), translated and published in English as *The Spaceships of Ezekiel* (1974) is an in-depth study of how the textual passages from Ezekiel could be translated into detailed descriptions of the construction of the alien craft that the prophet supposedly spotted. In Blumrich's interpretation, Ezekiel saw a landing craft that had been sent down by the mothership, and the description of his visions provided is sufficient enough to allow Blumrich to glean information about the mode of propulsion of the craft, the type of space suit worn by the alien being, and other such details.

As documented in the chapter by Régis Dericquebourg in the present volume, the race car driver and journalist Claude Vorilhon (b. 1946) took the step of transforming the concept of Biblical aliens from being the subject of books into what would become the core tenet of a new religious movement. He claimed that he in December 1973 had encountered an extraterrestrial being. This creature would reveal to Vorilhon, forthwith to be known as Raël, the true meaning of the Bible. The heart of that revelation combines the elements we have encountered so far: the technological reinterpretation of Biblical passages, the deity of the Bible as a species of aliens, and the creation of humankind by these extraterrestrial beings.

6.5 The Fantastic Realism of Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier

As previously mentioned, a major influence on much of the later literature in the ancient aliens genre is *Le matin des magiciens*, published in 1960 by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier and subsequently translated into numerous languages including English. In the preface (pp. 16–20), Pauwels describes himself as a seeker having an interest in esotericism (especially the work of Gurdjieff) and surrealism, and Bergier is cast as a populariser of science. Together, the two spent five years exploring fringe phenomena under the rubric of fantastic realism, an attempt that shares much in terms of ambition with the work of Charles Fort. In fact, Fort's efforts are described in the book at length, and Fort himself is presented as the harbinger of a new way of seeing the world in all of

its mysterious totality, free from the strictures that science places upon itself (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 155–173).

Karbovnik (2017: 201) notes that the profusion of examples and anecdotes amassed in this book can be reduced to four quite diverse categories: strange events of the type collected by Charles Fort; assertions that history has been influenced by secret societies or other forces acting behind the scenes; examples of parapsychology; and alternative archaeology. A substantial number of anomalies that became staples of the alternative archaeological genre hence make their appearance here.¹³ For example, technologies that ancient peoples, according to the point of view presented, could not have mastered single-handedly indicate the existence of civilizations that have long since disappeared, ones that only left a few traces of their otherwise shadowy existences behind. The Tassili frescoes are here taken as evidence that these ancient peoples knew of magnetic fields (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 175). The dimensions of the Cheops pyramid show that the distance to the sun was known around 2,900 BCE (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 190) and that there were technologies in place at that time that could enable the transportation of stone blocks weighing ten tonnes or more each (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 191). The Nazca lines, in particular, intrigue the authors (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 198). Additional signs that ancient peoples were able to construct flying machines are the mentions made of such vehicles in ancient Indian texts (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 205). Connecting the copious number of dots that comprise this picture of a past global civilization that possessed advanced technologies leads Pauwels and Bergier to claim, based upon the suggestion made by Matest Agrest the year before, that a race of extraterrestrial beings had visited the earth (Pauwels and Bergier 1960: 205). Our ancestors would have misinterpreted their advanced technology just like Melanesians believed, according to Pauwels and Bergier (1960: 207–8), that the goods of “white” culture had been acquired by magical means from the deities.

Pauwels and Bergier proceeded to publish similar stories in the fantastic realism genre in the magazine *Planète*, which became a major vehicle of the 1960s and 1970s counterculture in France.¹⁴ In other respects and areas as well, this epoch of culture criticism and experimentation became the classic age of

13 Pauwels and Bergier devote considerable space to presenting a philosophical worldview that can incorporate such anomalies; for details, see Kripal (2015). Later ancient alien mythology recycles some of the specific examples of anomalies and pays little heed to the philosophical agenda.

14 Karbovnik (2017: 19).

ancient alien mythology. From having lived a relatively quiet life as a special interest phenomenon for UFO enthusiasts and collectors of Forteanism, the fascination with ancient aliens exploded. This is evidenced by the fact that the authors who figure in the next section published mass-market paperbacks in vast print runs.

6.6 Ancient Alien Entrepreneurs of the 1960s

Whereas ancient alien theories are merely one of many points on the exceptionally broad range of anomalies referred to by Pauwels and Bergier, the topic enters centre stage in the 1960s with the authors discussed here. Robert Charroux (1909–1978), a post office employee and writer of novels and science fiction stories, penned a series of eight books from 1963 to 1978 that rewrite the prehistory of the human species, combining Theosophical historiography (Atlantis, Lemuria, Mu, the arrival of Venusians 18 million years ago) with ancient alien-based reflections on the Bible and other myths, and presentations of the by-now familiar set of astounding sites and artefacts (with some novel additions). In *Histoire inconnue des hommes depuis cent mille ans*, Charroux announces his key thesis: a very ancient technologically advanced civilization preceded ours (Charroux 1963: 20). As archaeologists disagree with each other about innumerable details, their science is therefore fallible, and a fresh look at the distant past will, according to Charroux, prove that our ancestors were not “primitive” in any sense of the word. In essence, the *préhistoire* or prehistory that mainstream archaeologists reckon with was preceded by a *primhistoire* about which they know nothing. When it comes to the way in which Charroux describes this early period in human evolution, it is apparent that the debt he owes to Theosophy and various other occultist movements is a great one. Tiahuanaco, which he views as the oldest city on Earth, may have been populated by beings who arrived from Venus (Charroux 1963: 79).¹⁵ Despite the

15 As an example of how elements from earlier books can be emplotted in new ways, it can be noted that the Tiahuanaco complex entered alternative archaeology through works with a racist or even Nazi agenda and were later lifted out of this political context and converted into a building block for theories about ancient aliens. Basing his arguments upon a form of racial and evolutionist thinking common at the time, the Austrian businessman and amateur archaeologist Arthur Posnansky (1873–1946) claimed that there had originally been two “races” in South America and that the master builders of Tiahuanaco were a different race than the present-day indigenous peoples (Marsh 2019). Posnansky’s ideas were taken up by several other writers, the most influential arguably being the German architect Edmund Kiss (1886–1920) whose works of alternative archaeology were well received among top members of the Nazi regime (Pringle 2006: 180–4).

fact that Tiahuanaco is a site high up in the Bolivian Andes, and even though Atlantis was supposedly located in the Atlantic Ocean, the two, Charroux suggests (1963: 84), were probably identical.

From there, Venusian/Atlanteans diffused across the globe and settled in centres of ancient civilization like Egypt. With the help of such advanced sciences as antigravitation, they constructed the pyramids at a period in time that far predates the estimates made by conventional archaeologists (Charroux 1963: 88–89). Amongst the other sites of importance that these early visitors could have migrated to is the fabled underground city of Agartha discussed by various nineteenth- and twentieth-century occultists. To these claims, all well-known from earlier literature, Charroux adds a local touch. Artefacts purportedly from a Neolithic site (but regarded as fakes by mainstream archaeologists) located at the French hamlet of Glozel, which bear writing in an otherwise unknown script, are taken as further evidence of the presence of these Venusians on Earth.

Also inspired by Charles Fort, customs official Walter Raymond Drake (1913–1989) collected information to support the idea of ancient encounters with aliens.¹⁶ He published numerous articles and nine books on the topic, including *Gods and Spacemen in the Ancient East* (1968). However, rather than focusing on archaeological anomalies, Drake's main interest lies in myth and literature. Organising his book by geographical area, he surveys texts from such staples of the literature as India, Egypt, and ancient Israel. As is also the case with Charroux, Drake's method of interpreting these texts places him firmly in a Theosophical lineage of writers. In his account, human history begins with the Lords of the Flame who, according to the *Book of Dzyan*, came from Venus, journeyed onwards to the Moon, and from there colonised our planet (Drake 1968: 33). Myths from India are understood by Drake as depicting actual events that took place and are granted a privileged position in his work because they purportedly reflect wisdom transmitted from Lemuria and Atlantis (Drake 1968: 31). Moreover, several personages from such Indian myths and epics are in reality, according to Drake, extraterrestrials, an example being the father of Rama (Drake 1968: 42). Similarly, when seen from this point of view, the vehicles, often in animal form, that the divinities use—such as Vishnu's legendary bird, the Garuda—become spaceships (Drake 1968: 54). The channelled text on the *vimanas* also makes an appearance in Drake's work, and he tells his readers (p. 64) that “[s]cientists in many countries are now studying the ancient Sanskrit texts minutely to rediscover secrets of space-flight”. His chapter on Israel deals mainly with the Book of Exodus. A reading of it reveals

16 For geographical information on Drake, see the entry under his name in Story 2002.

the extent to which a top-down imposition of the ancient alien hypothesis occludes any historical-critical reading of the sources. Elements of the Exodus story figure in much of the ancient alien literature, but contrary to what we find in the cases of many of the other authors associated with the genre, Drake is aware that this particular narrative and the very existence of Moses are seen as legendary by scholars since there are no records outside of the Hebrew Bible to confirm that these are historical events (Drake 1968: 156–159). Nonetheless, the Hebrew Bible is treated as a historical source that documents UFO-related events that ancient writers failed to identify correctly. An example of such a phenomenon is the so-called miracle of the burning bush which is reinterpreted by Drake as a glowing alien spacecraft seen through the branches of a tree (Drake 1968: 165).

No other purveyor of ancient alien mythology has been as influential as Erich von Däniken (b. 1935). Like the majority of his colleagues, von Däniken has no academic training in his chosen field. Instead he had a long-standing career in the hotel business and composed a manuscript about ancient aliens in his spare time. His efforts resulted in his first book, *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft* (1968), published in English as *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968), a work that launched a massive interest in ancient alien theories and became an instant bestseller. Because of his blockbuster success, von Däniken is sometimes seen as the first exponent of ancient alien mythology, but his first book is to a great extent a retelling of stories already found in such earlier works as the aforementioned books by Charroux and Bergier and Pauwels. Thus, von Däniken refers to such staples of the literature as the Nazca lines, the gigantic stone blocks of Tiahuanaco, and the Egyptian pyramids.

His arguments for rewriting prehistory in terms of contacts having been established with beings from outer space are both characteristic of the genre and typical for his time. One piece of evidence that he adduces is the lid of the sarcophagus of one of the most important Mayan rulers, K'inich Janaab Pakal from the city of Palenque. Archaeologists who attempt to interpret its iconography in terms of what is already known about its particular cultural context note that the centre of the lid represents a world tree, under which Pakal is depicted crouching over a mythological serpent with two heads. The design on the lid is thus composed of elements that reflect well-known motifs of Mayan cosmology. von Däniken, by contrast, interprets the same image in a way that he characterises as “naive” and “unprejudiced”, a reading that he feels would also serve to persuade the most diehard sceptic (von Däniken 1968: 149). Even a child, he argues, would recognise that this is a rocket with flames emerging from the rear, piloted by a human figure having their heel firmly planted on the pedal and their hands on the control instruments. What is more, the

headdress of the Mayan chieftain can only be a helmet with antennas. The ancient Palenque ruler is in this interpretation not only transformed into an alien being but recognisably into an astronaut from von Däniken's own times.

Although the elements used in his first book are familiar from earlier literature and the decontextualised strategy of interpreting objects and texts he uses is a common one, there is a secular turn in von Däniken's work that sets him apart from his predecessors (cf. Jüdt 2015). The references to Theosophical mythology and other esoteric cosmologies or to the rationality of the Bible are gone, as are Fortean reflections on the mysterious nature of reality. von Däniken's narrative as it appears in his first book is a bare-bones account of how academics have misread the past, which when seen in the light of an immediately accessible, intuitive interpretation of strange objects and places can be regarded as a technological extension of the present. Since his blockbuster debut, von Däniken has continued to promote his ideas through various media. A 1970 film version of *Chariots of the Gods?*, later remade into a TV miniseries in the U.S., contributed to making his ideas widely known. He has published some twenty books written in a very accessible style that are based upon similarly no-frills versions of ancient alien mythology.¹⁷ These books are typically emplotted in the form of adventure stories informed by a first-person perspective. He escorts his readers to various locations around the world, introduces them to locals who can take him to see structures and objects that have a striking visual impact, and suggests that, because these things can be interpreted within an ancient alien framework, they are signs of alien visitations having taken place in the past.

Peter Kolosimo (pen name of Pier Domenico Colosimo, 1922–1984) was an Italian journalist who, like von Däniken, contributed to the ancient aliens mythology by publishing mass-market books. Kolosimo's popular work, *Non è terrestre*, was published in 1969. It begins by mentioning various anomalies that conventional archaeologists are purportedly unable to solve. These include the presence of coins and metal objects in prehistoric America, where metallurgy was unknown, and seemingly modern, manufactured objects such as cubes and screws deposited in soil and rock layers thousands or even millions of years old. Kolosimo brands himself in his writings as the level-headed investigator who opts to avoid the (for him) extreme scepticism of conventional archaeologists and the equally extreme suspension of disbelief of other ufologists and ancient alien enthusiasts. From his purported middle ground, he reveals that not only strange objects but also myths from around the world

17 The plural "versions" is apt since von Däniken proposes somewhat different narratives in various publications; see Richter (2012) for a detailed analysis.

speak of beings who could commute between the Earth and the stars. Some examples of purportedly mysterious events and findings are familiar from earlier books in the same genre. The *vimanas* of India and the Palenque astronaut figure prominently. Regarding the former, the key text about the *vimanas* is attributed to Maharshi Bharadaja (Kolosimo 1969: 28 n. 19), a misspelt reference to the mythic sage who supposedly channelled the text to its early twentieth-century author. Much of what is reported consists of Fortean-style anecdotes drawn from historical periods spanning from antiquity to the recent past. While *Non è terrestre* is sparing in its references to sources, those that do appear demonstrate the eclectic mix of background materials that is characteristic of the genre. Kolosimo casts his net wider than most other authors in the genre do. For him, even fiction is grist for his mill. For instance, a tale of an alien kept in a sarcophagus in the Mongolian monastery of Tuerin is attributed to *Adventure*, a magazine that, one may discover after carrying out the most rudimentary of investigations, published fiction.¹⁸ An additional example is Kolosimo's use of a lengthy quote from H. P. Lovecraft's *The Mountains of Madness* describing ancient buildings on Antarctica as a means of introducing the sixth chapter of his book because he assumes (on the basis of anonymous and hence untraceable reports) that Lovecraft's tale presents something real clothed as fiction. The profusion of anecdotes he presents leads, in von Däniken-like fashion, to a minimalist, "secular" version of ancient aliens mythology. No overt attempt is thus made to situate the suggestion that extraterrestrial beings may have visited Earth throughout the history of humankind in an occultist, biblical, or philosophical worldview.

6.7 Zecharia Sitchin

The authors we have discussed so far present variations of a set of basic tropes. Based on either revealed messages or a "common sense" approach, a by-now familiar bloc of sites and texts is mined for evidence of extraterrestrial intervention in human affairs. Against this backdrop, the work of Zecharia Sitchin (1920–2010) comes across as that of a true entrepreneur. Sitchin was a shipping executive who cultivated an amateur interest in Mesopotamian languages and cultures and built his distinctive ancient alien myth upon the claim that he

18 See internet site, <https://badarchaeology.wordpress.com/2012/11/10/does-fiction-become-true-if-its-repeated-often-enough-the-alien-of-tuerin-monastery/>, accessed 05/02/2019, a debunking site maintained by Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, Archaeology Officer for North Hertfordshire District Council Museum Service.

had the philological expertise to read Sumerian texts and uncover their real meaning.¹⁹ The result is an ancient alien myth that, compared to the minimalist narratives of many of his colleagues in the field, is characterised by an almost baroque profusion of details.

In his first work, *The 12th Planet* (1976), Sitchin claims that certain Sumerian sources spoke of the existence of Nibiru, a planet with an extremely oblique orbit that at rare intervals traverses our solar system. It was the home of an advanced group of aliens, the Anunnaki, who made their way to Earth 450,000 years ago, and the deities referred to in ancient Mesopotamian texts are in fact, he claims, these beings from Nibiru. For many years, they mined precious minerals that were needed on their home planet. The gruelling work involved in this venture led, however, to much dissatisfaction amongst them. Rather than functioning as benevolent culture heroes, as ancient aliens tend to do in much of the literature, the Anunnaki at first had a more sinister motive: by genetically modifying existing humanoids, they succeeded in creating *Homo sapiens* for the purpose of making these early humans do the hard work for them. The extraterrestrials mated with human beings, which resulted in offspring; in light of this, according to Sitchin, the otherwise cryptic remark in Genesis 6:1–4 that Nephilim had children with human women becomes comprehensible. Roughly 13,000 years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, massive amounts of water coming from melting Antarctic glaciers inundated the Earth, an event that was recorded in a more or less garbled way in various deluge myths. After the waters retreated, the Anunnaki divided up the world amongst themselves and helped humans to create the civilizations that conventional archaeologists know.

His second book, *The Stairway to Heaven* (1980), in part recapitulates the message from his first one, and (amongst many other things in this sprawling volume) performs a similarly unorthodox reinterpretation of key texts from Mesopotamia, Ugarit, and ancient Egypt. The latter, Sitchin explains, describe the pharaoh travelling to the underworld and across the sky on his way to immortality and should be read not as mythic accounts but instead as records of a literal journey akin to that undertaken by modern-day astronauts. Models of the space capsules used in these voyages, so-called *benben* stones,²⁰ were displayed like museum pieces for the edification of ordinary Egyptians. The

19 Sitchin's claim to philological expertise and his readings of ancient texts are refuted in great detail by Michael S. Heiser, who holds a Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages, on his aptly named website sitchiniswrong.com.

20 These are understood by archaeologists as representations of the mythic mound that rose out of the waters in the Heliopolitan form of Egyptian mythology.

technologically advanced civilization of the Nile valley learned its advanced skills from Sumer and thus, ultimately, from the alien beings from the planet Nibiru of Sitchin's first volume. He scours ancient myths to find out the locations used for arrival and departure in connection with the visits these extraterrestrial "gods" made to our planet and concludes that there was a spaceport for them in ancient Lebanon: the site of Baalbek that Agrest had mentioned more than twenty years earlier as a vestige of an advanced alien technology.

6.8 Some Trends in Ancient Alien Mythology Up to the Present

The "classic" works of the 1960s have served to inspire a sizeable number of authors up to the present day to support ancient alien theories. Many of them function as entrepreneurs who rework the basic elements of ancient alien mythology in new ways and thus brand their own work as original. Here, rather than attempting to undertake the impossible task of surveying this sizeable field within the constraints of a short book chapter we will instead highlight a few trends.

The field of alternative archaeology in general and ancient alien mythology in particular functions as a market: selling books and achieving celebrity status in this milieu requires some degree of ingenuity. One way in which one could arrive at this point is through adding a new striking artefact to the list inherited from earlier authors. For instance, in *Nos ancêtres venus du cosmos* (1975) Maurice Chatelain presents as one of the most convincing pieces of evidence of extraterrestrial knowledge that was imparted to our ancestors Sumerian tablets that recorded a very large number, the Nineveh constant, that encodes detailed astronomical information. Unfortunately, Chatelain fails to provide his readers with any details that could help them to identify precisely which tablets he means, and as a search via Google's labyrinthine pathways leads only to discussions of Chatelain's book on alternative archaeology websites, the temptation to suspect that no such tablets exist outside of the world of ancient alien mythology becomes hard to resist.

Another way of being an entrepreneur is by constructing an extended case around an existing mythological element and developing the discussion of that element in new and unexpected ways. Robert Temple (b. 1945) is best known for his book *The Sirius Mystery* (1976, with a second edition published in 1998), which focuses on a well-known piece of anthropological lore, namely that the Dogon tribe of Mali knew of the existence of either one or two much smaller stars next to Sirius, stars that are not visible to the naked eye. This claim goes back to anthropological fieldwork carried out by Marcel Griaule and Germaine

Dieterlen in the 1940s and 1950s. Griaule published two books (1948, 1956) in which he presented Dogon cosmology as an extremely complex philosophical worldview. The claims regarding Sirius are part of a set of creation myths he presents in the latter of these two volumes. Temple expands on this motif and writes that the Dogon had received their astronomical information about Sirius via contacts the tribe had with extraterrestrial visitors in the distant past. It can be noted here that the Dogon ethnography upon which this account was based was re-evaluated by Walter van Beek (1992), who not only notes that Griaule's description of the Dogon is unlike the ethnography of any other African tribe, and even unlike the reports published by others who had done work amongst the Dogon, but that his own in-depth fieldwork could not locate any Dogon informants who had heard of the myth Griaule wrote about or who were aware of the information about Sirius that appears in Griaule's work. This supports our suggestion regarding the employment of ancient alien narratives. Although certainly not seen in such terms by the people who create and disseminate them, they function as a bricolage of data that, regardless of the nature of their relationship to the text-external world, are taken from earlier publications.

The story of ancient aliens has been around since the early 1950s. By the end of the 1970s, its proponents seemed to have advanced their position to the extent that an encyclopaedic work covering the main authors responsible for it and the artefacts and sites relevant to it could be published (Dopatka 1979). There are at present yearly conferences organised by and for ancient alien enthusiasts (Aliencon) as well as societies that one can join (Archeology, Astronautics and SETI Research Association). Nevertheless, acceptance by mainstream historians and archaeologists remains as elusive as these interplanetary visitors. Many authors explain the underdog status had by ancient alien theories as the result of the rampant ignorance and endemic incompetence that abounds amongst conventional archaeologists. To take just one example from a sea of many, Kolosimo (1969) begins his book *Non è terrestre* by claiming that representatives of conventional science, when confronted with evidence of a striking anomaly, will just turn and retreat. Some recent authors have even added an element of conspiracy thinking to the compote. For instance, in *We Have Never Been Alone* (2011: xxii–xxiii) Paul van Ward points a finger at a hegemonic elite that allegedly tries to suppress knowledge by preventing people who know about aliens from having access to mainstream channels of information.

So far, all of the examples of ancient alien mythology we have taken up in this chapter come from printed texts. In recent years, other modes of diffusion, including movies and television shows, have become increasingly important

channels of dissemination. Continuing a trend started by von Däniken, modern ancient alien mythology is often presented in the format of entertainment and adventure rather than as parascientific texts. Roland Emmerich's movie *Stargate* (1994), for example, weaves together an action-filled storyline with motifs culled from von Däniken, Sitchin, and other versions of ancient aliens mythology.²¹ Decades earlier, Rod Serling and Alan Landsburg created the science-fiction show *The Twilight Zone* as well as a television documentary, *In Search of Ancient Astronauts* (1973), that was built around von Däniken's theories. More recently, the series *Ancient Aliens* has entertained viewers with ancient alien mythology since it first aired on the History Channel in 2010. The mediatization of the ancient alien phenomenon has had a significant impact upon the available ways through which one can establish oneself as a successful entrepreneur in the ancient alien field. A case in point is Giorgio Tsoukalos (b. 1978). Whereas the other individuals mentioned up until this point became important purveyors of ancient alien mythology by writing books, Tsoukalos is primarily a television personality. His achievements prior to his installation as a staple of the show *Ancient Aliens* include the attainment of a bachelor's degree in sports communication and working as a bodybuilding promoter.

6.9 Conclusion

The arrival of extraterrestrial beings on Earth in the distant past is a topic discussed in a diffuse network of people and can be characterised as a fluid theme having many variations rather than as a specific set of claims. Some common trends emerge from the material, and these can be summarized in terms of the four characteristics of alternative archaeology with which we began this chapter. The ancient alien genre is built around a highly controversial topic, namely the claim that the gods of various religions are actually extraterrestrial beings, that these beings were in possession of advanced technology, that they brought key elements of culture to early humans, and that the science of the aliens was so far in advance of that of these humans that they believed that the "gods" from space had produced miracles. The social setting where this topic is elaborated on is non-academic: the main purveyors of narratives concerning ancient aliens have no immediately relevant educational background and present their ideas via such channels of publication as mass-market

21 The *Stargate* DVD includes a special feature of interviews with von Däniken and Giorgio Tsoukalos.

paperbacks and in television series. The main methods employed are the re-analysis of existing archaeological findings and the recycling of elements of earlier ancient alien texts. The emplotment varies from one author to the next but can be classified into a small number of categories. Some authors, such as Drake and Charroux, give the theory of ancient aliens an esoteric spin. Others, like Jessup and Sendy, use it to support the truth of Biblical narratives. Yet others, such as Fort, Pauwels, and Bergier, wish to paint a picture of the world as a far more mysterious place than what is admitted by proponents of mainstream science. Finally, an additional faction of writers, amongst whom we find Agrest and von Däniken, appear to be resolutely opposed to the notion of mysteries: for them, the hypothesis of ancient alien intervention is the simple result of a common sense reading of the past that in one fell swoop can explain what is wrongly taken to be inexplicable. People who are engaged in producing ancient alien myths constitute a cultic milieu (Campbell 1972) and are ultimately united more by their opposition to a scholarly consensus than by a shared view of the past.

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They Knew Too Much: The Entangled History of Conspiracy Theories, UFOs and New Religions

David G. Robertson

7.1 Introduction

Kenneth Arnold's sighting of "saucers" over the Cascade Mountains in June 1947 inaugurated the Flying Saucer narrative, and within months, two themes emerged which have never gone away: religion and conspiracy theories.

Basic forms of the UFO conspiracy theories we are familiar with today are readily identifiable in some of the earliest books on flying saucers. Donald Keyhoe's *Flying Saucers Are Real* (1950) already combines a conspiracist narrative wherein the Air Force knows about flying saucers but are keeping it from the public, with a millenarian narrative where the UFO occupants are attempting to warn humanity about imminent disaster. Although today the idea of UFOs is utterly tied to extraterrestrials, Keyhoe's book was actually one of the first to make the extraterrestrial hypothesis. Most very early accounts considered flying saucers to be some sort of secret weapon or aircraft test, either friendly or enemy.

Also in 1950, Frank Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* introduced the Saucer Crash narrative that would eventually reach its apogee with the Roswell narrative in the 1990s (while the actual Roswell incident, whatever it was, happened in 1947, it was not until the 1980s that it was of more than local concern [see Saler, Ziegler and Moore 1997: 12–18]). Scully argued that the US was in possession of a crashed flying saucer, and government scientists were attempting to figure out its propulsion system. By 1956, Grey Barker's *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* had introduced the Men in Black, shadowy G-Men who would advise witnesses to keep quiet about what they saw. The Men in Black would also get an increasingly supernatural spin as time wore on, but initially they are clearly very earthly intelligence agents.

But at the same time, flying saucers were also being interpreted through a spiritual lens. For Carl Jung, the UFOs themselves were projections of humanity's spiritual/psychological development, pointing to their circular design (and conveniently ignoring that Arnold's were shaped like Batarangs) as comparable to the Mandala, and so a symbol of wholeness (1958). A more

influential interpretation, however, came through the post-theosophical tradition of Ascended Masters. In founder Helena Blavatsky's writings, the Masters or Mahatmas resided in remote terrestrial locations, particularly Tibet, and were very much human, albeit with supernatural powers. Charles Leadbeater and Annie Besant developed the concept of Masters considerably, including the idea of Masters residing on Venus and other planets, and Alice Bailey's writings (supposedly channelled from a Master) set out a vast cosmic system of planetary intelligences. These narratives easily incorporated flying saucers to create the contactee movement, in which individuals claimed to have been contacted physically or psychically by the occupants of interplanetary craft (Rothstein 2013). These "space brothers" typically warned terrestrial Contactees of imminent planetary destruction and terminal spiritual decline, and indeed this millenarian narrative leads directly to the early *sensu stricto* New Age movement through groups such as the Findhorn community in the Scottish Highlands (Sutcliffe 2003: 65–6). George Adamski had founded the Order of Tibet before publishing his claims of extraterrestrial contact in 1953; other notable Contactees also had involvement with millenarian or New Age groups, including Daniel Fry, Billy Meier, Claude Vorilhon and George King. UFOs were quickly incorporated into a wide variety of new religions, as this volume demonstrates, and though it is less well attested, conspiracy theory narratives were brought with them.

I am not going to spend time setting up a stipulative definition of conspiracy theory, because I think the attempt is ultimately futile.¹ Rather, in this chapter I will be thinking about the discursive *function* of conspiracy theories. This has two aspects; the function of these discourses for those using them, as well as the function of the term 'conspiracy theory' to marginalize the discourse of other groups. We will here be focusing on the former, though the latter will certainly come into play. Indeed, the two are often in a dialectical relationship—critiques of those in power by a minority group may be labelled conspiracy theories by those in power, reinforcing the idea that there is an organized resistance to the minority group, and so on.

Historically speaking, conspiracy theories are, like UFOs and to some degree new religions, the product of the cultural milieu of the Cold War. That is not to say that theories involving conspiracies began after World War II, nor that ideas about hidden groups with nefarious intentions was a new phenomenon, but that the specific idea of *conspiracy theories* as a specific kind of deviant, irrational and dangerous *type of belief* began to gain traction among intellectuals

1 For my thoughts on the question, readers are directed to Robertson (2016: 34–9) and Dyrendal, Asprem and Robertson (2018).

in this specific socio-historical context. Although these ideas have always had broad popular appeal, the term ‘conspiracy theory’ only appeared in the late 1940s, became common in popular culture from the 1970s, reflecting broader trends of detraditionalization and an ever-growing distrust of governments, and eventually became a self-identifier in the 1990s. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the term reflected the McCarthyist fear of ideological sleeper cells, and indeed the tendency for the US government to posit secret groups conspiring against it may have led directly to those critical of the US government to do the same (Olmstead 2009: 2; Byford 2011: 59). The dominance of “consensus politics” (that is, marked by a drive towards agreement over policy between rival parties) meant that minority views were marginalized—and especially those which were critical of institutions of power—and ‘conspiracy theory’ became a useful tool for stigmatizing dissenting views (Thalmann 2014). Through the 1980s and 1990s, conspiracy theories filled the vacuum of paranoia left by the Cold War (and gave the idling intelligence agencies something to do), with UFO narratives increasingly drawn in, from Roswell and the abductee movement, to Majestic 12 and David Icke’s Reptilian shapeshifters (Robertson 2016: 67–73 and f.f.).

As I have previously argued at length, UFOs functioned as a bridge by which conspiracy theories crossed from the Christian right to the millennial left during the 1990s and early 2000s (Robertson 2016). My aim here is to develop that framework to look at these themes in what we might call more formal or institutionalized new religions, as a sketch for a full-length treatment in future. The first part of the chapter will outline the structural relationships between UFOs and conspiracy theories, and the function of conspiracy theories in new and alternative religions. The second part will then look at how these functions play out in three UFO religions: Heaven’s Gate, the Nation of Islam, and Scientology.² These will necessarily be short and focused on the UFO conspiracy aspects, and are intended to complement their own chapters in the volume.

I should add the caveat that I do not suggest that all NRMs which involve UFOs necessarily also involve conspiracy theories. Indeed, there are some very clear examples which do not, such as the Raelians. Nor do I argue that conspiracy theories are present in these traditions solely as a result of the presence of UFOs. What I do argue, however, is that there are some affinities—explanatory,

2 Some will disagree with my including Scientology as a UFO religion here, and with good reason. It is certainly not a UFO religion in any strict sense—not founded by a contactee or Abductee, nor does communication or contact with extraterrestrials play any significant part of the religion. However, this volume deliberately casts its net widely, and Scientology is a product of the ufological milieu in several ways, not least its engagement with science fictional themes and imagery. See Hugh Urban’s chapter in this book for further discussion.

functional, and epistemological—which mean that these ideas are frequently found together. In the following section I will set these out briefly, but readers are directed to my monograph on the subject for a fuller explanation.

7.2 Functional and Epistemic Affinities

Conspiracy theories, new religions and ufology are all parts of the cultic milieu (Campbell 1972), so unsurprisingly, we find common interest in such themes as alternative therapies, off-the-grid living and organic gardening, and pseudo-archaeology *a la* von Däniken—all aspects of what Michael Barkun calls “stigmatized knowledge” (2003: 26–9). As we have already seen, millennialism and/or apocalypticism too are frequently found together with conspiracist narratives. Indeed, conspiracism leads to teleological narratives almost inevitably, because conspirators must have a plan, and that plan must have an end goal. When the conspiracy is nefarious in intent, the end-point is frequently apocalyptic, in a broad sense, at least. Conspiracy theory narratives and new religions, UFO-related and otherwise, frequently posit non-falsifiable occluded agencies—agencies working in secret, but of whose existence or actions there is no empirical evidence. In other words, for conspiracists, the religious and the ufologist alike, something is pulling the strings, but it doesn’t want us to know that it is. Brian Keeley argues that from a philosophical position, there is little to distinguish conspiracism from monotheistic religion (Keeley 2018), and a number of psychological studies have suggested that common processes underlie both religious and conspiratorial ideation (Wood and Douglas 2018).

A more sociological take on this idea is found in Asbjørn Dyrendal’s argument that claims of “special knowledge” function essentially identically in conspiracist narratives as in various “esoteric” traditions, and “the parallel ways in which knowledge, history and agency are constructed” (2013: 224). While both are dependent on “stigmatised knowledge,” Dyrendal draws our attention to the assertion that such special knowledge may lead to a revelation which is typically expressed as a shift in the sense of self and its relationship to the cosmos and history. Whether expressed in terms of spirituality or not, this shift is frequently referred to as *gnosis*, in both esoteric and conspiracist traditions.

These epistemic affinities mean that ideas are readily shared and cross-fertilized. But there are also *functional* aspects to conspiracy theory narratives which make them especially useful to some new religious groups. Conspiracy theories can help to deal with uncertainty, whether failed prophecy or a more general failure of mission. Here, conspiracy theories can act as a form of theodicy, explaining why bad things happen despite the actions of a benevolent

higher power (Robertson 2013). Challenges to the truth claim are particularly important in charismatic new religions where these claims come directly from the leader and are therefore less amenable to claims of misinterpretation or mistranslation than those in religions where the revelations are more distant, temporally and culturally. Challenges to charismatic truth-claims can be side-stepped by positing a conspiracy against them, which shifts the blame from the charismatic individual to an external group—whether existent (Freemasons, Jews) or posited (Satanists, the Illuminati, the New World Order). Which is, of course, exactly how many conspiracy-minded ufologists argue that the evidence for UFOs has been covered-up.

Such a move can even make a potentially divisive ideological issue into a source of group cohesion, by heightening the impression of an existential threat against them. Indeed, in certain cases—conspiratorial, ufological and religious—this realization of the individual's position in a battle most other people are not even aware of can have a profound effect on their sense of self. Insider accounts describe the revelation of a new reality—or gnosis, perhaps.

As just one recent example from a guest on *The Higherside Chats*, a US-based podcast focusing on the full range of stigmatized knowledge, puts it:

You haven't had that moment yet, because oftentimes, people who get as deep as we do, it's almost a spiritual experience when you come to realize that reality is not the way in which it was presented to you.³

The deeper connection between religions, UFOs and conspiracy theories then is epistemological. It is less a change of beliefs, but rather a change of epistemology; not an issue of *what* you believe, but a change in *how and why* you believe what you believe. The conspiracist, the ufologist, the new religious convert—each claim (or at least attest to) not only special knowledge, but also *special ways of accessing knowledge*. Science is the epistemic standard in the post-Enlightenment world, though in practice tradition and (increasingly) personal experience are also appealed to in how we understand our world and make decisions. To these the millenarian, conspiracist or contactee might add channeling, intuition, synthetic (dot-connecting) and other stigmatized epistemic strategies to gain knowledge of the world. Another way of putting this is that these figures appeal to *epistemic capital*—not what you know, per se, but rather how you know it. Karl Maton describes epistemic capital as “the way in which actors within the intellectual field engage in strategies aimed

3 Internet site, <https://www.thehighersidechats.com/smq-ai-we-all-died-in-2012-the-mandela-effect-the-changing-timeline/>, accessed 27/05/2019.

at maximising ... epistemic profits, that is, better knowledge of the world" (2003: 62). Gaining epistemic capital by appealing to special knowledge gained through stigmatized epistemic strategies allows one to positioning oneself as a member of the *counter-elite*. Literally, "knowledge is power," as the case studies which make up the second part of this chapter will show.

7.3 The Nation of Islam

The Nation of Islam was founded in Detroit, Michigan, in 1930, by Wallace Fard Muhammad. Fard remains a mysterious figure, to some degree deliberately; certainly, however, he was preaching a mixture of Islamic terminology, Black Nationalism and millennial eschatology. By 1933, the Nation of Islam had a Temple and University, and established a quasi-military wing, the Fruits of Islam. Fard had already begun to recede into the background, apparently considering his mission accomplished, which served to reinforce the idea that Allah had temporarily assumed his form to achieve his goal on Earth (Lieb 1998: 132–4).

The Georgia-born Elijah Poole (1897–1975) had become his assistant in 1931, and was named Minister of Islam in 1933, taking the *nom du guerre* Elijah Muhammad.⁴ When Fard disappeared altogether in 1934, he had left no official successor, but Elijah Muhammad assumed leadership, setting up headquarters in Chicago and severing ties with the original Detroit group. Mohammad was jailed for refusing conscription in July 1943, but on his release in 1946 he returned to spreading the word. Membership grew rapidly during the 1950s, at least in part due to the preaching of the charismatic Malcolm X, with sixty-nine temples established across twenty-seven states (Lieb 1998: 134–5). Estimates of membership run from 25,000 to 100,000 (Lieb 1998: 136).

Despite the name, in these days, the Nation of Islam had little in common with the mainstream of Islam. Like some other Black NRMs (such as the Nuwaubians), they drew from Islam, pan-African nationalism (especially Egyptian imagery), pseudo-archaeology, science fiction and UFOs—a *bricolage* recognizable in the Afrofuturism movement among African American artists in the late-1950s (Nelson 2002). Fard taught that African Americans were in fact members of the lost Tribe of Shabazz, who had populated the world (then called "Asia") in prehistoric times. About 10,000 years ago, in revenge for

4 As Poole was the name of his parents' 'owners', he considered it to be his 'slave name' and changed it to Muhammad, a practice which would continue in the Nation of Islam (including, for example, Malcolm X).

a perceived snub, a rebellious scientist named Yakub created a race of “devils.” Yakub is called Adam in the Bible. These devils would eventually (d)evolve into white people, and finally assume complete power around six thousand years ago. Ultimately, however, this would lead to the return of “the True Messenger of Allah” (i.e. Elijah Muhammad), the liberation of the tribe of Shabazz and the resurrection of the just (Lieb 1998: 140–142).

The connection with UFOs was introduced by Elijah Muhammad in the 1950s, who interpreted the vision of Ezekiel 1:15–18, known as Ezekiel’s wheel, as a UFO (Muhammad 1973: 238). In *Message to the Blackman in America* (his first major publication, from 1965), Muhammad called this the “Mother Plane,” or similar linguistic variants:

The present wheel-shaped plane known as the Mother of Planes, is one-half mile by a half mile and is the largest mechanical man-made object in the sky. It is a small human planet made for the purpose of destroying the present world of the enemies of Allah. The cost to build such a plane is staggering! The finest brains were used to build it. It is capable of staying in outer space six to twelve months at a time without coming into the earth’s gravity. It carried fifteen hundred bombing planes with most deadliest explosives—the type used in bringing up mountains on the earth.

MUHAMMAD 1965: 240–242

This was not in itself a radical suggestion, and in fact rather a staple of pseudo-archaeology which was particularly popular at the time. Ezekiel’s wheel, also known as Ezekiel’s chariot, as a UFO is also in Erich von Däniken’s *Chariots of the Gods?*, published in 1968. Muhammad claimed to have gained this idea from Fard (Curtis 2016: 19), although clearly the term UFO could not have predated 1947, and no record of Fard talking about the Mother Plane exists prior to Muhammad’s release from prison. Muhammad’s early descriptions of the Mother Plane echo the earliest physicalist “wonder weapon” descriptions of UFOs, in which the technology reads like advanced earthly warfare, rather than of interstellar travel. Indeed, the Mother Plane is described explicitly as a weapon of war, and interestingly is not described as extraterrestrial in origin. Rather, it was built on (or near) Japan, by Allah, who in the Nation of Islam’s cosmology is a living man (Lieb 1998: 160).

The Mother Plane as harbinger of the apocalypse took a more central role in Muhammad’s last major book, *The Fall of America* (1973). If the black Muslims could not change their way of life and recommit to Islam, the Mother Plane would destroy the world (Curtis 2016: 19–20). At the same time, however, it would be the instrument of regeneration for the reinstatement of the tribe of Shabazz (Lieb 1998: 162).

Following the death of Elijah Muhammad in 1975, the Nation of Islam split into several factions; the official one led by Muhammad's son Imam Warith Deen Muhammad (1933–2008), which moved towards conventional Sunni Islam; and several others which continued with Muhammad's more apocalyptic teachings, scientific style and, increasingly, conspiracist narratives, the largest of which was led by the former musician, Louis Farrakhan (b. 1933) (Lieb 1998: 178–81). Farrakhan developed the narrative of the Mother Plane (referred to interchangeably as “the Wheel”) in several directions. First, he claimed to have been physically taken up into it, a narrative which became central to his whole biography (Finley 2012: 435). On a trip to Tepoztlan, Mexico, on September 17th, 1985, to visit the ruins of a temple dedicated to Quetzalcoatl, he reports being taken into the Mother Plane (Finley 2012: 442):

As we reached the top of the mountain, a Wheel, or what you call an unidentified flying object, appeared at the side of the mountain and called to me to come up into the Wheel. Three metal legs appeared from the Wheel, giving me the impression that it was going to land, but it never came over the mountain.

FARRAKHAN 1989: 5–6

That the events took place on a mountain, and that he refers to Quetzalcoatl as a “Christ-figure,” are clearly mobilized to give the story hagiographic weight (Farrakhan 1989: 5). Moreover, while aboard, he meets both of his prophetic forebears, Fard and Muhammad, in a situation reminiscent of the description of Elijah and Moses' presence at the transfiguration of Jesus in chapter 17 of the Gospel of Matthew. Yet the description also uses the language of classic UFO encounters: the Wheel/Mother Plane has three legs, and Farrakhan is taken up in “a beam of light” to sit next to the “pilot” (Farrakhan 1989: 6). Significantly, the account is given at the height of the abductee narrative, in which accounts of terrifying nocturnal abductions by extraterrestrials dominated the UFO community, often considered to have begun in earnest with Whitley Strieber's 1987 account, *Communion*. As Loeb notes, Farrakhan's account of the Mother Plane is as much a product of its time as Muhammad's was. Sadly, there have also been a number of plainly antisemitic statements and publications from the Nation of Islam since the mid-1980s (Lieb 1998: 184–7)—another borrowing from the New World Order conspiracism of the time, perhaps.

The purpose of his abduction, Farrakhan tells us, was an urgent message from Elijah Muhammad:

[Current sitting] President Reagan has met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to plan a war. I want you to hold a press conference in Washington, D.C.,

and announce their plan and say to the world that you got the information from me on the Wheel.

FARRAKHAN 1989: 6

This was not only a war against Muammar Gaddafi and Libya, but against the African American population through drugs and incarceration. However, the Mother Plane is there to protect the African Americans, the “people of God” (Farrakhan 1989: 14–15; Finley 2012: 446). In a more recent video series, “The Time and What Must Be Done,” presented weekly from January 2013 until February 2014, Farrakhan continues to develop this apocalyptic narrative, but with the conspiracist aspects amplified, and using language drawn from 1990s New World Order (NWO) narratives.⁵ The New World Order is supposedly a clandestine project to create a globalist totalitarian (and usually left-wing and atheist) state; Farrakhan argues that a “shadow government controlled by the global elite” has been hiding the existence of UFOs even from past and present Presidents of the US. The reason for the ongoing secrecy is that they are trying to conceal “some greater knowledge of The Wheel, its power and its occupants,” supposedly gained from Fard and Muhammad’s notes after they were raided during the 1940s.⁶ Farrakhan is not an isolated case: Rashad Muhammad, a spokesperson for the Nation of Islam, has been actively engaging with the UFO conspiracy community to promote his book, *UFOs and the Nation of Islam: The Source, Proof and Reality of the Wheels*, appearing on the prominent ufological and alternative media website Project Camelot in November 2018.⁷

So we see that in the Nation of Islam, conspiracism serves two functions. Firstly, it serves to explain the inherent contradiction in the Nation of Islam cosmology—that African Americans are the original man and the greatest scientists, but find themselves enslaved and segregated. Second, it is tied to a millennial narrative in which the New World Order is or will be destroyed, and the Black Muslims restored to their proper place with the help of the Mother Plane. Thus, the Mother Plane, as with other conspiracist UFO narratives, is a synecdoche of a broader challenge to the dominant episteme. The “black gnosis” of the Nation of the Islam is not comprehensible by whites, and demonstrates the inherent superiority of the black man (Lieb 1998: 163–4). Thus, when Farrakhan says “We are people of the Wheel. It protects us, it guides us, it stands as a constant reminder of our difference, our otherness” (quoted in

5 Internet site, <https://www.noi.org/thetime/>, accessed 22/01/2019.

6 Internet site, https://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/National_News_2/article_101209.shtml, accessed 22/01/2019.

7 Internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipHRB-RdZgY>, accessed 22/01/2019.

Lieb 1998: 219), he is pointing to racial difference, surely, but also to different knowledge—or Supreme Wisdom. Supreme Wisdom is epistemic capital.

7.4 Heaven's Gate

Bonnie Lu Nettles, a nurse, and Marshall 'Herff' Applewhite, a music teacher, both heading into middle age with failed marriages, met in 1972 when Applewhite arrived at the Houston hospital where she worked (Zeller 2014: 19–22). They immediately struck up an intense (though probably not sexual) relationship, and began to refer to themselves as 'The Two', 'Bo and Peep', and eventually, 'Ti and Do'. By 1974, they were preaching a form of Christian millenarianism at its base, with aspects drawn from Theosophy and ufology. They saw each other as the two witnesses of Revelation 11, and preached that the Last Days would be instigated when they were publicly killed, resurrected and taken up to a UFO, which they referred to as "the Demonstration". The Earth would be "recycled," and the Two would be transformed and live forever with the extraterrestrials (Zeller 2014: 29–30).⁸ They quickly began to attract "crew-members" who also wanted to ascend to The Evolutionary Level Above Human (TELAH), and although they are best known by the name they used at the end, Heaven's Gate, the group used a number of different names. The group's ideas and practices also changed considerably over the years. They were initially highly disorganized, to the point that the members lost often contact with The Two, and each other; they reorganized in 1976, living communally with a strict set of behavioural rules (Zeller 2014: 40–41). At their peak, the members numbered 200 or so, and all took new names with a strict pattern (e.g. Gbody, Neody, Brnody), with some (including Applewhite) later undergoing castration.

Nettles died in 1985, which meant that the Demonstration would not happen as predicted, and with Applewhite in control, the theology of the group shifted markedly. Applewhite had long thought of himself as the reincarnated Christ, but now he began to talk of Nettles as having been an incarnation of God the Father, a role she continued on a higher plane. By this time, membership had been gradually dwindling for years, and although the group made considerable efforts to attract new members, these were not very successful. The group became more isolated during this period, and gradually, New World

⁸ A surprisingly common idea in early New Age circles. The Findhorn Foundation's founders thought the same thing in the late 1950s (Sutcliffe 2003: 65–6), as did the group centred around Dorothy Martin as described in Festinger's classic *When Prophecy Fails* (1956).

Order conspiracies were incorporated into their millennial narrative. Stlody (a member since 1975, though with a three-year break) describes this trajectory of interest in UFOs leading to both membership of Heaven's Gate and latterly a global conspiracism more reminiscent of Alex Jones than a New Age guru:

[I] had a strong interest in UFOs and what's going on with these abductions and space aliens and cattle mutilations and all this type of thing. And of course, through the years, that information is very difficult to obtain accurately in the human kingdom—it's covered up probably deeper than any other subject. And now we understand why. For these negative forces to control the planet the way they do, the truth has to be covered up, and covered with layers of misinformation and deception, for even this world systems—governments, economic systems—to survive as they do ... We know the media is going to do a hatchet job on us, in the same way they do a hatchet job about practically every other subject. If humans knew the truth about what goes on on this planet they'd be shocked, and wouldn't continue in their 8-to-5 slavery and ignorance ...⁹

Heaven's Gate's radically dualistic worldview fitted perfectly with the more right-wing elements of the alternative media at the time, particularly the Militia movement. Chkody's exit statement, written just before the suicides, accuses governments and religions of "drug-trafficking" and that "a one-world government is a reality, though not yet in name."¹⁰ Glnody's talks of the threat of the "cashless society,"¹¹ and Srrody of "DDT testing in the '50s, Tuskegee syphilis in the '70s, genetics on inner city babies in the '90s." These ideas and terminology—particularly the description of the NWO as 'Luciferian'—might have come straight from the pages of William Cooper's *Behold a Pale Horse* (1991), a foundational text for New World Order conspiracy theorists, though the dating suggests rather a parallel development of ideas already circulating in the conspiracist milieu. Following sieges at Ruby Ridge in 1992 and Waco in 1993, members of Heaven's Gate became concerned that they too would be raided by the government. William Cooper himself would be shot in a stand-off with police in 2001.

Heaven's Gate members came across the idea of a UFO trailing Hale-Bopp from the website of Art Bell's *Coast to Coast AM*, a show in which

9 Internet site, <https://youtu.be/wHz9it7oTdI>, accessed 18/06/2019.

10 Internet site, <http://www.heavensgate.com/exitchk.htm>, accessed 12/06/19.

11 Internet site, <http://www.heavensgate.com/exitgln.htm>, accessed 12/06/19.

ufological conspiracy narratives were front and centre, on November 14th, 1996 (Zeller 2014: 207–13). Soon, Applewhite began to think that TELAH might be achieved by hitching a ride on the UFO. After a number of them had videoed their goodbye messages, the thirty-nine members of the “Away Team” swallowed phenobarbital pills mixed with applesauce.

Heaven’s Gate is a clear example of how a religious group can appeal to conspiracy theories to deal with failed prophecy or other forms of uncertainty. In effect, these NWO conspiracies explain away that Nettle’s death did not lead immediately to TELAH because these “negative forces” prevented their full understanding of the situation until after her death. Do even suggested that her death may have been indirectly caused by her alien consciousness having to constantly battle the negative alien forces.¹² Moreover, the failure of Heaven’s Gate to attract more members was due to this conspiracy which kept the masses from seeing the truth. Yet as with the other cases mentioned here, UFOs are taken as undeniable evidence of this truth, physical symbols of the limits and limitations of human knowledge. For Srrody, even the conspiracists do not see the full picture; only Heaven’s Gate do:

They, too, still cling to values and lies that were instilled by the enemies of their Creator long ago (family, sexuality, independence, ...)—the details of which can be found in our record, Heaven’s Gate, for those who seek truth and its full realization: Life.¹³

Heaven’s Gate has given its crewmembers knowledge of the true “negative forces” in control of the world—Luciferian extraterrestrials:

Banks are definitely tools of the “Luciferian” forces in opposition to the Next Level, and we would prefer not to make banking transactions ... there are very real space-alien forces in opposition to us who can use such things as bank accounts and mailing addresses against us.¹⁴

Members of the Heaven’s Gate Away Team were the only humans who saw the whole picture of warring extraterrestrial forces who were, in secret, battling for control of the planet. Again, conspiracy theories come hand-in-hand with the

12 Thanks are due to Ben Zeller for helping me ensure the accuracy of Ti and Do’s ideas, here and throughout the section.

13 Internet site, <http://www.heavensgate.com/exitsrr.htm>, accessed 12/06/19.

14 Internet site, <http://www.heavensgate.com/exitgln.htm>, accessed 12/06/19.

liberating knowledge, explaining both why the Demonstration failed to take place as originally prophesized, and why the rest of benighted humanity failed to heed their message. From *The Evolutionary Level Above Human*, all would be clear, but we regular humans lack the epistemic capital.

7.5 Scientology

Hugh Urban writes that “Scientology is best understood not as a counter-cultural rejection of mainstream America, but rather as the fulfilment (if perhaps exaggeration) of American concerns particularly during the decades of the Cold War” (2006: 382). Indeed, Hubbard claimed that Scientology “was born in the same crucible as the atomic bomb,” giving their mission an apocalyptic urgency (1997: 163). Cold War concerns also included conspiracy theories, of course, and Scientology has become perhaps the new religion most involved with that category today. In this and other respects, Scientology is uniquely—and I argue, unfairly (Robertson 2020)—vilified in popular media, the law and academia, though it is clear that much of this hostility has been engendered by their hostile relationship with their critics.

Conspiracy theories within Scientology began with Hubbard in the mid-1950s, around the time that Dianetics was beginning to evolve into the more explicitly religious Church of Scientology (Urban 2011: 167). Hubbard’s increasing antagonism towards mainstream psychiatry led him to posit them leading an organized opposition to Scientology, later expanding to include government agencies like the CIA and FBI, as well as anti-cult groups (Urban 2011: 167; Cusack 2012: 305). Hubbard also became increasingly concerned with the threat of subversion from within the organization—perhaps mirroring the contemporaneous McCarthy hearings, to which Hubbard would report suspects occasionally. The Church’s Ethics Branch carried out ‘Sec Checks’ (short for Security Checks) designed to identify ‘suppressive persons’ who threatened the Church by revealing Scientological teachings without authority, or by questioning Hubbard’s authority (Urban 2006: 374). Over time, this expanded to include non-Scientologists too. In a policy letter dated 18th October 1967, Hubbard established the policy of ‘Fair Game’, in which anyone considered to be a threat to the Church of Scientology was open to being “deprived of property or injured by any means by any Scientologist,” for example by being “tricked, sued or lied to or destroyed” (Wallis 1976: 144), or revealing embarrassing personal information, so that it “recoils on the attacker” (Hubbard 1966). Sec Checks and Fair Game were both officially cancelled during a series of reforms in 1968, but the policy letter makes it clear that this cancellation is in

name only (Hubbard 1968b), and the Church continued to defend the practice as a protected 'religious expression' long after the official cancellation and into Hubbard's successor David Miscavige's leadership (Urban 2011: 109; Headley 2009: 75–76; Cusack 2012: 309). Miscavige ramped up the conspiratorial narrative, suggesting that "every single detractor ... is part of a religious hate group called Cult Awareness Network ... it's the same as the KKK would be with the blacks" (cited in Cusack 2012: 306). Such rhetoric has certainly encouraged suspicion regarding non-Scientological society at large.

One interesting detail is that Scientology has actively promulgated conspiracy narratives involving other NRMs, as part of an attempt to shore up its controversial claims to legal recognition as a religion. A more cynical reading might be that they were attempting to take out the competition. One example is the claim in *Freedom* (Scientology's in-house magazine) that Jim Jones' Peoples Temple had been infiltrated by government agencies, specifically the CIA. The article asserts that Congressman Ryan (whose assassination seems to have triggered the suicide—and murder, in some cases—of some 900 members of the Peoples Temple) was assassinated by the CIA due to previous opposition to their activities, and that the mass suicide was to mask the actual target (Whittle and Thorpe 1997; Moore 2002). In fact, it seems that Scientology has been quietly active in the Anti-Cult Movement; recently, evidence has come to light that Scientology-owned groups funded anti-cult organizations in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵

On the other hand, it is also true that some high-ranking Scientologists criminally infiltrated government offices in an attempt to control the narrative. By 1960, Hubbard had encouraged Scientologists to attempt to occupy posts in government offices to advance the interests of the Church (Urban 2006: 377); fifteen years later, Jane Kember (the Church's 'Guardian Worldwide') issued a directive against the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) which, in addition to litigation and aggressive public relations, involved infiltration of the Washington Office. This was named 'Operation Snow White', allegedly by Hubbard himself (Atack 1990: 227). Gerald Wolfe and others stole thousands of pages of documents from the IRS, the Justice Department and other offices, and planted a microphone in the office of the IRS's Chief Counsel (Urban 2011: 168). After this was uncovered by the FBI, eleven people (including Hubbard's wife) were convicted of conspiracy. This did not convince the general public of the honesty and benevolent intentions of the Church.

15 Personal correspondence with Bernard Doherty, April 2019. His publication of this research is forthcoming.

But perhaps even more than this, Scientology seems to grate against what many implicitly assume to be essential features of religion—Scientology is new, involves UFOs, is initiatory, has a rather gaudy aesthetic, and perhaps most importantly, makes money. Scientology itself has often been portrayed by its detractors as a conspiracy, a ‘racket’ designed to make money, rather than a ‘genuine religion’. Of course, that society tends to construct ‘making money’ and ‘genuine religion’ as an oppositional binary is interesting in itself, but beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁶ The important issue here, however, is the claim that the religion is a *front* for the money-making—that there is a conspiracy to deceive people for profit in the upper echelons of Scientology. While the Church certainly makes a good deal of money, the evidence that this is the prime motivation, and for dishonesty about this fact, is largely anecdotal, particularly during Hubbard’s life. The oft-cited quote attributed to Hubbard—“I’d like to start a religion. That’s where the money is!” (cited in Urban 2001: 58)—is not strong evidence; even if he did say it (and the multiple post hoc attestations suggest otherwise), it is certainly problematic to use Hubbard’s own statement in order to prove that he is lying.

The presence of conspiratorial narratives is explained by the dissonance between the special knowledge of the Scientologists and the hostile reaction from non-Scientological society. Uncertainty over the universality and legitimacy of their new religion was alleviated by positing a malevolent but hidden agency working to undermine it. Scientologists’ mobilization of conspiracy theories as explanations for societal resistance is a softer version of the more acute “failure of mission” that we saw in the case of Heaven’s Gate, certainly, and it follows that the outcome was less tragic. And though couched in scientific rather than more traditionally religious language, what Hubbard supplied was no less “special knowledge” than in the other cases here.

What complicates the issue for Scientology is that they circled the wagons and fought back. The Fair Game policy and covert operations like Snow White increased the degree of suspicion with which they were viewed by the media and policy makers (not unreasonably!), amplifying mutual conspiracist rhetoric. An even clearer example perhaps is the Church’s various lawsuits to keep the higher ‘OT’ (Operating Thetan) teachings secret, and the subsequent release of that material on the Internet and the campaign against them by anti-censorship ‘hacktivist’ group, Anonymous (Robertson 2017: 311–312). Here, conspiracy narratives are more to do with keeping control of special knowledge than a lack of interest, perhaps. The result, however, has been a mutually-reinforcing dialectic of suspicion, in which both Scientology and their critics

16 But see Robertson (2020).

have each reached for conspiracy theories to marginalize the other, and each bolster their claims of epistemic capital.

7.6 The End Is Nigh

The three brief case studies presented in this chapter have shown that the frequent entanglement of conspiracy theories, UFOs and new religions is both functional and epistemological. Functional, because conspiracy theories help mitigate against uncertainty and even failure because they posit a malevolent counter-agency working against the group. Epistemological, because claims of special knowledge, and exclusive epistemic strategies such as channeling, are central.

These features were present in each example, though the relationship between them varied with the groups' socio-historical context. The Nation of Islam began from the position of a marginalized group (African Americans), and their appeals to special knowledge were foundational—a direct rejection of the hegemony of the white slave owners, a repatriation of knowledge. UFOs, in the form of the Mother Plane, symbolized the limits of the epistemic capital of the white hegemony. A conspiratorial narrative, in the form of a false history, was also present from the beginning, and fell increasingly into line with right-wing anti-governmental narratives as time went on.

Similarly, Heaven's Gate's conspiracism developed out of their interest in UFOs and other kinds of special knowledge, particularly with the growth of the same anti-government narratives in the 1990s. Their socio-economic position was different, however; Heaven's Gate were more ignored than anything else, and their special knowledge claims took on a conspiratorial aspect in the face of the failure of the prophesied Demonstration, due to Nettle's death. Thus the uncertainty here was more internal than external.

Scientology almost reversed the situation of The Nation of Islam, marginalizing themselves through tight restrictions of their special knowledge and a paranoid conspiratorial stance which encouraged a mutually hostile construction of Otherness. In this example, UFOs do not play a direct role, but rather Scientology is rooted in the post-war compost of paranoia, space-age scientism and the dialectic of nuclear apocalypticism and New Age millennialism.

In each of these cases, the special knowledge granted by their epistemic capital leads not to acceptance by the masses, and an embrace of their message of liberation, but varying degrees of rejection. Their special knowledge made them outcasts. Rather than the crazy cultists of the popular imagination, perhaps they simply knew too much.

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'I Figured That in My Dreams, I Remembered What Actually Happened': On Abduction Narratives as Emergent Folklore

Erik A. W. Östling

Whatever else they may be, the flying discs are also new folklore in the making.

BLAKESLEE 1947



8.1 Introduction¹

It was the late evening of September 19, 1961—Betty (1919–2004) and Barney Hill (1922–1969) and their dachshund Delsey had spent an extended weekend travelling by car to Niagara Falls and Montreal; and were now *en route* for their home in the coastal town of Portsmouth, New Hampshire.² Driving through the sparsely inhabited White Mountains in the northern part of the state, a light in the sky caught their attention, and they made several stops along the road to look at it through their binoculars—the light seemed to grow bigger and to follow them. While Barney wanted to brush the observed object off as something as mundane as a star, an aircraft, or a satellite; Betty however was rather more inclined to consider the two of them witnessing an Unidentified

1 I am indebted to William Ross, Dale Valena and Elizabeth Scheckler at the University of New Hampshire Library for help with accessing the Betty and Barney Hill collection, and for the permission to reprint two photographs. Håkan Blomqvist, Anders Liljegren, and Clas Svahn at the Archives for the Unexplained in Norrköping, Sweden have further been helpful with some unpublished archival materials. Benjamin E. Zeller, Karen Swartz, and Paulina Gruffman gave helpful suggestions on the text; I am solely responsible for any errors or omissions. The quote in the title of the chapter is from the hypnosis session transcripts of Betty Hill, conducted by Dr. Benjamin Simon (see Fuller 1966: 275).

2 This retelling of the main parts of the narrative of Betty and Barney Hill draws upon John Fuller's *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours "Aboard a Flying Saucer"* (Fuller 1966).

Flying Object. During one of their stops to observe the object, Barney claimed to spot beings aboard the craft looking down upon him, causing a feeling of panicking distress. Several days after returning home Betty started having—for five days in a row—nightmares in which their car was stopped in the middle of the road by alien beings, and where she and Barney were led aboard a landed craft and forced to endure a medical examination (part of which included Betty getting a long needle inserted into her navel as a pregnancy test).³

The Hills filed a UFO report to Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth; and after having read a book by the ufologist Donald E. Keyhoe,⁴ Betty wrote a letter directly to him—retelling their observation and asking for further information. This letter to Keyhoe—a retired Major in the United States Marine Corps and a central figure in the *National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena* (NICAP) (see Jacobs 1975: 56, 132–147)—would eventually put the Hills in contact with several NICAP-affiliated investigators who visited the couple during the fall of 1961. During one of these visits, a perceived anomaly in the report was brought to the fore—the drive home had inexplicably taken several hours longer than expected. They had, during their alleged experience, somehow lost time for which they could not account. During the following year, the couple would conduct several attempts to backtrack and locate the place where they had observed the light; in an attempt to unravel the mystery of the missing hours. While the couple had considered the idea of unlocking the memory block through hypnosis it was ultimately through issues with Barney's health that the couple would end up exploring this avenue in a search for answers. Barney, who worked night shifts as a postal worker in Boston (commuting daily back and forth from Portsmouth), suffered from ulcers and hypertension, and besides seeing a physician had also sought psychiatric care. Through referral and recommendation by his doctor, the couple become patients of the Boston psychiatrist Dr. Benjamin Simon, who conducted hypnotherapy with them between January and June of 1964. Through the therapy, the couple relived their purported experience of being taken from their car by a cadre of uniformed beings with large eyes and greyish skin. Not only describing the examinations that befell them, Betty Hill also further spoke about her conversations with the leader of the alien beings, and how she was shown a star map. Upon requesting to know from where the beings came, the leader however refused to show her

3 Betty wrote down her nightmares in a manuscript entitled "Dreams or Recall?" (Hill 1961) and it was subsequently included in *The Interrupted Journey* as an appendix (see Fuller 1966: 297–304).

4 The book in question, *The Flying Saucer Conspiracy* (Keyhoe 1957), does, as Kottmeyer has observed (1990: 8) relate a Venezuelan occupant report detailing an attempted capture by the alien beings (1957: 192–193).



FIGURE 8.1 Betty and Barney with Delsey and article about themselves
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the location of their own star system when she could not point out where on the map the Solar system could be found.

The story about the capture of Betty and Barney Hill is one instance of a popular narrative tradition (in the sense of a corpus of textually or orally narrated texts, which include recurring motifs and themes)⁵ that has developed during the latter half of the twentieth century. While initially being on the margins in the ufological milieu,⁶ narratives containing abduction motifs

5 As a concept, 'tradition' can both be understood to refer to "culture passed on' and [the] 'procedure of passing on of culture'" (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 238). Thomas E. Bullard argues in his doctoral dissertation that the development of UFO narratives can be understood as such a traditional process (1982: 470–477).

6 My conceptualization of a ufological milieu draws upon Colin Campbells' idea of a 'cultic milieu' (see Campbell 1972). It is my contention that such a model more correctly than the notion of a movement captures the nature of ufology. As I have previously conceptualized ufology, I construe the concept "in the broadest sense, encompassing all producers and consumers of materials related to said purported phenomena. The demarcation is drawn when acknowledgements or presuppositions on the existence of such phenomena are not being made" (Östling 2015: 374n4).

would steadily rise to prominence within ufology; and has further become a staple of contemporary popular culture. While, as will be shown, the Hills were not the first to report an alleged abduction, their narrative functions as a recurring benchmark (e.g. Jacobs 1992: 40–41; Mack 1994: 13–15); as the folklorist Thomas E. Bullard has observed, the Betty and Barney Hill case “defines the events of a ‘typical’ abduction and all others measure against it” (Bullard 1987: 6).⁷

In discussing abduction narratives, the present chapter aims to outline and discuss this narrative development and to highlight how we can understand texts describing purported abduction events to be a form of contemporary emergent legendry or mythology. In doing this, we will proceed from a brief overview of the beginnings of flying saucer lore and its relation to the concept of folklore—through a discussion on folkloristic genres and the rhetorical function of first-person narratives—onwards to a discussion on the development of abduction narratives. We will further discuss these narratives in relation to comparativist endeavors that juxtaposes alien abductions to various historical belief traditions containing similar motifs of supernatural capture. Finally, we will outline how this narrative tradition develops in relation to the ufological milieu, and to the wider occulture through the interaction with mass media and popular culture.

8.2 From Flying Saucers to Folklore

The conceptual nascence of ‘flying saucers’ or ‘flying disks’⁸ (forerunners to ‘Unidentified Flying Objects’ or ‘UFOs’) can be traced to June 24, 1947 and the interaction of Kenneth Arnold (1915–1984)—a salesman of fire control equipment by trade and a private aviator—and the two reporters Nolan Skiff and Bill Bequette from the *East Oregonian* in Pendleton, Oregon. Arnold claimed to have, during a flight between Chehalis and Yakima (both located in Washington

7 This is of course a position that is not necessarily agreed upon from the perspective of a ufologist; or ‘abductionist’ to talk with Curtis Peebles (1994: 225–241). For example, Budd Hopkins has argued that while the “case in all its particularities has become a kind of model, a canonical type against which other abduction cases have been measured” (1981b: 44); he would see the narrative as “more the exception than the rule” (1981b: 44). This ties into Hopkins’ conception of abductions as an epidemic of yet unfathomed proportions, and where the majority might be unaware of being affected: “the abduction phenomenon is largely invisible, and its extent is potentially vast” (Hopkins 1981b: 56).

8 Both the spelling ‘flying disk’ and ‘flying disc’ can be found in the source materials (see Blakeslee 1947; *Los Angeles Times* 1947).

state), observed nine peculiar and crescent-shaped crafts flying in formation at a tremendous speed. Outlining his observation to the reporters Arnold described the objects flight characteristics as “like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water.” However, when Skiff and Bequette—working on a tight deadline—wrote up Arnold’s narrative for the newspaper the objects were described as “saucer like,” transforming a description of flight characteristics to a purported shape. Bequette would further forward this description through an Associated Press wire, thus giving the flying saucer flap of 1947 its initiatory momentum (Bartholomew 2000: 202–204; cf. Jacobs 1975: 36–37; Peebles 1994: 8–10).⁹ As such, mass media can be seen as imperative in forming the burgeoning flying saucer legendry and mythology (Denzler 2001: 8–9). The historian David M. Jacobs (who we will encounter further on in this essay in relation to his ideas on alien abductions) noted that the concept of flying saucers itself “set a tone of ridicule for the phenomenon” (1975: 37); and has further complained on the tone of derision that saucer narratives got in some media outlets: “many magazine writers with flashes of humorous ‘insight’ insisted on equating flying saucers with the Loch Ness monster or sea serpents” (1975: 41). This Silly Season sentiment can for example be seen in the *Los Angeles Times*’s tongue-in-cheek comment on July 8, 1947 asking their readers if they had “reported [their] flying disk?” and further linking the narratives to folklore:

Reliable statistics are not available on the numbers who left bar stools over the week-end to telephone fantastic variations of the skimming saucer yarn to newspapers, but they must be huge [...] At any rate, the flying saucer has joined up with the sea serpent and mermaid folklore.

Los Angeles Times 1947

On the same page, the newspaper also printed a drawing by staff artist Bruce Russell entitled “The State of the Nation” featuring Uncle Sam with saucers for eyes; highlighting American culture as caught in the middle of flying saucer fever. Twelve days later, *Washington Post* reprinted the drawing in an article by Howard W. Blakeslee; headlined as “Flying Saucers’ Called Forerunners of the New Atomic Folklore” (1947). Blakeslee takes a slightly less critical stance, quoting the psychiatrist J. L. Moreno to the effect of the saucers as a response to general cultural sentiments—foreshadowing Carl Gustav Jung’s *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1959):

⁹ For a retelling by Arnold of his purported observation, see Arnold 1948. Jacobs interestingly describes the objects as “disc-shaped” (1975: 36).

The basic cause seems to be fear of coming disaster. A social psychosis of this sort is difficult to diagnose because the individuals sharing in it are normal. These normal feelings are infectious. Mankind has experienced many similar developments in the past. These produced the beliefs in witches, pixies, devils, giants, Santa Clause and the astrological and other cults.

BLAKESLEE 1947

As the folklorist Alan Dundes observed, a popular everyday understanding of the concept of 'folklore' see it "as a synonym for error, fallacy, or historical inaccuracy" (Dundes 1966: 226; cf. Bascom 1965: 7; Bullard 1991a: 1). It seems further safe to state that the concept of folklore in such a popular sense can be said to carry with it sentiments of the rural and pre-industrial and notions of perceived survivals of superstitions from earlier and more archaic times—vestiges of culture doomed to disappearance by increasing modernisation. Just as early social and cultural anthropology set out to gather and preserve the remains of the perceived 'primitive' cultures, the folklorists aimed to capture the remnants of the more vulgar strata of society and culture to be found at home (Dorson 1976: 33–45; Dorson 1982: 71–72; Dundes 1980: 1–6; cf. Saler et al. 1997: 32–33). Regarding the conceptualization of the 'folk' in relation to a specific American folklore Richard M. Dorson observed in 1945 that "a 'folk' does not exist in the United States in the Old World sense of a rooted, tightly knit, traditionally minded community. [...] Although the term is convenient to use, by itself and in compounds, its American meaning probably approximates 'popular'" (Dorson 1945: 207n1). Further, an important, and oft invoked (see e.g. Bullard 1982: 13–14; Bullard 1991a: 4; Saler et al. 1997: 33) development of the idea of 'folk' in folklore was Alan Dundes' formulation that "the term 'folk' can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor" (Dundes 1966: 232, original emphasis); thus effectively removing any necessary link to traditional or pre-modern societies. As such, we could talk about a plethora of folk groups in contemporary society, of various sizes and intersecting at multiple points—from subcultures to nations as a whole (Dundes 1980: 6–14). In outlining the scope of such folk groups in relation to ufology Thomas E. Bullard has observed that "the people who respond at all to UFOs, whether to ally with favorable or unfavorable positions, constitute the folk of UFO lore" (1982: 14). As will be argued in this essay, UFO narratives can come with varying levels of ontological or metaphysical suppositions (cf. Östling 2016: 420–421), thus requiring varying levels of commitment in holding them as veridical. Understanding 'folk,' in relation to narrative traditions, at its most macro level we can talk about chains of narrative transmissions

that are on national or even international scales; and through mass media and popular culture (cf. Bullard 1982: 14), to borrow a phrasing from Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, “legends reach out to the masses and make participants of almost everyone in society” (1978: 270).

8.3 Folklore and Narrative Genres

Regarding the perceived mysterious nature of UFOs, Linda Dégh has observed that “their continued mystery maintains an international cycle of legends” (1971: 55). Following this, we are thus led to the question of what we mean when we label something a ‘legend.’ Unravelling and sorting out the conceptual nomenclature of narrative genres (and sub-genres) can indeed be a rather daunting task to perform; especially in light of Elliot Oring’s observation on the concept of legend that “[t]he downside [...] from the point of the folklorist, is that no one seems to be able to pin down precisely what it is” (2008: 127; cf. Koski 2016: 113). Scholars in the history of religions (and in the humanities in general), are of course well accustomed to the ever-ongoing debates over definitions or the feasibility of defining a specific concept (as for example ‘religion,’ where it is easier to pinpoint which social and cultural processes that should be included in the domain, than to actually offer a definition that neither falls short of capturing all the desired phenomena nor includes more than what is reasonable). Such as it is, I will here only offer a rudimentary overview of genres that have bearing on the materials in question; and we are well to remember Lauri Honko’s statement that narrative genres are ideal types (1968: 61; cf. Koski 2016: 117).¹⁰

When discussing legends as a part of folklore we are then dealing with a genre within what William Bascom labels as “prose narrative[s],” a form of popular expression in prosal form that Bascom separates from other forms of “verbal art,” such as proverbs and riddles (1965: 3). A basic genre division of prose narratives to be made is that between ‘legends’ and ‘folk tales’ (sometimes vernacularly referred to as ‘fairy tales’),¹¹ where a common denominator

10 For the situation of definitions in folklore, see e.g. Dégh (1985: 99); Ward (1991: 296).

11 Strictly speaking, Bascom differentiates between ‘folk tales’, ‘myths’, and ‘legends’, where the latter two categories both refer to culturally perceived veridic narratives. The differentia between myths and legends are in this system related to the domain covered by each narrative form. Legends speak of perceived recent historical events and myths relate happenings in the far away past, including the workings of divine beings. As etic categories this conceptual system is as Bascom observed not necessarily to be found cross-culturally, while he does however seem to find the difference between purported truthful

of difference is the alleged historicity and veracity of legends. Donald Ward has observed that already in the early nineteenth century, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm saw the former category as purportedly historical, and in contrast to the imaginative and poetic qualities of the latter one (1991: 296–297; cf. Koski 2016: 113; Tangherlini 1990: 371). This basic differentiation has according to Timothy Tangherlini “influenced the entire course of legend scholarship” (1990: 371–372), and echoes of this dichotomy can be spotted in Dégh’s statement that for the legend “[i]t is not the story that counts, but the message it conveys” (Dégh 1992: 104).¹²

As narratives, legends deal with what can be labelled as the “extraordinary” (Oring 2008: 129) or the “exceptional, potentially true events in the margins of the narrators’ and listeners own, conceivable social reality” (Koski 2016: 114);¹³ and as Kaarina Koski further has observed, following the work of Bill Ellis, “the first stage of a legend being born is that it names a marginal experience” (2016: 123). In doing this, legends aim to deal with the world as it is perceived to be,¹⁴ and as such, to borrow Carmen Blacker’s phrasing, “purport to be factually true” (1967: 121; cf. Oring 2008: 128). This, however, should not lead us to assume that we are warranted in claiming the notion that every teller of (or listener to) a legend by necessity hold a belief in its historical veracity (since legends can be narrated both to make a claim about the world and for their value as entertainment).¹⁵ This can further be underscored by Dégh’s

and fictional genres to be recurring all over the world (1965: 4–5). Bascom has further argued that the usage of ‘fairy tales’ as a rubric for a narrative category should be considered a misnomer “because narratives about fairies are usually regarded as true, and because fairies do not appear in most folktales” (1965: 4).

12 Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi has however criticised the view that legends as narratives do not exhibit any form of folk artistry—a notion that they argued had led to certain amount of neglect in scholarly attention (1974: 233).

13 Oring has however also argued that in narrating such events, the legend’s internal “logic must adhere to the logic of everyday life” (2008: 148). Discussing abduction narratives, it has been observed that in their more developed form show a dreamlike quality (Matheson 1998); however, Bullard has argued that the narratives are “remarkably consistent” in conforming to an “ideal pattern” of eight specific narrative elements: 1. capture; 2. examination; 3. conference; 4. tour; 5. otherworldly journey; 6. theophany; 7. return; and 8. aftermath (Bullard 1987: 48). Bullard’s position on the significance of the pattern structure has been questioned in regards to that the logical structure of a narrative would require certain elements to precede others (Matheson 1998: 222–223).

14 Bill Ellis has argued that legends are to be understood as “normative definitions of reality, maps by which one can determine what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen” (1989: 202).

15 To this point one can sometimes find a differentiation between belief- and entertainment legends, see e.g. Honko (1964: 12–13); Pentikäinen (1968: 121–122); Ward (1991: 301).

statement that “[a]mong the members of the legend-transmitting chain [...] there are also skeptics as well as deniers” (Dégh 1977: 247). As such, even this essay becomes yet another link in the chain of proliferating narratives (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 227). In light of this, Tangherlini has argued that legends are not to be considered to be held as historical *per se*, but rather as “*historicized* narrative[s]” and where “[t]he believability of the narrative is underscored by the historicization of the account”; as such they are “a reflection of folk belief” (Tangherlini 1990: 379, original emphasis). Legends are, in Oring’s words a form of “performance of truth” (2008: 160), and as such various rhetorical devices may be employed in narration to underline the legend’s truthfulness (see Oring 2008: 131–158). Such a rhetorical stance could be the utilization of a first-person perspective; where the narration not simply retells any purportedly veridical event, but rather is an example where the narrator adds the epistemic weight of actually having experienced it for themselves (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 231; Koski 2016: 116; Oring 2008: 133).¹⁶ As narratives, reports dealing with observed UFOs or alleged alien abduction often take this first-person form, as “personal narratives” (Dégh 1977: 243; cf. Dewan 2006: 187). In order to understand how we are to conceptualize these narratives; we need now to venture into the development and utilization in folklore and the history of religions of first-person perspectives in relation to folk religious belief materials.

Writing during the first half of the twentieth century, the Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow outlined a categorical system for prose narratives, of which an elemental distinction was drawn between the categories of ‘memorates’ and ‘fabulates’ (von Sydow 1948: 86–88).¹⁷ For von Sydow, memorates were conceptualized as “narratives of personal happenings,” while the fabulates were envisioned as “short, single-episodic tales, built, it is true, upon elements of real happenings and observations, but with this background of reality transformed by the inventive fantasy of the people” (1948: 87). In outlining memorates in such a fashion, von Sydow would see these narratives as non-traditional (though conducive in forming fabulate traditions in themselves through repetition) and based in psychological processes in the individual observer, for example hallucinations. Expanding on von Sydow’s work the next generation of scholars would re-conceptualize the memorate as standing in

16 Terry Matheson has, in studying books relating stories about alien abduction, tried to outline narrative strategies used by the authors in portraying the narratives as true events (see Matheson 1998).

17 In this endeavour von Sydow was, as has been observed by several writers, attempting to conceptualize a Linnaean taxonomy of narrative genres (Drobin 1983: 125; Koski 2016: 115; Pentikäinen 1973: 218; Pentikäinen 1979: 43). For a recent overview and critique of the development of this outlook on narrative genres, see Koski 2016: 115–118.

relation to cultural currents and belief traditions, focusing on why certain supranormal events would be frequent in specific cultural settings (Drobin 1983: 125–132); memorates would here, to use Ulf Drobin's words, be understood in a manner consistent with the observation that it is "collective tradition that forms the individual experience" (1983: 132; cf. Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 236–237; Pentikäinen 1968: 120). Thus, by the 1960s memorates would become indispensable for the source-critical folklore of for example the Finnish scholars Lauri Honko and Juha Pentikäinen (Koski 2016: 116). In this approach memorates were seen as holding the highest evidentiary value to access authentic traditions of folk belief; and were thus differentiated from cultural fictions and folktales which were held to have insignificant value as sources (Honko 1964). For Pentikäinen experience itself constituted "the actualization of a belief within some supranormal frame of reference" (1979: 41), and through narratives about experience one could thusly, with the right theoretical tools, reach a fuller view of tradition:

A memorate is an experiential narrative—a description of a supranormal experience undergone by the narrator or somebody close to him, and it is the most reliable source for the scholar of religion. It represents an empirical tradition; the surest way to recognizing a memorate is by its authenticity from the standpoint of perception psychology. By taking into account the perception-psychological and social-psychological factors we may decide how authentically the memorate being studied describes the supranormal experience.

PENTIKÄINEN 1979: 50

Given the previously outlined situation with the folkloristic definitions of the 'legend,' it is no surprise that the nature of von Sydow's memorates and fabulates have garnered scholarly debate in a similar fashion—Pentikäinen observed this when he stated that "[i]t would be hard to find any two researchers who have used either the term legend or the term memorate in precisely the same way" (1973: 217). As envisioned by von Sydow the fabulate seems to correspond to the concept of the legend (Drobin 1983: 127); and in the subsequent scholarly work one can both find the position that memorates are a sub-genre of legends (Bullard 1982: 6; Koski 2016: 115), and conversely that they are not (Pentikäinen 1973). Dégh and Vázsonyi argued in the early 1970s against the possibility to clearly demarcate the memorate from other narrative genres (1974: 225). Their argument were based in the observation that narrating a story in the first-person form were a narrative device in itself; and further that just

as memorates could—by repeated retelling—become fabulates, so could the fabulate be transformed into a first-person memorate when told as a genuine experience (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 228; cf. Koski 2016: 116; Oring 2008: 134), thus raising its purported credibility. Oring similarly has observed that “[t]he first-person memorate is likely to be the most suasive type of account, for the narrator claims to report something he or she has experienced” (Oring 2008: 133). For the person at the receiving end in a narrative transmission-chain there is no inherent difference to be discerned genre-wise if the recounted story actually happened or not (Dégh 1977: 246–247). The important point is here not the question of the existence of a personal experience in itself but rather the appeal to such an experience in the narrative process. As such, Koski has argued, “the difference between fabulates and memorates have been reduced to style: fabulates describe the same event as stereotyped or distanced, while memorates link it to one’s own life or social circle” (Koski 2016: 118). As we have seen above, abduction narratives often take the form of first person memorates; and while this discussion on folkloristic genre conceptions might seem tangential to the overarching aim of this essay, I would argue that it is imperative to outline in what way we are here using the concept; and more importantly in what way we are not using it.

In American folkloristics, following especially the works of David J. Hufford, an experience-centred approach to traditions have emerged (e.g. Bullard 1989: 167–168; Dewan 2006; Ellis 1988; Hufford 1977; Hufford 1982a). Central to Hufford’s position is the idea that experiential narratives can exist independently of a specific tradition-corpus—exemplified with comparing memorates of being attacked (or ‘hagged’ or ‘hag-ridden’) by an entity known as the Old Hag in Newfoundland with similar accounts collected in parts of North America lacking such a tradition of supernatural assault. While Hufford’s discussion on these narratives in relation to such somatic states as sleep paralysis is convincing (Hufford 1976; Hufford 1982a); my understanding of experience as a concept is here informed by the observation by Olav Hammer’s (2001: 348) and Robert H. Sharf that we can never claim to study experiences directly, but rather are left to dabble with their remnants:

Scholars of religion are not presented with experiences that stand in need of interpretation, but rather with texts, narratives, performances, and so forth. While these representations may at times assume the rhetorical stance of phenomenological description, we are not obliged to accept them as such. On the contrary, we must remain alert to the ideological implications of such a stance. Any assertion to the effect that someone

else's inner experience bears some significance for *my* construal of reality is situated, by its very nature, in the public realm of contested meanings.

SHARF 2000: 283, original emphasis; cf. BULLARD 1987: iii¹⁸

This is not to argue that every experiential claim is to be considered spurious (cf. Sharf 2000: 286); rather the point here is that in studying these traditions we do not study experiences *per se* but rather narratives *about* experiences—and further acknowledging the rhetorical and legitimizing strategies that can tie into claims of access to pure unmediated religious experience (Sharf 2000: 269).¹⁹ Ulf Drobin's observation regarding von Sydow's memorate definition does here seem apt: "Such a definition of genre applied to narratives of religious experiences can scarcely reflect anything but the researcher's own belief; it might, for example, well be used in an endeavour to prove the ontological relevance of occult and parapsychological experiences" (Drobin 1983: 126). In relation to ufological narratives there are indeed several examples to be found of what Peter M. Rojcewicz has referred to as "anomalous folklore" (e.g. 1997: 499–507) and where experiential accounts are held to signify the need for greater ontological shifts in our understanding of such narratives.²⁰ Rojcewicz is thusly arguing for such a shift when he alleges that "[j]ust as traditional understandings can influence descriptions and interpretations of experiences, so repeated encounters with prodigies can influence traditional beliefs. From this perspective, people believe in UFO abductions because something truly uncanny actually occurs, and not simply because the local belief system permits or encourages such a belief" (1989a: 115).

One might perhaps argue that in taking the above outlined critical perspective on experiential descriptions one becomes part of what Hufford has described as the "traditions of disbelief" (Hufford 1982b). The point, however, that I want to make is firmly based in a methodologically agnostic stance, where the purported objective reality behind various claims are beyond the scope of study. As Donald Ward has observed "[t]he folklore scholar is fortunate in regard to this debate inasmuch as he need not concern himself with the question of the existence or non-existence of paranormal phenomena" (Ward 1977: 216); and as Dégh has even more succinctly stated, the folklorist studying ufology

18 Interestingly, Sharf is using abduction narratives as a comparison to those discourses on religious experiences that he is analysing: "is there any reason to assume that the reports of experiences by mystics, shamans, or meditation masters are any more credible as 'phenomenological descriptions' than those of the abductees?" (2000: 282).

19 Olav Hammer has outlined narratives of experience as one type of epistemological strategy in the contemporary religious landscape (see Hammer 2001: 331–453).

20 For a recent example, see Strieber and Kripal (2016).

“does not need to watch the skies and strain his neck, he can stay among fellow earthlings for scientific explorations” (Dégh 1977: 244).

8.4 Alien Abductions as a Narrative Tradition

As we noted in the introductory section to this essay, while offering a formative and important version of the abduction narrative, Betty and Barney Hill cannot be held to be the first reported instance of such a narrative. A sometimes-considered possible other contender is the story of the Brazilian farmer Antônio Villas Boas (see e.g. Smith 2001: 3; cf. Bullard 1987: 5) who reportedly was dragged aboard a landed craft on the night of October 15, 1957 and induced into sexual intercourse with a female extraterrestrial being (Creighton 1969). While Villas Boas' narrative was known to American ufologists in the early 1960s (Bullard 1987: 6), it would not be published in English until the 1965 January-February and March-April issues of the British periodical *Flying Saucer Review* (see Creighton 1965a; 1965b).²¹

A somewhat more probable first instance of a published abduction memoir can be located in the December 11, 1957 edition of the *Prince George Citizen* (a British Columbia newspaper) (Bullard 1987: 5). The narrative relates the experience of an unnamed soldier “working for the U.S. occupation army in Austria” (Powell 1957:1) who encounters an alien being outside of Salzburg:

He had no hair at all, I could see through the sort of glass helmet. His head was sort of cylinder form. A very high forehead with big eyes. You could see lots of little eyes in the two big eyes. It seemed to me it looked like the eyes of a fly. No nose at all, just two holes. He had a very small slit for the mouth. It looked like he had skin, it was sort of white. There was two holes for the ears. His skull was very large. He had no eyebrows or any hair at all.

POWELL 1957: 3

Paralysed and brought aboard a landed flying saucer the soldier is taken on an interplanetary journey to what he thinks is the planet Mars; and where he sees waterways, fields of flowers and also other humans (Powell 1957).

Mikael Rothstein has argued that the story of the anonymous soldier—as the first abduction narrative—arrived too early on the scene, and at a time

21 Charles Bowen, then editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, claimed that they got wind of Villas Boas' claims in 1962 through their Brazilian contacts (Bowen 1969: 245).

when the climate was more auspicious for contactee narratives in the likes of George Adamski. Thusly not generating any narrative development; and that it would not be until some years later in the 1960s that tales casting aliens as nefarious or demonic could start to circulate (Rothstein 2000: 195–196). As it stands, Rothstein's suggestion holds a certain amount of merit—indeed the 1950s were the heyday of the contactees—however, I will argue here that it does at the same time somewhat miss the mark. Firstly, one must keep in mind that concurrently with the contactee accounts of benevolent space brothers and sisters (and their concerns for humanity's destructive cultural trajectories with nuclear weapons) the popular culture of the 1950s teemed with monstrous extraterrestrial beings; sometimes including the motif of abducting aliens (Bullard 1989: 164). Secondly, it is not the case that the capture motif was unheard of in the ufological literature of the early days of flying saucers. As Brenda Denzler has observed, in his 1955 book *The Case for the UFO* the American ufologist Morris K. Jessup would hypothesise on capture narratives (Denzler 2001: 50; see also Rogerson 1993: 4), tying them to the stories of the ghost ship *Mary Celeste* or the sudden appearance of Kaspar Hauser in Nuremberg in 1828 (Jessup 1955: 119–125; 142–143). In a similar fashion, one year earlier, the British writer Harold T. Wilkins observed that “[e]vidently, there are people in the U.S.A. who believe that flying saucer entities have kidnapped human beings!” (1954: 267)—further musing on the implications of these alleged happenings: “One wonders how many cases of mysterious disappearances of men and women, in 1948–1952, might be explained as ‘TAKEN ABOARD A FLYING SAUCER MET IN A LONELY PLACE?’” (1954: 250; cf. Rogerson 1993: 3). Further, as has been shown in an article by Peter Rogerson (1993), narratives detailing abductions can also be found in sources published during the first half of the 1950s.²²

In order to grasp why the proliferation of abduction motifs would have such a slow start, one needs to consider the reception of UFO occupant cases *vis-à-vis* contactees within the ufological milieu.²³ Just as flying saucer movies of the 1950s both included the messianic Klaatu of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Etherden 2005) and the invading Martians of *The War of the Worlds*, so did

22 Bullard sees such narratives, or the Domsten case (see below) as only tangentially linked to more fully formed abduction reports—sharing only a few motifs (1987: 304). Such a perspective would disregard more contemporary abduction stories as a traditional development from earlier existing motifs (cf. Matherson 1998: 158n16).

23 As I have argued elsewhere “the investigatory organizations and the contactees can be considered competing producers in the same occultural milieu” (Östling 2015: 385). For a somewhat trenchant overview of the animosities between the contactees and the early investigatory flying saucer groups, see Jacobs (1975: 108–131).

UFO narratives of the era include both the benevolent Orthon from Venus or Aura Rhanes from Clarion (see Adamski 1956: 40; Bethurum 1954: 68), and reports of purported strange or frightening observations of saucer occupants or 'ufonauts.' Such narratives included the alleged besieging of the Sutton family by self-illuminating and clawed alien beings outside of Hopkinsville, Kentucky in 1955, or the 1952 report of the so-called Flatwoods Monster of Flatwoods, West Virginia (Bullard 1982: 263–264; Lorenzen 1969: 144–145, 152–153). Ufology, of course, cannot be considered a monolithic movement of identical perspectives to the purported phenomena. Indeed, different investigatory groups would take different attitudes to such cases of observed beings. This can be seen when looking at another early example of a UFO report including the motif of extraterrestrial capture.

On December 20, 1958, Hans Gustavsson and Stig Rydberg alleged to have just barely eluded capture by a group of amorphous and doughlike beings that they had spotted near a landed saucer outside of Domsten in southern Sweden (Svahn and Liljegren 1989). Interestingly, two Swedish investigators, separately, sent reports to American ufological organizations—the aforementioned NICAP (see Schalin 1959) and Jim and Coral E. Lorenzen's *Aerial Phenomena Research Organization* (APRO) (see e.g. Rehn 1959a). As an organization APRO was generally more positive to alleged occupant cases (while not accepting contactee claims) (Jacobs 1975: 183; see also Lorenzen 1959); as the Swedish ufologist Clas Svahn has observed (Svahn and Liljegren 1989: 12) APRO did choose to publish the story (see Rehn 1959b), while NICAP on the other hand decided to ignore it.²⁴ The more occupant-sceptical position of NICAP can be understood in light of their ongoing efforts to give the study of UFOs a scientific legitimacy and, most importantly, to their campaigns to through Congress make the US Air Force disclose their alleged UFO secrets. As such, any report of observed beings were too similar to the contactees to be taken seriously, and it would not be until the mid-1960s with the observation of the Socorro, New Mexico policeman Lonnie Zamora that reported observations of alien beings became more or less unanimously accepted within ufology (Denzler 2001: 38–39; Jacobs 1975: 145–192).

Even among those ufologists who early on accepted occupant cases one can find the need to differentiate these narratives from the likes of Adamski. This

24 The narrative would further spread in wider circles through the pulp magazines *Fate* (Hunt 1960) and *Flying Saucers* (Rehn 1959c), the latter account being a reprint of Rehn's report from *The A.P.R.O. Bulletin*. The *Flying Saucers* issue also accompanied the story with another short APRO reprint, which the editor Ray Palmer headlined as "Family of Seven Disappears (Kidnapped by Saucers?)" (1959) thus highlighting yet another early instance of the capture motif.

perspective can be seen in an article by Isabelle L. Davis where non-contactee occupant reports seem to hold an alienness that is considered more fitting of beings from other worlds:

The little men's appearance is humanoid, not superhuman; their behavior is quite incomprehensible; and they never *communicate* at all. They utter no lofty messages, no explanations of ancient riddles, no admonitions, warning, reassurances, prophecies, or esoteric doctrine.

DAVIS 1957: 44–45, original emphasis

It shall be remembered that it was NICAP that conducted the initial investigation into the Hill's story. The investigator, Walter Webb, while observing that "[o]ne, of course, must maintain a proper skepticism whenever occupants or creatures are involved in UFO cases simply because of the sensational nature of the claim" (Webb 1961: 1), nevertheless, found the couple to be truthful in retelling their story (1961: 4). In Webb's report the only hint of abduction is Barney's alleging the feeling that the observed beings in the craft were coming for them.

In offering a tentative historical overview of the development of alien abduction narratives, one important node would naturally be the publication of Betty and Barney Hill's story. While Walter Webb did write up a report for NICAP, it would not be until the fall of 1965 that the story was published for the first time in a Boston newspaper (see e.g. Luttrell 1965). While the Hill's themselves had not sought out this publicity, they had publicly discussed their experience at a meeting for a UFO group and their talk had unbeknown to them been recorded. Teaming up with the writer John G. Fuller in producing *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours "Aboard a Flying Saucer"* was thus a way to get some control over the story, to tell it as they saw it (Fuller 1966: 287–288), and it would be through this book that their position in ufology fame were properly established. If the publication of this book can be held as one formative moment in the development of the alien abduction narratives, then another important developmental node would come some 15 years later with the publication of Budd Hopkins' book *Missing Time*—published in 1981 (Bader et al. 2010: 63–64; Denzler 2001: 55; Rothstein 2000: 204). While the 1960s and 70s did generate several abduction narratives—such as the 1973 abductions of Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker while fishing in Pascagoula, Mississippi, or the five day disappearance of the logger Travis Walton in the forest of Arizona in 1975 (Bullard 1989: 149)—abductions were seen as utterly rare occurrences, instances of a misfortune of cosmic proportions where someone were “in the

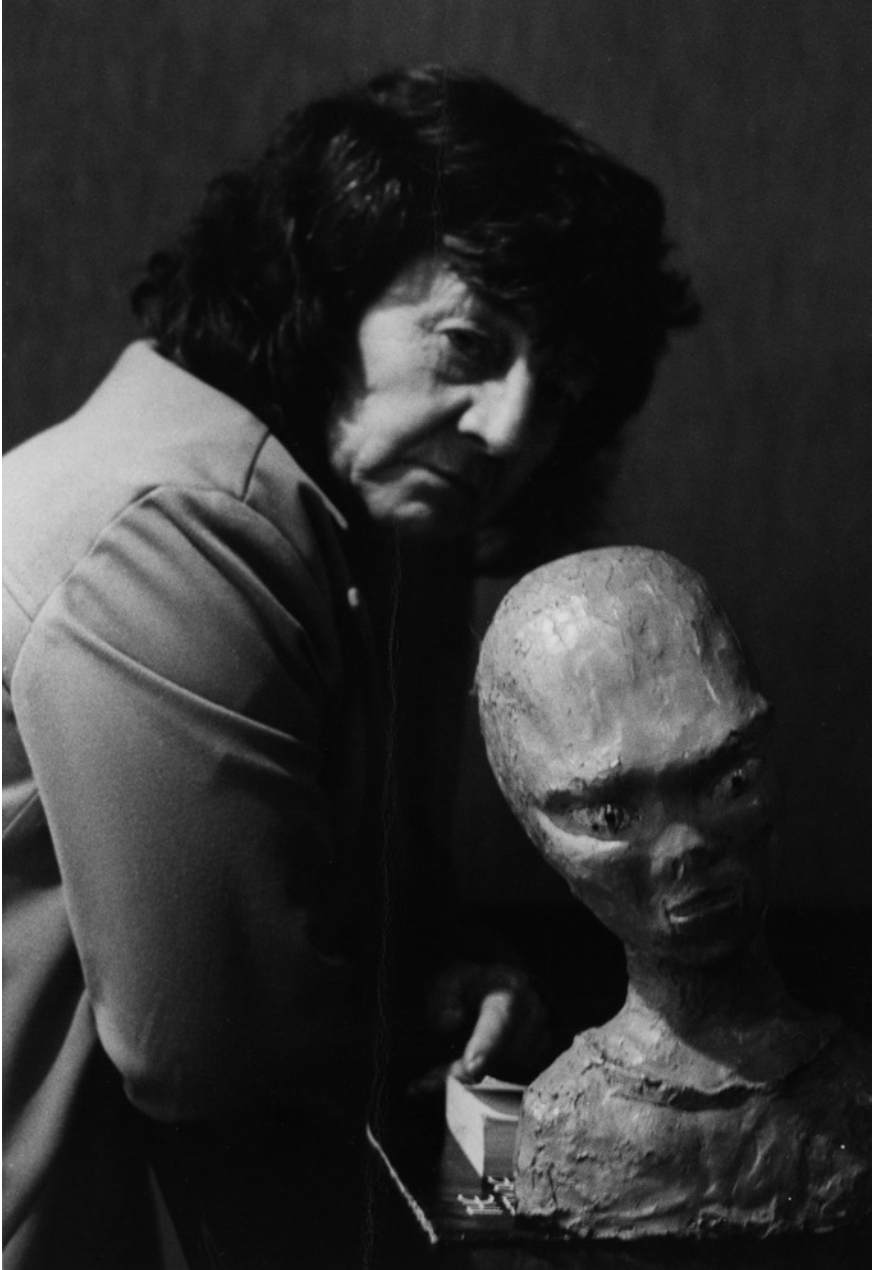


FIGURE 8.2 Betty Hill with papier-mâché alien head

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wrong place at the wrong time" (Bader 2003: 676).²⁵ By the 1980s, purported recurring incidents became an important facet in the narratives, and when Christopher D. Bader surveyed abductees in the late 1980s the mean amount of claimed incidents per person were ten (Bader 2003: 676). What Hopkins would bring to the narrative tradition would be a rising of the stakes of abductions as a phenomenon. No longer would it be a necessary prerequisite to have observed a UFO or its pilots. Memories of abduction events were now envisioned as being able to stay so well hidden within that their only manifestations could be general feelings of distress and uneasiness (Bader et al. 2010: 63; Matheson 1998: 134–136; cf. Hopkins 1981a: 51–88); thusly the number of reported cases grew steadily (see e.g. Hopkins et al. 1992: 13). By 1992, Hopkins together with David M. Jacobs and the sociologist Ron Westrum published a report based on a nation-wide poll of the American population, in which they concluded that the prevalence of what they called the "UFO abduction syndrome" was staggering. Polling the American populace for unusual experiences²⁶ that the authors argued correlate with abductions led to the estimate that about 2% of American adults are abductees (Hopkins et al. 1992: 14–15).

The importance Budd Hopkin's influence would have on the further development of the narrative tradition from the 1980s and onwards cannot be underestimated. Writer's such as Whitley Strieber—whose *Communion: A True Story* (1987) in itself was a bestselling account of a purported score of abduction events—David M. Jacobs, and John E. Mack can all be said to stand in relation to Hopkin's work.

8.5 Alien Abduction Narratives and the Scope of Comparison

An oft mentioned observation about abduction narratives is their similarity to traditions of supernatural assault, capture or kidnapping (e.g. Bullard 1989; Jackson 2017; Rojcewicz 1989a; Rothstein 2000: 64–66), which can be found in belief systems from various cultures. For example, the Japanese concept of

25 Bullard has similarly noticed this happenstance nature of capture narratives: "[c]ontact with the otherworld and its inhabitants is fraught with danger for humans. A common peril for unfortunate people whether out in the open or within their own homes is kidnapping by a marauding troop of fairies, a fate sometimes deserved, but often determined in traditional legends as well as in abduction reports by nothing more than the bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time" (1989: 160).

26 Such experiences could e.g. be "feeling as if you left your body," "having seen, either as a child or adult, a terrifying figure [...] in your bedroom or closet or somewhere else," or "[h]aving vivid dreams about UFO's" (see Anonymous 1992: 21–22).



FIGURE 8.3 Budd Hopkins, artist and abduction researcher in his home in November 2009
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

'kamikakushi'²⁷ (Blacker 1967; Sadler 1987) or the Scandinavian 'bergtagning'²⁸ (Jackson 2017) both refer to legendry where a hapless human being could end up in the clutches of non-human entities. Indeed, Lindow characterizes the latter concept as "a favorite activity of the supernatural nature beings" (Lindow 1998: 109). In more contemporary, and sometimes less supernatural,²⁹ traditions the abduction motif can also be located in at least one instance of a Bigfoot- or Sasquatch-narrative with the story of Albert Ostman who, in the 1950s alleged that he had (back in 1924) been held captive by a Sasquatch family—surmising that he had been taken as a mate to a young female (Buhs 2009: 60–61). In the same way, motifs of capture can be found in traditional folk tales.³⁰ One must here, however remind oneself of the genre difference between legends and folk tales, in that the latter does not purport to relate a historicized and 'true' event. Notwithstanding this however, they can be adduced to show the popularity of supernatural capture in various narrative traditions. Similarly, one can find hints of abduction motifs in early twentieth century pulp fiction novels, as in H. P. Lovecraft's³¹ *The Whisperer in Darkness* where the fungal Mi-Go, aliens from the planet Yuggoth, "like to take away men of learning once in a while, to keep informed on the state of things in the human world" (Lovecraft 1931: 38).

A recurring theme in abduction narratives is the focus on human sexuality and reproduction, and where the aliens' ulterior motive is seen as linked to attempts of human-alien hybridization (Flaherty 2010; cf. Hopkins 1987; Bullard 1989: 156; Jacobs 1992: 153–186, 198–207; Jacobs 1998). Bridget Brown has argued that Hopkins' second book, *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods* (Hopkins 1987), is the first book-length treatise arguing that the abduction phenomena in essence is "an interspecies breeding project" (Brown 2007: 84; cf. Matheson 1998: 154). However, as we saw earlier, already in the report of Antônio Villas Boas was an act of interspecies coitus described between the young man and a humanoid as a central theme. Though in Villas Boas's account, we do not encounter the iconic grey aliens of later lore, but rather a

27 Sadler translates 'kamikakushi' as "hidden by the *kami*" (Sadler 1987: 219, original emphasis). Blacker refers to this as a form of "supernatural kidnapping" (1967: 111). Rogerson has previously (1988: 6) discussed the tradition of kamikakushi in comparison with alien abduction narratives.

28 Lindow translates the Swedish concept 'bergtagning' as "taking into the mountain" (1998: 109; cf. Drobin 1983: 126).

29 The purported ontological status of the biped roaming the forest varies from a hypothesis of an unknown hominid to notions of a being with more supernatural prowess (see Bader et al. 2010: 136–141).

30 See e.g. F320 Fairies carry people away to fairyland; F451.5.2.4. Dwarfs kidnap mortals; R11 Abduction by monster (ogre) (Thompson 1955–1958).

31 Christopher Partridge has argued that such pulp authors as H. P. Lovecraft can be considered being parts of the "origins in popular culture" of abduction narratives (2004: 179).

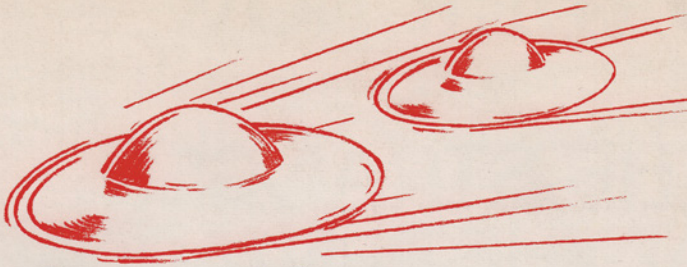
humanoid woman described as having fair hair on her head and pubic and underarm hair that was of a blood red colour (Creighton 1969: 216, 218):

Her body was much more beautiful than that of any woman I have ever known before. It was slim, with high and well-separated breasts, thin waist and a small stomach, wide hips and large thighs. Her feet were small, her hand long and narrow, and her fingers and nails were normal. She was quite a lot shorter than I, her head reaching up to my shoulder. This woman came towards me silently, looking at me with the expression of someone wanting something, and she embraced me suddenly and began to rub her head from side to side against my face. At the same time I felt her body all glued to mine and also making movements [...] All I know is that I became uncontrollably excited, sexually, a thing that has never happened to me before. I ended up by forgetting everything, and I caught hold of the woman, responded to her caresses with other and greater caresses ... It was a normal act, and she behaved just as any woman would, as she did yet again, after more caresses.

CREIGHTON 1969: 216–217

In contrast to later narratives, there is in this tale a purported titillating appeal of the sexual union. While being angry at his captors, Villas Boas conceded with perhaps a tint of machismo to having been used as “a good stallion to improve their own stock” (Creighton 1969: 218). As Curtis Peebles have observed, “[b]y the 1980s, with the spectre of AIDS haunting the bedroom, Hopkins was depicting [...] [human-alien hybridization] as a joyless, technological rape” (1994: 241). Among early receptions of Villas Boas’ narrative one can find a rather more positive interpretations of the story, as in Ed Wallace’s article *The Seductress From Outer Space*: “[h]ere is the story of Boy meets Supergirl, with details leading up to that fateful eve of mid-October, the date which may one day become the new Valentine’s Day in interplanetary relations” (Wallace 1967: 12). Accompanying the article itself is a one panel cartoon by Bruce Stark, featuring Villas Boas and the alien woman as a pin-up straight out of *Playboy*, complete with a 1960s style beehive hairdo. In a similar fashion in a 1967 article in the magazine *Sexology*, the fortean ufologist John Keel is referred to as “only half-laughingly [suggesting] [...] that the UFO’s may be engaged in some weird outer space Kinsey survey” (Gross 1967: 168).

Another early instance of the hybridizing theme can be found in a book advertisement on the back cover of the summer 1967 issue of *Saucer News*; provocatively headlined with “Forced into sex aboard a flying saucer: What is the result ... a new race of humanoids?” While the advertisement itself does not name the title of the book, a highly probably candidate for being the book in



forced into **SEX** aboard a flying **SAUCER**

**WHAT IS THE RESULT... A NEW RACE OF
HUMANIDS?**

This challenging book, the first of its kind, presents questions that must be answered by every government throughout the world to its citizens. The contents should not be suppressed any longer as it affects all mankind.

Are we being secretly invaded through mutations of the human race? **This book challenges the existence of every individual.** It goes beyond the entire U.F.O. question — written by a noted researcher — the full inside story of U.F.O. occupants. Fascinating experiences of everyday individuals who came in contact with extra-

terrestrial beings all over the world.

Now in its 2nd large printing, insure your copy by mailing the coupon now.

Flying Saucer Research, Inc.
Box 422 Murray Hill Station
New York, N.Y. 10016

Please rush my copy to me by return mail! I enclose a check/money order for \$5.95 plus 30¢ for postage and handling. (N.Y. City residents: please add city sales tax.)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

FIGURE 8.4 Advertisement on the back cover of the summer 1967 issue of Saucer News

question is Jan Hudson's (pseud.) *Those Sexy Saucer People*, published the same year (see Hudson 1967).³² Published in the Greenleaf Classics imprint—a purveyor of lurid sex paperbacks³³—the book includes both the Villas Boas narrative (under the rubric of “seduced in a saucer”) (1967: 163–168) and the alleged experience of a woman pseudonymously referred to as Cordelia Donovan, the “first Earth woman to have been raped in space” (1967:112). Her narrative is the focus of a chapter entitled “Raped in a U.F.O.” (1967: 112–129) which reads like a pornographic pulp exploitation story: “They were white slavers, I though hysterically. White slavers from space! Instead of being shipped off to a house of prostitution in South America, I would be taken to its equivalent on Jupiter or Saturn or God only knew where” (1967: 121). Donovan is by the trickery of a human accomplice brought on board the space craft of an all-male alien crew from the star Vega—colonizers having arrived in the solar system—and who's female companions all died in a crash (an incident the text ties to the Tunguska event of 1908). In need to substitute the missing companions Donovan is being held captive for six weeks, and while the narrative in multiple ways differ from the later abduction and hybridization accounts of Hopkins and similar abduction researchers, it does feature the same focus on probing sexual organs and the extraction of ova to be used in artificial reproduction.

Purported sexual relations between humans and non-human entities—what Rojcewicz have referred to as “other-sex” (1989b)—is well attested in various historical belief systems. As the historian Mikael Häll has shown, in the court records of early modern Sweden one can find several cases dealing with the act of sexual intercourse with various kinds of nature spirits, an act that could, as a crime against the natural order, result in a death sentence. Such beings were from the perspective of the Church seen as examples of incubi or succubae, demonic beings who lured women and men into sexual intercourse, with the aim of creating ungodly offspring (Häll 2013; cf. Flaherty 2010: 86–87). Christopher Partridge has argued that the contemporary abducting extraterrestrial draws upon the cultural lineage of such demonic beings, “the demonisation of the extraterrestrial [...] [draws] from a common pool of myths and ideas that can be traced back through the periods of the witch craze and the Middle Ages to early Christian thought and, ultimate, to Jewish apocalypticism” (Partridge 2004: 170; cf. Flaherty 2010; Vallée 1969: 119–129). Thusly, for Partridge, the aliens as “technological demon[s]” resonate with this shared cultural history, which lends them an air of plausibility (Partridge 2004: 173).

32 I am indebted to Håkan Blomqvist for pointing this out to me.

33 For an overview of the Greenleaf Classics, see Robert Spray's online database (Spray 2013).

Just as the abducting alien beings are routinely compared to medieval demons, so are they compared to such folkloric beings as the fairies of fairy-lore (Rojcewicz 1997: 491). Such comparativist endeavours owe a lot to the French-American computer scientist and ufologist Jacques Vallée (Rothstein 2000: 216; Denzler 2001: 109–110) as expressed in his classic monograph *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers* (Vallée 1969). Just like the ufonauts of abduction lore seem to need humans for their reproduction, so was humans seen as instrumental in the reproduction of the fairies—which can for example be seen in narratives of human midwives being captured and brought to their realm (Bullard 1982: 397, 438; Rojcewicz 1997: 492–494); Vallée would frame this similarity in the following way: “[w]hat was the purpose of such fairy abductions? The idea advanced by students of folk tales is [...] very close to a current theory about UFO’s: that the purpose of such contact is a genetic one” (1969: 105). In understanding the relationship between the traditions of the past and the present, Vallée would see this as the existence of a “continuum of beliefs [...] [that] leads directly from primitive magic, through mystical experience, the fairy-faith, and religion, to modern flying saucers” (1969: 131). For Vallée, as a ufologist, the importance in the comparison is to be found in the supposed shared unexplained nature inspiring the continuum of beliefs. This however, shall not be read as a position necessarily endorsing a view of actual physical aliens visiting Earth on a quest for our genetic materials (see e.g. Vallée 1969: 57). With *Passport to Magonia*, Vallée would move beyond the purely physicalist interpretations of his earlier work (Denzler 2001: 109–110), and conjectured among other on the existence of “a natural phenomenon whose manifestations border on both the physical and the mental,” visiting “mental entities,” or “that for centuries some superior intelligence has been projecting into our environment [...] various artificial objects whose creation is a pure form of art” (1969: 159–160). Finally conceding that “[w]e cannot be sure that we study something real, because we do not know what reality is; we can only be sure that our study will help us understand more, far more, about ourselves” (1969: 163).

Before one is carried away (no pun intended) by this comparativist analysis it shall emphatically be stated here that the relating of these narrative analogies are not to be held as a way to outline a necessary genealogical relationship between historical folkloric belief systems and contemporary legends about alien abductions. Richard M. Dorson, somewhat humorously, stated this perceived disconnect between traditional European supernatural lore and narrative traditions in the American context, that “[a]pparently the ethnic supernatural figures are too closely associated with the culture and geography of the Old Country to migrate” (Dorson 1959: 207). At the same time, however,

Dorson's position can be contested with reference's to Wayland D. Hand's account of multiple instances of fairy lore having followed immigrants across the Atlantic (1981). Regardless of the status of this specific question what the aforementioned comparative analogies *do* attest to—rather more modestly—is a certain human propensity to construct narratives about human dealings with a perceived 'other,' whether or not if Rojcewicz is correct in his bold and generalizing statement that "[n]o culture known to anthropology is without a body of beliefs and narratives concerning the human interaction with nonhuman others" (Rojcewicz 1997: 481). In creating such narratives, a border is drawn between the safe cultured space of humanity and the dangers that dwell on the outside (Bullard 1989: 168; Jackson 2017; cf. Häll 2013: 74–75; Lindow 1998: 109). This tie into Diane Purkiss' observation, as quoted by Christopher Partridge: "Now on earth there are no unknowns, no *terra incognitae*. But there are still the stars" (Partridge 2004: 172–173, original emphasis; cf. Häll 2013: 541–542).

8.6 Locating Abduction Narratives in Relation to the Ufological Milieu

In October 1990, the British zine *Magonia* offered a list of suggested likely trends to surface in ufology in the upcoming years. Among these, one directly relates to alien abductions: "[a]n abductee will form a cult on the Atherius [sic]/Raelian model" (*Magonia* 1990: 4). To the best of my knowledge, this has never happened; though interestingly enough the Raelian narrative of the conception of Rael himself draws upon the abduction motif in having his mother being taken aboard one of the extraterrestrial Elohim's crafts to be impregnated, and then later returned to Earth with her mind wiped clean of any trace of the event (Östling 2014: 371, 379n5). This aside, the abduction motifs seem to have mainly stayed as an element in the less formally organized facets of the milieu, rather than being included in the mythologies of formalized UFO-religions proper.

In tying up the loose ends of this essay we will now turn to the question on how to understand the abduction narratives as an emergent or contemporary form of folklore. In doing this, we will have to both look from the perspective of production and consumption—both from the textual and the social sides of the narrative tradition. While it might smack of a trite truism it is well remembered that a necessary prerequisite for the creation of a legendry, as with any social ontology, in the first place is through human interaction. As Bullard has observed "[c]ommunication draws UFOs into the social realm, and there the variety of UFO beliefs acquires its folkloric significance" (1991a: 6; cf. Dégh 1992: 106). According to Dégh and Vázsonyi, one can understand legends to spread

through legend conduits; as an interaction between a sender and a receiver of the legend in question (1975: 211). While folkloristics traditionally focused on the oral transmission of narratives (Bynum 1993: 94; Saler et al. 1997: 32–33), several scholars have pointed out the important function mass media (Baker 1976; Bullard 1982: 14; Danielson 1979; Dégh 1994) and popular culture (Bynum 1993: 94; Dorson 1959: 202) can have in the transmissive process:

We cannot speak about the legend as an oral folklore genre anymore because the coexistent vehicles of communication together shape them [...] In the past, we were too preoccupied with 'genuine', 'oral' texts, and did not pay particular attention to the multimedia variants in the background of emergent texts. We cannot afford this shortsightedness anymore because a new version cannot be interpreted without the comparative and contrastive analysis of its predecessors in any possible manifestation.

DÉGH 1992: 112

As has become apparent from the above discussions on the historical development of alien abductions; we are here dealing with a legendry that is passed along through various textual means. Central to this tradition are both the texts produced by abductees or experiencers themselves (e.g. Hickson and Mendez 1983; Strieber 1987; Walton 1978; Wilson 1993) and treaties by ufologists aiming at systematizing the facets of a purported phenomenon (e.g. Hopkins 1981a; Hopkins 1987; Jacobs 1992; Mack 1994). Further, narration goes through ufological periodicals and general mass media in the form of newspapers, tabloids (e.g. Pratt 1979) and articles in such magazines as *Playboy* (1978) or *Penthouse* (Barry 1977). Beyond written texts, the transmission of abduction narratives is facilitated through movies and television series (Bynum 1993: 94). Exemplifying the inclusion of the abduction motif, we can here mention for example *The UFO Incident*, *The X-Files*, and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

In a study on the legend corpus on cattle mutilations (a tradition which at points intersect with notions of UFOs and abductions), Bill Ellis has observed that the legend conduits can be found in the form of "specialized networks" (1991: 48) for the legend aficionados: "These networks generate close personal relationships among participants, have a high sense of self-identity, and share specialized information, so they are identical to conduits typical of folk groups, even though they augment traditional face-to-face oral transmission with modern communication media" (1991: 49). In relation to abductions, support groups for the affected have sprung up, and becomes venues to explore purported experiences (Bader 2003; Brown 2007: 13; Dégh 1992: 105). Just as

Budd Hopkins was instrumental in the narrative development in the 1980s, so would he be important in creating the first support group for abductees that would convene in his own home (Bader et al. 2010: 64).

It has for a long time in the sociological studies of alternative religious or paranormal belief systems been understood that such systems can be formed with varying levels of organizational complexity, and that at the most basic level we find not formalized organizations or movements *per se* but rather loosely formed networks and milieus. We can here call upon both Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge's notions of 'audience cults' (1985: 27–28), and the idea of 'paranormal subcultures' as conceptualized by Christopher D. Bader, F. Carson Mencken, and Joseph O. Baker (Bader et al. 2010: 100–128). A further important concept is Colin Campbell's idea that religious cults (the most ephemeral of the classical sociological categories of religious groups) are born out of a field or a milieu—the 'cultic milieu'—that is "highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general" (Campbell 1972: 122). My conceptualization of ufology as a field or a milieu is to be understood as a subset of the cultic milieu. Not only conducive for the formation of religious groups, one can further see such a milieu as an arena for narrative transmission. In outlining his thoughts, Campbell would describe the milieu in the following way:

The cultic milieu can be regarded as the cultural underground of society. Much broader, deeper and historically based than the contemporary movement known as *the* underground, it includes all deviant belief-systems and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs.

CAMPBELL 1972: 122, original emphasis

As we have previously noted, part of the legend conduits for abduction narratives goes through our contemporary popular culture. Building upon, and revising, Campbell's work, Christopher Partridge has argued that our contemporary culture is characterized by the existence of an 'occulture' as a pervasive cultural current and reservoir of for example paranormal and spiritual beliefs and practices (a part of secularization and re-enchantment); and where contemporary mass marketed popular culture is central to its diffusion and transformation (Partridge 2004–2005; cf. Dégh 1992: 106).

In his 1992 book, *Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of UFO Abductions*, David M. Jacobs argues against reading abductions as folkloric or inspired by contemporary popular culture—aiming specifically at comparativist folklore readings,

which he argues, “disconnect such folktales from their original social and cultural context and then present them as fact in a completely different milieu as if they have a life of their own [...] For adherents of the folklore hypothesis, facile resemblances become complex modern duplicates.” (1992: 298). In his critique, Jacobs sees folklore as generally “orally transmitted” and prone to consistent transmutations through the processes of narration (1992: 299). Folklorist and ufologist Thomas E. Bullard, has similarly argued that “[t]he question ... is not whether abduction reports can be legends. They certainly can, and UFOs in general constitute a form of modern folklore. The question must be: are these stories anything else than folklore, do they have a basis outside human traditions of belief?” (1991b: 17). This all amounts to a position reminiscing of Rojcewicz’s conception of an anomalous folklore. For Bullard, abduction narratives show such a high degree of content stability and consistency that they break the rules of a legendry; rather than bearing the hallmarks of a tradition it is for Bullard a phenomenon pointing to “shared experience” (1991b: 24; cf. Bullard 1987: 353–382). As has already been established, questions pertaining to the ultimate ontological nature are beyond the purview of the historian of religions, and will as such not be addressed here. Similarly, the question of the diachronic developments of specific narrative motifs would be well beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is well worth to remember that being a tradition that is highly textually narrated also amounts to a certain amount of consistency in that texts have a more stable permanence; as compared to purely oral transmission that can quickly change when handed down along the conduit. Further, it is well to remember that memorates cannot be seen to exist exclusively in a descriptive form; but can just as well be seen as *prescriptive* in offering authoritative accounts of how an abduction event is supposed to play out (cf. Honko 1964: 11–12; Sharf 2000: 272). Writers such as Hopkins, Jacobs or Mack, do not simply relate full-fledged abduction reports, but rather craft patchworks of narrative snippets in their aim to systematize the phenomenal characteristics (cf. Matheson 1998: 12). Within the milieu, abduction researchers attend authoritative expert positions and act as narrative gatekeepers in the conduits. This can be seen for example in Jacobs’ observation about the pitfalls of “dissociative fantasies, confabulations and false memories, or alien-instilled memories” (Jacobs 1998: 46) to be encountered in the process of memory retrieval through hypnosis (see Jacobs 1998: 30–60). The abduction researcher then has to work with more or less explicitly formed criteria on what can be seen as authentic abduction memories, and what is not. Echoing the classical divisions in ufology Jacobs argued that “[c]ontactees provide the model for what is not legitimate, but their claims

serve as a convenient touchstone for deciding which abduction reports are probably bogus and which may not be" (Jacobs 1992: 284). This can in itself be seen as part of the narrative process, and the negotiation on which motifs are to be kept and which are to be seen as unseemly: "[e]ach experience report has to face social censorship that immediately blue-pencils the antitraditional features of the memorate" (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974: 238).

In a previous study, I made the observation "that narratives dealing with observed UFOs and interactions with extraterrestrial beings exist in a continuum of forms; these range from the more explicitly religious stories (as in the narratives of the contactees) to forms that relate to religiosity on a more implicit level" (Östling 2016: 420). Drawing upon Joe Simonton's story of his encounter with beings making pancakes in a saucer that had landed outside of his house (see Simonton 1961; cf. Lorentzen 1969: 161–163), I envisioned that narratives can differ in the amount of "metaphysical superstructure" that is built on top of them (Östling 2016: 421). As a narrative, taken in isolation from a larger corpus, a tale of abductions might not in itself signify anything more than the purported existence of alien beings and them having visited Earth. Taken as a corpus, however, it is not hard to see how the ontological stakes can be raised into the forming of a mythology of alien abductions—and in investigating UFO or abduction narratives several authors have observed their mythic nature (e.g. Denzler 2001: 2–4; Matheson 1998: 279–303; Rothstein 2000: 211–219; Saler et al. 1997: 1–2). While myth and mythology are traditionally understood to mainly deal with the dealings of the gods from time immemorial (see Bascom 1965: 4); we can here draw upon Hammer's stipulation of myth as "a grand narrative of the nature of the cosmos [...] or of mankind [...]" (2001: 40). In giving an account of the relations between legendry and mythology, Bill Ellis has argued that the differences between these narrative categories (as it pertains to contemporary mythologies) "is simply one of levels of abstraction. Beliefs are combined and linked in legends; legends are combined and linked in mythologies" (Ellis 1991: 44). If legends primarily deal with what *is*, then the mythologies purport to explain the *why* (cf. Ellis 1991: 62). In the creation of purportedly explanatory frameworks for the abductions, whether they see the aliens as ultimately nefarious or benign;³⁴ a mythological fabric is woven, thread-by-thread, from the strands of abduction legends.

34 For an overview, see Partridge 2003: 26–36.

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'Focused Gatherings'? Notes for a Study of a UFO Conference

Rafael Antunes Almeida

9.1 Introduction: From "Focused Gatherings" to "Group Formations"

In the past forty years the field of anthropology of science has directed its efforts to the problems associated to the construction of scientific facts (Knorr-Cetina 1981), to the description of what has been called the sociotechnical networks composed of actants of heterogenous nature (Latour 1999), to the processes involved in publishing scientific results (Latour 1997) and, very frequently, to the participation of scientists in public debates. Although the discipline has produced contributions that substantially changed the field of Social Studies of Science and Technology, it had, along the years, absolutely ignored the task of describing scientific conferences. Even if the refusal is not openly pronounced, its absence among the anthropological monographs is made clear when one pursues bibliographical research on the topic and finds the small number of works on the theme. This absence of attention to the topic is also a characteristic of other fields, such as psychology, sociology and history of science.

Definitely, it is hard to speculate on the reasons that explain why the topic had so little attention, but it is possible to estimate that although some papers on the field of Social Studies of Science and Technology may describe conferences, the absence of a theoretical elaboration on these events is due to internal changes inside the proper field of Science and Technology studies (STS) that happened in the end of the 70s. I am referring to the transformation of a perspective that looked at science as organization, whose main proponent is the American sociologist Robert Merton, towards an attention directed to the construction of the "content and nature of scientific knowledge" (Bloor 1976: 3), as was defended by David Bloor, in what he called the Strong Programme in Sociology of Science. The Strong Programme was built around four tenets (Bloor 1976: 7) and constructed itself as an attempt to instrumentalize the sociology of science and technology to reach the real core of science, the scientific theories, which, according to Bloor, the sociologists of science had avoided discussing, leaving the task to the philosophers of science. Sociology, in the previous division of labour, the author teaches us, would

“explain error, limitation and deviation” (Bloor 1976: 9). The question is why, even after the successive revisions of the “Strong Programme” in sociology of science—among which is Bruno Latour’s fierce critique of the analytical frontiers between “context” and “content” (Latour 1999)—this was not sufficient to attract attention to the conferences as a fundamental site of constitution of the work of scientists.

In spite of the low attention within the field of STS,¹ this does not mean that the social sciences are entirely absent of genuine efforts to think that these transitory events that, at the same time that they disappear within days, obviously have some traces that denote their permanence along time. In the introduction of the already classic essay of the interpretative anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1972), while describing the cock fight at Bali, calls upon the notion of “focused gatherings” (Geertz 1972:10), a concept originally developed by the sociologist Erving Goffman, and which may cast some light on the nature of the conferences:

a set of persons engrossed in a common flow of activity and relating to one another in terms of that flow. Such gatherings meet and disperse; the participants in them fluctuate; the activity that focuses them is discreet—a particulate process that reoccurs rather than a continuous one that endures. They take their form from the situation that evokes them, the floor on which they are placed, as Goffman puts it; but it is a form, and an articulate one, nonetheless. For the situation, the floor is itself created, in jury deliberations, surgical operations, block meetings, sit-ins, cockfights, by the cultural preoccupations—here, as we shall see, the celebration of status rivalry—which not only specify the focus but, assembling actors and arranging scenery, bring it actually into being.

GEERTZ 1972: 10

The above extract from Geertz characterizes the “focused gatherings” by the presence of three distinctive traces: the variation or fluctuation of the public; the fact that it “reoccurs” (Geertz 1972: 10); and the dependence of the nature of the meeting of the “context” in which it takes place. The notion of “focused gatherings” (Goffman 1961: 8), as Goffman conceives it, was created to distinguish relations that, although may have some characteristics also found in

1 Obviously, there are exceptions. See, for example: Mckinlay and Potter (1987).

what he terms "social groups," are unique situations of interaction. According to him, social groups "continue to exist apart from the occasions when members are physically together" (Goffman 1961: 11). Besides, social groups are defined by several other traces, such as the "regulation of entering and leaving; capacity for collective action; division of labour, including leadership roles; socialization function ..." (Goffman 1961: 9)

The notion of "focused gatherings" may seem to be a good conceptual tool to analyse scientific conferences. However, its dependence on the notion of bounded group, as it was demonstrated by the list of characteristics established by Goffman, turns out to be an impediment to making this concept operate in situations in which the set of relations does not fit Goffman's list, or those in which its participants (members?) refuse to describe themselves in terms of a social group.

The later observation is in line with what has been termed the "post-social anthropology" (Goldman 2012), a theoretical movement which is distinguished by a strong questioning of the appeal of a notion of "social group" to describe social life. Among its representatives, are the anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (Strathern 1996), for example, who explores the limits of the notion of society conceived as an "entity" (Strathern 1996: 50) to explain other social formations. Bruno Latour, one of the founders of anthropology of science, also refuses to attribute to the 'social' the status of a transcendental force, and stands in a clear opposition to what he has been called the "sociologies of the social" (Latour 2005: 14). For Latour, "Groups are not silent things, but rather the provisional product of a constant uproar made by the millions of contradictory voices about what is a group and who pertains to what." (Latour 2005: 31)

If we follow Latour, there is no need to develop a particular notion to work with moments such as the scientific conferences because, for him, the collectives—and with this word, he includes humans and non-humans—must be involved in a perpetual processes of "group formations" (Latour 2005: 31). This means that, for the mentioned author, "there exists no societies to begin with, no reservoir of ties, no big reassuring pot of glue to keep all these groups together" (Latour 2005: 37).

In accordance with Latour, I argue for the need of an interest in scientific conferences as sites of the processes of "group formation." Considered this way, conceptual tools such as the notion of "focused gatherings," which is defined in an antithetic relation with the notion of group, seems unnecessary when we start to observe the existence of collectives whose sole existence lies in these rather very ephemeral meetings. My intention is to develop this argument ethnographically by describing one of the sites of construction of a collective of

Brazilian ufologists.² But first, it is important to justify the extension of the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) to the study of ufology conferences, considering that ANT itself occupies an ambivalent position towards the study of the topic.

9.2 Ufological Conferences as a Field of Interest to the Social Studies of Science

I have argued elsewhere (Almeida 2015b) that the theoretical framework known as the Actor-Network-Theory—originally created by Latour—no doubt does authorize a study of the so called parascientists based on the fact that the question of the reality of any entity is not predefined by the researcher. Yet Latour himself more than one time has expressed his antagonism towards such attempts based on what he conceived of as the mission of the anthropology of science: the preference for the study of central institutions of modernity, rather than forms of knowledge considered to be peripheric, as pointed to by Sá (2015).

Latour's continuous critiques on subjects such as ufology, from one perspective are based on what he conceives as "central," and from another, are possibly related to his perception that scientific ufologists, in their alleged mimetism of science, are naïve to believe in the versions of science that scientists present to the public³ (Latour 2009). It must be observed that this image which depicts the scientific ufologists as involved in a mimetic effort cannot be maintained as we move from the ufological discourse, full of references to science, to their actual practice. This considered, I regard UFO conferences as important occasions to study how ufologists constitute themselves as a collective. Their place in the economy of the present text goes beyond a traditional position already presented at some studies on ufology in the human sciences, those which mobilize descriptions of the conferences as instances of presentation of the authors first contacts with the field (see, for example, Cross 2000), associated with narratives of conversion, or as cases that only illustrate more general

2 For a good description of a UFO Religion Conference and a profound discussion on the relations of science, religion and the Raelians, see Battaglia (2005).

3 Donna Haraway (1988) in a classical essay, although dialoguing with a totally different problem, points to this distinction between what scientists say, and what scientists do, a sort of trope inside the Science Studies. "The only people who end up actually believing, and goddess forbid, acting on the ideological doctrines of disembodied scientific objectivity—enshrined in elementary textbooks and technoscience booster literature—are nonscientists, including a very few trusting philosophers" (Haraway 1988:576).

interests of the work. Here the conferences are taken as the key sites for the continuous constitution of ufology.

9.3 Visible Configurations of Brazilian Ufological Collectives

It could be argued that the Brazilian ufological community, in terms of its main narratives, gravitates around the same topics as those found in other countries. The field is populated by a series of elements that, with no doubt, are present in other contexts, such as: theories about the role of ancient aliens in shaping human history; attempts to analyse the nature of unknown phenomena seen in the skies; interpretations of abductee messages; controversies over the confidence of the abductees; theories about alien intentions and interpretations of alien personalities according to their races; accusations of cover up directed towards governments; and attempts to reduce reports on encounters of religious nature (what I have called the “reduction process” [Almeida 2020]) to the realm of the aliens.

When it comes to its organization, nationally there are several small collectives of UFO enthusiasts, mainly composed by men, with very different origins in terms of class and education. The members of these small groups usually were brought to these informal associations by previous trajectories of passages through several other mystical groups or, in other cases, were impressed by what they call “UFO experiences,”⁴ which represent a sort of “trigger effect” to enter in these associations in search of explanations. In the past, these small groups used to organize frequent modest meetings, vigils and other UFO related activities, but my experience with a UFO group of residents of Brasília and several encounters with members of other groups, pointed to the fact that these meetings and vigils are becoming rarer.

At the time of my doctoral research, the EBE-ET, a UFO group with more than 20 years of activity, was meeting once a month or less. Furthermore, members of this and other groups often explained to me that the reduction of the frequency of the vigils was connected to the possible threat of robbers and possible violence, considering that these gatherings usually occur in places that are distant from town (the alleged reason being the possible confusion of the spotted UFO with human originated lights coming from cars or other electric

4 Susan Lepselter tells us that, in the case of her fieldwork, people “often told the same origin story about how their lives shifted into a register that included extensive thinking and talking about aliens; the story was about discovering Whitley Strieber’s book *Communion: A true story*” (Lepselter 2016:5).

powered devices). The referred groups have different views on their filiation to “mystical” or “scientific ufology,” but even in groups which define themselves as scientific, it is not uncommon to watch practices that, (according to the members?) are associated with the mystical side. If I am correct, the boundaries between what is mystical and what is scientific are a particular language ufologists use to talk about themselves. As I regard them, these categories are more useful less as a descriptive statement, than as a sort of accusatory device often mobilized to establish differences between “what is being done by your group” and other sort of practices associated with other groups.⁵

Another class of ufological activity is associated with a national and larger collective of UFO people. Many of these researchers may be associated with local groups, where they hold different leadership positions. Others are solitary ufologists who have left their original groups—or who never had participated in such organizations—and are part of this wider network. The national collective calls itself “Equipe UFO” (UFO team) and is coordinated by Ademair Gevaerd, the main editor of the monthly magazine called *UFO* (a quite established magazine on the subject, which has been distributed throughout the country for many years), and the most important organizer of the largest conferences of the country. Ademair Gevaerd, as I have argued elsewhere (Almeida 2020), is the chairman of Brazilian ufology. He is often invited to mainstream television shows and there is no issue involving the topic that goes without his comment, considering that he is not only connected to a large network of UFO researchers around the world, but he is also the “owner” of the main channels of UFO related topics discussion, such as the e-mail list and several social media pages.

9.4 UFO Conferences

The local UFO collectives usually organize conferences, symposiums or talks with a small number of participants (8–12 attendees) and, very frequently, with few speakers. Those who participate normally know each other and the inscription fees are inexpensive. The conference rooms are simple and the speakers are often invited from nearby cities. In these classes of events, strategies to reduce costs are put to work, such as the invitation of their own local members to give talks, which may recompensate him/her with extra doses of prestige, considering that no monetary payment is given.

5 In the past years it was not uncommon to hear from different ufologists that the two “perspectives,” the mystical and the scientific, may be complement to each other.

The national conferences, on the other hand, are an occasion to watch ufology in the making. I will describe in detail the complex process of preparation of the First Forum of Contactees and Abducted, a big meeting held in Florianópolis, in the South of Brazil.

9.4.1 *Mobilizing the Virtual Networks*

The First World Forum of Contactees and Abducted (1 Fórum Mundial de Contatados e Abduzidos) was a meeting promised several months before. In the website of the *UFO* magazine, in the left margin of the page, a calendar signalled the days of the conference and other events which would be supported by the publication. Months before, in September 2012, I received in my mailbox an e-mail to multiple recipients, written by the chief editor of *UFO* containing an alert with the possible date and place of the conference and announcing that the speakers were “people who have faced ETs all over the world.” Together with the message, an image produced by the ufologist Rafael Amorim showed a group of people walking at night towards an intense light. Some days later, a new message arrived, this time to announce the decision about the city and the hotel that would host the conference which, according to Gevaerd, was chosen after many “technical visits” to other hotels and auditoriums all over the city.

In the above lines I have narrated a series of episodes typical of the months before the occurrence of a ufological event organized by the *UFO* magazine. All those who have signed the e-mail list received them, and they seem designed to produce in their participants all sorts of expectations. The conference poster attached to the e-mail described “Antonio Urzi: the Italian who filmed UFOs more than 2000 times and who attracts UFOs wherever he is.” The same document annotated the names of all the researchers that would take part, some of them speakers in all the conferences I have been attending from the start of the research. Until the last days before the conference, messages continued to arrive at my e-mail.

9.4.2 *A Thematic Conference*

The organizer was interested in creating a forum where contactees and the abducted—respectively, people who had contacts with extraterrestrial and took as their personal mission the spread of their messages, and people that were kidnapped by extraterrestrial—met the researchers of phenomena. This sort of conference, according to Peebles (1994) dates back to the Giant Rock Convention, a series of meetings that took place after 1952 in California’s Mojave Desert in the USA, and that attracted a large public.

However, a conference that established as its mission to present the experiences which are not taken as legitimate by all the ufologists, surely faces

resistances. Among the ufologists there are those that consider the multiplication of reports of this kind a damage to the legitimacy of discipline, especially when subjects of these experiences start to appear in famous television shows and contribute to a burlesque public image of the field. Such is the case of J. Allen Hynek, famous in the ufological literature for his disregard of this type of report: "Such persons not only frequently turn out to be pseudoreligious fanatics, but also invariably have a low credibility value, bringing us regular messages from 'space men' with singularly little content" (Hynek 1972: 47).

Peebles, while describing the position of contactees among self-proclaimed scientific ufology points to the fact that their relations not always would have a positive outcome. The comment of Roth (2005) coincides with Hynek: "this particular pedigree of ufology is an embarrassment to investigators of sightings and landings who imposed a forensic seriousness on the saucer topic" (Roth 2005: 43).

Even considering these mentioned tensions, the organization of the conference was being shaped in a certain way, that these controversies would not threaten the existence or the continuity of the organization of the meeting. In fact, considering that a large part of the attendees was interested in the topic of the contactees, this approach may have been chosen as a sort of survival strategy put to work in face of the need to fill the rented auditoriums.

The economic side was being revealed in the continuity of the messages, this time alerting recipients to advanced ticket sales. These messages came with teasers of the story of some of the speakers and with texts that pointed to the opportunity to meet those who had been "face to face" with "Them." Other messages were directed to possible volunteers who would, in exchange for accommodation and inscription, act as workers at the reception, at the production of images and the organization of the technical apparatuses of the place.

As soon that the online subscription was made, several other activities were offered by the organizers: a workshop on cases involving abductees and contactees with the doctor Mônica Medeiros; a special dinner in one of the nights of the conference; and the online announcement of a "ufoarcheological trip to Peru," in which the traveller was promised to meet shamans and to visit "ufo-logical related" spaces: "Explore Nazca—Considering the great success of the first trip, the *UFO Magazine* and the Terra Inca Tourism Agency want to inform of another trip to the Nazca."

The online massive announcements seemed to work. By the time of the start, the conference hall was completely full of people, who were being received by a large staff of security guards, people responsible for welcoming the participants, and sellers of the *UFO magazine* subscriptions. Some of staff members were the voluntary workers recruited online, but the overall appearance was very professional, mimicking a structure that is common in academic

events. In these front tables, the UFO enthusiast could buy his card with his name and registration number associated to the Centro Brasileiro de Pesquisa de Discos Voadores (Brazilian Center of Research on Flying Saucers), which promised to give the owner discounts in all of the UFO publications and would facilitate access to the UFO conferences.

Among the received material, the attendee would find a folder with an invitation to support the "Grupo de Apoio ao Avanço da Consciência Cósmica" (Support Group for the Advancement of Cosmic Consciousness), which described the instructions for possible donors and the benefits derived of the association, which usually are copies of the UFO magazine, edited books, and other materials. It is important to mention that Ademar Gevaerd very frequently posted in the lists a sort of balance sheet, in which he described the acquisitions made with the resources of the group, such as an advanced drone to film crop circles and the financial support to an introductory course on ufology.

The economic dimension of the conference is not limited to these subscriptions. As was already described by Cross (2000), the selling of souvenirs, such as books, DVDs, CDs with images, and t-shirts is part of these conferences and in the present case, the commercialization occupied part of the second floor of the auditorium. Among the sellers, the UFO magazine had its own space, in which were sold souvenirs whose quality was considerably higher compared to the individual sellers, who very often were also ufologists.

In terms of the public, although no survey was applied to the attendees, my impressions converge with Magnani, when describing the mystical circuit of São Paulo: "The activities of this universe, differently from other magical religious practices, are not associated to lower classes" (Magnani 1999: 65). Most of the public were over thirty-five years old, with technical or college education, associated with the urban middle classes. When we consider their involvement with ufology, some of them are members of UFO local groups, but the majority of the attendees had no other relation with ufology than the consumption of material produced by those who spend more time writing books, articles and producing research. In fact, as it was pointed while describing the UFO local groups, it is reasonable to assume that the participants have in common some sort of "ufological experience," a sort of mediator not only between the attendees, but also a mediator of their relationship with the event.

Another concept which is central to comprehend is the process of "group formation" (Latour 2005) which takes place in the conferences is the notion of "community." Ademar Gevaerd very frequently uses the expression "Brazilian ufological community," while speaking about the activities of the UFO magazine. In one sense, the notion of "community" acts as a sort of representational device that allows him to speak in the name of the attendees, but carrying the risk of reducing the variability of positions about the UFOs inside the same

“community.” On the other hand, the notion of “community” would potentialize the capacity of negotiation with the locus of ufology pleas for information: the instituted political powers, the “powers-that-be” (Battaglia 2005), the keepers of the documents ufology wants to be declassified, and the “Science.” Jodi Dean in *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (Dean 1998) points to a possible meaning of the notion of community:

Usually, however, people in the UFO community have a general sense of what the term means. At any rate, what is interesting about the community is that it combines a reasonable replication of the demographics of the United States (tilled toward the White middle class) together with a self-perception of being an excluded minority. The UFO community’s sense of exclusion stems from its perception that most people, especially scientists, the media and government officials ridicule belief in extraterrestrial contact with Earth.

DEAN, 1998: 17–18

9.4.3 *Openings*

Once most of the attendees were accommodated, a video was showed in the screen of the luxury hotel auditorium. Mimicking the format of a commercial trailer, the movie opens with a young man walking between two wooden houses and looking to an open field. Above him, in the centre of a grey sky, a large light moved, then replaced by the captions: “You always wanted to know.” In the next frames, a man in front of a truck with a frightened look observes a triangular spaceship that moved towards him. A New Age style sound track continues to play as new captions such as “Where are they from?”, “What do they want?”, “What is their message?”, “Who has been inside the ship?” are showed. The music stops and the next frame is a UFO magazine logo.

As soon as the video finishes, Gevaerd takes the stage and convokes a group of people to take part of the main table: Marco Antônio Petit, the co-editor of the journal, Silvia Pérez, the owner of a ufological museum at Argentina, and Wilson Picler, a former deputy and businessman, who was supporting the conference.

9.5 The Domain of the Testimony

In her study of the relation between ufology and “science” at the United States, Anne Cross calls our attention to a very specific form of presentation of their research by the ufologists. According to her, “[m]any researchers structure

their research and their conference lectures completely around witness accounts on their own experiences" (Cross 2000: 54). This disposition to the testimony, is "in pointed contrast to impersonal modes of mainstream scientific data collection" (Cross 2000: 55).

In fact, as it was observed by Cross, ufology is marked by a modality of communications that privileges "autobiographical" reports (Cross 2000: 63), presented according to the model of a "story." Undoubtedly, this is an aspect of several talks, mostly characterized by a sort of narration of image and video-based slides.

This is the case, for example, of Dr. Mônica Medeiros, the first speaker on the second day, someone described by Ademar Gevaerd as a combination of a mystical and scientific ufologist. She is an abduction specialist, and claims multiple abductions, which led her to develop her own version of a theory that explains these phenomena. Dr. Mônica is the coordinator of Casa do Consolador, a centre in which, among many activities, occurs the spiritual channelling of an extraterrestrial called Sheiliana, whose home is far away, in the constellation of Taurus.

Mônica presents herself as someone who had mediumistic contacts since she was a child. The first of these happened with her grandfather, to whom she was strongly attached, and who had passed away. After many contacts, this relative communicated that he would stop appearing to her, but in his place, he would leave a friend that would look for her. She tells us that she is not certain if this last entity was an extraterrestrial, but in her memories, she recalls calling him "Casper" (the same name from the cartoon *Casper: The Friendly Ghost*).

These, according to her, were the first, but not the last experiences. During her life she was taken to the spaceship several times and she recalls that, in one of these episodes, she was offered a cream flavoured ice cream that was eaten in the company of other kids taken from their homes. This memory led her to describe the aspect of her capturers who, according to her, were Greys, a race of extraterrestrials usually described as having had cloned themselves too much, which has made them lose their variability. In other ufological accounts, the Greys are robots, or a hybrid race, commanded by another race of extraterrestrials, the Nordics.

This information about the Greys leads us to a particular mode of production of knowledge inside ufology. Even if there are stabilized patterns of alien race descriptions, the personal testimonies presented during the conferences do not only reproduce data derived from other sources. Most of the times, the speakers produce interactions with these patterns and suggest significative changes derived from the observation of the behaviour of the extraterrestrials with whom one had contact. In this line, the narrative of Mônica Medeiros

is surely close to others, but some of her claims on the project of hybridization undertaken by the Greys were mingling topics that already float in diverse ufological communities around the globe, with her own interpretations, such as her understanding that in the later project, while the Greys would give us “evolution,” humans would offer them “feelings.” Her testimony fits with a characteristic Cristopher Roth attributed to the contactees. In his view:

Abductees and contactees are not just the stars of these new ufological communities; they are the experts. No educational background is necessary; in fact, the pronouncements of other so-called experts are sidelined when real people who have interacted with real aliens are in the room. Their memories, theories, and intuitions are treated as (not necessarily true) “information”—an important and all-encompassing category in ufological discourse—and the people at these meetings are hungry for it.

ROTH 2005:68

But the evidences for her claims are not only found in her memories. Mônica Medeiros is an avid reader of the ufological literature, and according to her, the proof of the fact that humans are an extraterrestrial project can be found in the diverse pictorial representations of the aliens in non-western societies, a recasting of the theory of the ancient aliens. She understands that Greys were our creators and they “are an extraterrestrial race that seek for the renewal of the bond. They are seeking for affection.”⁶ According to Mônica, humans have difficulty dealing with their space creators, and Humanity, she told the full auditorium, “is hostage of its own beliefs, of forgetting the truth and of the predominance of material values.” As this last phrase points out, her talk is a true assemblage, a superposition of elements in connection that appropriates from different repertoires available to the ufologists, and that produces a meshwork of personal experiences and ufological broad theories, such as the relation of abduction and forgetting, an explanation of the origin of human life, and a particular form of reading palaeolithic works of art. The assemblage produced by Mônica Medeiros, possibly, could be translated using a notion developed by Susan Lepselter, that is, the concept of “resonances” defined as “the intensification produced by the overlapping, back and forth call of signs from various discourses” (Lepselter 2016: 4).

The speakers who followed her presentation used the same testimony model. Dr. Wellaide Cecim Carvalho, who is a physician known to be the only doctor working at the Island of Colares during the time of the attack of the

6 Notes taken during the conference.

“chupa-chupa” focus of lights, started her narrative as follows: “It is the first time that I am giving a talk. I have a sort of isolationism. When I arrived at the Colares Island, I was 22 years old and it had been days before that I had left college.”⁷

Asís, a Peruvian contactee, constructed his talk around an autobiographical report, associated to the exposition of the messages he received from the extraterrestrials with an invitation for the “awakening of the consciousness.” This is because in his case, the ETs have been present in his life since he was born, in 1974, when a ship made a close approach to his parents’ car. In 1982, when he was 7 years old, he had a visual contact with UFOs that were close to a building. The contacts repeated in 1993, at the university. The extraterrestrials, he explained, wanted to convey a message about the destruction of the Earth and were now making planned contacts with him, in which he was being taught that humans should “promote the peace, the love and the forgiveness.” He concluded: “Do not stop dreaming. We are all one, part of God. You are infinite. Improve yourself constantly.”⁸

9.6 The Regime of Comparison

If the talks of Mônica Medeiros, Wellaide Cecim Carvalho, and Asís were marked by an autobiographical aspect, in line with what Anne Cross observed in UFO conferences at the United States, others would attempt to dialogue with the topic using different strategies. In this topic I am going to present a researcher’s attempt to submit experiences to comparative efforts, guided by the ambition of producing classificatory operations. However, while operating with the distinction between the regime of testimony and the regime of comparison, we should keep in mind that we are not facing completely antithetical ways of dealing with the subject. They should be understood more as a tendency or as an emphasis, than a radical different modality of communication.

During the presentation of Gilda Moura, Ademar Gevaerd remarked that she was dealing with the phenomena from the scientific point of view. She is a psychologist, a specialist in abductions who has a lot of respect among the ufologists, a respect derived from the comments on the quality of her books, but also from her history of personal involvement with the subject. She opened her talk with remarks on the general characteristics of the contactees: they are normal persons, but extremely susceptible to hypnosis; usually they experience paranormal phenomena; they have a strong sense of being chosen and a strong

⁷ Notes taken during the conference.

⁸ Notes taken during the conference.

desire of communicating future catastrophes; they act as if humans had an important mission; and feel that their home “is not here.”

After presenting these traces, Gilda Moura described some traces of the psychological process in which the contactee is involved, which are: “an impact on the conscience”; the creation of a feeling of epiphany; and the promotion of the personality disruption. These comments were followed by an exposition of the “energetic effects of the contact,” based on a research she made comparing contactees and a group of people capable of trance. Gilda Moura claimed that more than 100 people were measured and the result, after analysing the encephalogram exam, was that “only those connected to the UFO phenomena have reached the super activation of the frontals.”⁹ We were taught that these results are very similar to those found in the prefrontal lobes of the Tibetan monks who practice meditation for years. This, according to her, demonstrated that the contactees not only had a personality change, but their contacts seemed to be capable of altering their own brain functioning, allowing people who never had any relation to meditation, to get results that were very similar to those reached by the monks.

As we can observe, these narratives do not aim to discover if the contacts, in fact, had occurred. They are not a test of truth. As Cross argues, “people do not come to UFO conferences to find out if extraterrestrial spacecraft and extraterrestrials are real. It is taken for granted that they are” (Cross 2000: 9). So, the tests that captivate Gilda Moura are those that show the possible effects of this phenomena on people.

9.7 Rearticulating

As it was observed, the two forms of presenting data that take place in UFO conferences (personal testimony and comparison of cases) may be seen as complementary. The first, as pointed out by Cross (2000), which is characterized by an autobiographical narrative, is related to the second in the same way that the narrative of the patient is interpreted by the analysis of the therapist. In what Jodi Dean calls a “therapeutic discourse” (Dean 1998:52), the abductees end up being captured twice: by the extraterrestrials that examine their bodies, implant objects, and extract reproductive material; then, by the ufologists, who puts themselves in the position of the researchers of such phenomena, and who incite the “witness” to recapitulate all the details of the contact by hypnosis or other methods.

9 Notes taken during the conference.

It was Jodi Dean who described this homology with a "therapeutic site" (Dean 1998: 48) that shaped ufology from the moment that the cases of abduction started to gain attention within the scene. According to the author, the introduction of the hypnosis as a form of reaching the "truth about the contact" or, to reconstruct it in details, "disconnected" (Dean 1998:51) the activities of the ufologist from the sightings. She explains that, with the report of the contactee or the abductee in hands, it is now possible to study a case without being front to front with the extraterrestrial entity. There is also another question: according to Jodi Dean the change of focus to the abduction reports displace the problem of knowing if what was seen is, in fact, an extraterrestrial device, considering that the absence of memories is, by itself, evidence that something may have happened (abductees often report experiences of missing time). In her own words, "constructed around a lack covered over and filled in by words, the UFO discourse today doesn't need UFOs: absence itself marks an alien encounter" (Dean 1998: 46).

But the *making of ufology* does not end in the talks given during the conference. The movement online we have followed in the first pages and that happened months before the preparation of the event, is repeated days after its end. Ademar Gevaerd activates the online e-mail list to thank all the people who participated in the event and to spread the news that innumerable newspapers, television shows, and websites have covered the event. The next e-mails came with photos and links that would lead to other news in the press. However, a few days later the editor of the magazine and organizer of the conference adopted a different position towards one of the magazines which was covering the event. Among other comments, the journalist had commented on the mercantilist side of the meeting. Ademar Gevaerd addressed him directly:

The article presents an unhappy outlook of the event, presenting, by one side, the participants as a mob of alienated and, on the other hand, the organizers as a mercantilist group. Maybe, by excess of critical sense, ignorance or even a scepticism on the subject, the reporter seemed to ignore the mechanism of the organization of an event of any nature. That is why I want to make clear that, what he defined as a "great ufological bazaar," because of the number of stalls selling products, only existed because these sales would cover the great costs associated to the realization of the Forum. [...] The public taken to the meeting, classified by the reporter "as willing to pay tickets, accommodations and fees" is composed by instructed people, the majority of them have a solid education and a solid professional background, who find at the 1 Forum Mundial dos

Contatados the opportunity to search for answers to their more intimate questions related to the experiences they have lived.

Message sent to the UFO Magazine list

Departing from this letter sent from Ademar Gevaerd, I would like to suggest that that continuation of ufology, as a set of relations whose aim seems to be the amplification of the interest and legitimacy on the topic of extraterrestrial life, depends on such terrestrial movements. The presence of innumerable media outlets by one side was fundamental to reach a public that was out of the horizon of the UFO magazine. But the presence of the media certainly created a risk of the spread of a derogatory view of the meeting and of its participants, and enhanced the chance of the production of descriptions that could show the Forum as a conference of unwise people, overrepresenting its commercial side.

Gevaerd decided to answer the letter not only because he was the organizer of the conference. He also did so because, considering the current set of relations inside ufology, he is sort of a spokesperson (Almeida 2019). He acts like the scientist described by Bruno Latour in the third chapter of "Pandoras Hope" (Latour 1999). According to Latour, it is Joliot who connects nuclear fission, the future of France, the German scientists, and the heavy water, making them all pass through his laboratory. It is he, by different means, who puts in motion a series of movements in order to "hold together all the threads and getting favors from everybody, neutrons, Norwegians, deuterium, colleagues, anti-Nazis, Americans, paraffin ..." (Latour 1999:90). According to Latour it is Joliot who triggers the devices of "interesement"¹⁰ (Callon 1984) of human and non-human actants, changing its courses, convincing them to cooperate and, while doing so, transforming his own interests. Latour, while discussing the nuclear fission of Joliot's laboratory at the College de France, presents his main movements: The "mobilization of the world," the capacity of making objects gravitate around his laboratory, the "autonomization," the creation of its own criterium of evaluation and relevance, the "alliances," and the "public representation" (Latour 1999: 100).¹¹

In a movement that is similar to that of Joliot's, Gevaerd needs to bring together different actants, making them pass through the "Brazilian Ufological Community." In order to do so, he needs to do something described by Michel Callon as a "translation" (Callon 1984): "To translate is to displace [...]"

10 "Interesement is the group of actions by which an entity (here the three researchers) attempts to impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors it defines through its problematization. Different devices are used to implement these actions." (Callon, 1984:207)

11 All these characteristics appear in the figure present in (Latour 1999:100).

But to translate is also to express in one’s own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate to each other” (Callon 1984:223).

The description of Gevaerd’s role in the continuity of ufology by his constant feeding of the “community” with new data, new cases, and new conferences is a topic of interest for a research on the biographical trajectories of those ufologists who, like him, were capable of transforming ufology into his profession and his main source of income. The point is important and, as the ethnographic effort to describe the process of “becoming an ufologist,” is a task to be considered in an upcoming text.

The aim of this chapter was mainly to offer an attempt to provide a detailed description of a UFO conference held in Brazil with special attention to the forms of communication used by researchers and the processes that occur before and after the event. After rejecting the notion of “focused gatherings,” it is argued that, in the years of the research (2011–2014), the UFO conferences were an important site of constitution of this collective in Brazil and the events, as described from an Actor-Network-Theory perspective, and are a special instance in which to observe ufology “in the making.”

The ethnography of ufology conferences in the future may serve as the basis for comparison with conferences held by collectives such as flat earthers, anti-vaxxers and climate change deniers. Some questions that scholars may address in the future: are their modes of communication similar to those used by ufologists? What is the role of the conferences in their process of constitution? And of special interest, is their critique of science similar to the critique made by the ufologists? This research agenda may cast some light on the possible value of the insights of an ethnography of ufology beyond its original field. That is, we may find in this study some clues to understand the dynamics of the production and reproduction of collectives whose characteristics are linked to what very recently has been being called “post-truth.”

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PART 3

Case Studies: Individual Proponents



A Martian God: Eleanor Kirk's Extraterrestrial Epiphany in *The Christ of the Red Planet*

Christa Shusko

10.1 Introduction

In 1901, a seventy-year-old newspaperwoman, publisher, and suffragist named Eleanor Kirk wrote a rather peculiar book titled *The Christ of the Red Planet*. This book detailed what Kirk believed to be her real experience of astral travel to Mars. While her “Journey to Mars” had been a recent one, occurring on May 6, 1901, in the book’s preface and first chapter, Kirk noted that the revelations she received on Mars were ones that she had long sensed—though without the ability to fully articulate them. Kirk wrote

To dwell in limitation, and yet to be acutely mindful of the unlimited, is, no doubt, the experience of many persons. This has been mine to a wonderful and sometimes very annoying extent. To see and yet not to see; to know and not to be able to explain, either to myself or others; to be constantly possessed by a consciousness of distant phenomena without fact or data, is not a very comfortable mental state for one aiming to be logical, and desiring above all things to be honest and the reverse of imaginative. But this has been my condition ever since I can remember.

KIRK 1901: xiii

For Kirk, it was her journey to Mars that at last allowed her to fully comprehend and articulate her truly universal religion, one offered hope not only to Earthly humanity but to beings throughout the observable universe.

While it might be easy to write off Kirk’s *The Christ of the Red Planet* as the obscure work of an obscure writer, Kirk was in fact a prominent popular writer in late nineteenth-century America, writing a popular newspaper column published in a number of newspapers throughout the country in the 1880s and 1890s. Kirk was active in a number of key reform circles, counting among her friends and associates suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the notorious Christian minister Henry Ward Beecher. Thus Kirk’s

Martian epiphany was the product of a widely popular author, an important—if forgotten—figure of late nineteenth-century America. In tracing Kirk's path from common-sense newspaperwoman to inter-planetary traveller, much can be gleaned about the intersections between Christianity, occult religions, and science—broadly construed—in late nineteenth century America. Further, an examination of Kirk's Martian revelations can likewise demonstrate the ways that these late nineteenth century new religious fusions would reflect many similar characteristics of later UFO religions.

Technically, of course, Kirk's Martian experience is not a UFO religion. There are no unidentified flying objects in Kirk's vision; her Martian Christ does not enter the scene on a flying saucer. As Christopher Partridge notes, "whilst there are claims to 'contact' with beings from other planets prior to the Arnold sighting [in 1947], they are not the principle focus of such belief systems and UFOs *per se* are absent. The emergence of a religion specifically focused on UFOs is a post-1947 phenomenon" (Partridge 2003: 8–9). Yet many scholars of UFO religions—including Partridge—observe these earlier claims of "contact" with extraterrestrial beings as important predecessors to UFO religions.

In *Concerning the Earths in Our Solar System* (1758) Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg outlined his observations of the spiritually advanced peoples existing on other planets, including Mars. In *Imagining Mars: A Literary History*, Robert Crossley writes of this work that "Instructed by an angel, Swedenborg is informed that humanity is not confined to a single Earth, but that the inhabitants of various worlds are constituent parts of a universal humanity, 'The Grand Man'" (Crossley 2011: 31; see also Melton 1995: 2–3). Swedenborg was a major influence on the famous Spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis, who would similarly see the occupants of other planets as inhabiting more advanced "spheres" in his celestial system, with many of these extraterrestrial spirits occupying even "higher positions in the plane of thought and wisdom" (Davis 1847: 659). John Saliba notes that "Many UFO groups have borrowed heavily from both spiritualism and Theosophy. They have incorporated in their ideology the concepts of cosmic wisdom and cosmic masters who exist on other planets" (Saliba 1995: 27). While exhibiting some of these broad influences, Kirk is somewhat more unique in that she did not explicitly claim allegiance to either spiritualism or theosophy. In analysing Kirk's Martian experiences, therefore, we must attend not only to the theosophical and spiritualist influences, but also to Kirk's more explicit allegiances with the occult teachings of Astrology and, most importantly, Mental Science. Though it is certainly the case that many of these occult religions occupied overlapping territories, a consideration of Kirk's more wide-ranging influences might helpfully complicate the genealogy of later UFO religions.

10.2 Martian Religions, UFO Religions, and Science

Scholars of UFO religions have noted the various ways that UFO religions tend to fuse—or infuse—their religious visions with science. Pointing to the ways that UFO religions might synthesize scientific knowledge, Benjamin E. Zeller writes that

UFO religions are not in fact purely scientific, but neither is science absent from their worldviews. In fact, being ‘scientific’—however members of UFO religions define that term—is often central to the self-understanding of the adherents of UFO religions. Yet their understandings of science are fluid, changing, and seldom follow rigorous academic definitions of the term. UFO religions often combine elements of science fiction, pseudo-science, and what professional scientists would recognize as academic science. UFO religions engage in a creative act of religious syncretism, drawing from multiple sources as they create complex systems of beliefs and practice at the nexus of science and religion.

ZELLER 2011: 667

Like later UFO religions, Kirk’s *The Christ of the Red Planet* similarly reflects the widespread scientific and popular fascination with the planet Mars in the late nineteenth-century. Crossley’s *Imagining Mars* provides an extensive genealogy of Martian literature. According to Crossley an especially fertile period for Martian literature began in 1877, following “momentous scientific reports on Mars” in that year (2011: ix). Martian literature would expand exponentially in the decades that followed. Much—though not all—of this literature would draw upon contemporary scientific theories about Mars. Perhaps most notably, astronomical observations of Martian “canals” by Giovanni Schiaparelli, Camille Flammarion, and Percival Lowell—observations which would later be proven false—would lead to great speculation, both scientific and fictional, about the possibility of current or past inhabitants of the red planet. While Kirk’s *The Christ of the Red Planet* does not explicitly engage with the contemporary scientific accounts—differing from her some of her Martian contemporaries like Sara Weiss—Kirk’s vision was assuredly influenced by this Martian milieu.¹ And while Kirk’s vision seemed to rely less heavily on the scientific Martian observations of her day, her Martian vision still presented—in her

1 I’ve written elsewhere about the Martian milieu as it influenced the religious views of Kirk and her spiritualist contemporaries Sara Weiss and Helene Smith. See Christa Shusko, “Religions of the Red Planet: Fin de siècle Martian Romances,” *The Paranormal and Popular*

understanding—a scientific picture of Mars and the greater universe. For Kirk, this science was connected not just to the physical features of Mars but, more importantly, to the “invisible” scientific principles underlying all physical existence.

Though preceding UFO religions in the strict sense noted above, Kirk’s vision shares much in common with the scientific impulses of these later UFO religions. Andreas Grünschloß writes that “Despite all their differences in detail, religious ufologies express a common theme: the search for an integral vision, a ‘synthesis of science and religion’—oscillating between religious interpretations of technology and technological interpretations of religion” (Grünschloß 2008: 434). Christopher Partridge has stated that he “[prefers] the term ‘physicalist religion’ rather than ‘scientific religion’ (which is sometimes used), simply because [he is] not convinced that the beliefs of UFO religions can, strictly speaking, be described as ‘science’” (Partridge 2003: 22). Zeller has suggested the term “materialistic religion” to describe this “treatment of all knowledge and knowable things as comprised of physical, tangible matter, as described by the sciences of physics, chemistry, and related fields” (Zeller 2010: 119). Internally, however, many UFO religions use the term “scientific” to describe their beliefs. Grünschloß writes that for those invested in UFO religions, the “new ufological ‘unity of reality’ is in accordance with the space age and modern scientific and technological worldview—with all its inherent ideas of progress, perfection, and easy utilization” (Grünschloß 2008: 434). The late nineteenth-century new religions noted above, like Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Mental Science likewise saw the promise of science in similar terms; and it is perhaps this affinity that would later make elements of these religions attractive to UFO religions. The progress and ultimate perfection of humanity occurred in both spiritual and physical terms or, to put it another way, the physical *was* spiritual for many of these religious thinkers, Kirk included.

Kirk was certainly convinced that her vision was—even without reference to specific details—scientific. In fact, it was the “invisibility” of recent scientific advances that, for Kirk and many other new religious thinkers of her era, lent credence to their own “invisible” revelations. In *The Christ of the Red Planet*, Kirk wrote, “The wonderful evolution of electricity has opened their [scientists’] eyes to the fact that the forces they cannot see are far more potent than anything else in evidence” (Kirk 1901: x). Earlier, in *The Influence of the Zodiac Upon Human Life*, she would write similarly that

In our ignorance we have scorned the invisible and latent, and measure the universe by our five circumscribed senses. Ignorance shuts its eyes and declares itself to be right, while it is the primary source of human misery. The late tremendous progress in electrical science has been a great force in awakening the minds of the people to the realization of hidden or occult power, and it has also helped to prove the truth of the Christ statement that 'there is nothing hidden which shall not be revealed'.

KIRK 1894: 19

It is not accidental, I think, that when Kirk turned to the religious movement known variously as New Thought, Mind Cure, or Mental Science, Kirk would almost exclusively use the term "mental science," as that term best reflected her view that "science" was true—even if its most refined truths might remain "invisible" to the uninitiated or untrained. While Kirk's vision of Mars was certainly influenced by these optimistic and perhaps overly simplistic popular views of science in the late nineteenth-century, her vision of Mars serves as an important predecessor to later UFO religions, and demonstrates the ways in which she, like later UFO religions, fused a wide range of varied social and religious interests into a vision of a utopian—and physical—universe. Integrating Christianity, Mental Science, Astrology, Spiritualism, and even Women's Suffrage, Kirk's extraterrestrial epiphany was a bricolage of hope, offering the promise of salvation through a recognition of the sacredness of the self, a recognition only made possible through her journey to Mars.

10.3 A Woman Writer

Eleanor Kirk was the pseudonym of the woman born Ellen (or "Nellie") Maria Easterbook in Warren, Rhode Island in 1831. She was married and widowed twice before the age of forty, and had the unenviable task of providing financially for her five children.² In order to do so, she began writing, first working as a reporter for the *New York Standard*, and later penning articles for a number of other newspapers and magazines.³ In the late 1860s, Kirk became a prominent member of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's and Susan B. Anthony's Working

2 Kirk would take the name Hubbard from her first husband and Ames from her second; in her personal life from the late 1860s onward, she seems to have gone by "Nellie Ames." See "Eleanor Kirk' Dead at Rhode Island Home," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 25 June 1908.

3 In the 1870s, for example, Kirk published articles in a number of magazines; in a number of cases, she was a regularly featured writer, including *The Christian Union*, *The Phrenological*

Woman's Association; this group would later develop into the better-known National Woman Suffrage Association. Kirk would ultimately turn down an opportunity to succeed Anthony as president of the group in 1869—as her own professional commitments and economic needs meant that she needed to devote her time primarily to writing.⁴

Kirk's first published book, the novel *Up Broadway*, was a darkly romantic story following the travails of a young woman who met the man of her dreams, married him, and bore him a child before learning that their marriage had been fabricated, her “husband” already being married to a woman who was not his true match. was published in 1870. In the decades that followed the publication of *Up Broadway*, Kirk continued her work as a journalist; her writings continued to reflect her concerns for women's health—both physical and spiritual—and for societal ills, often caused, in her view, through imprudent marriages and the children who resulted from those unions. During the 1870s and 1880s, Kirk's writing would primarily be published in newspapers and magazines, for which she wrote popular short stories and poems published across the country. Kirk also wrote newspaper columns that were syndicated by a number of newspapers from the 1870s to the 1890s.

These columns were often titled “Eleanor Kirk's Letter” but sometimes simply the “New York Letter”—in these letters, Kirk reported on the latest New York fashions and trends and providing “common sense” advice about writing, publishing, marital relationships, education, health, and home economics. She also used the column to endorse various products, from sea moss to glycerine suppositories to beef jelly. While it is likely that Kirk may have been

Journal and Science of Health, and *The Independent*. Her magazine pieces were often republished in local newspapers across the nation.

- 4 While some accounts presented this as a financial need that she recognized on her own, in one later reminiscence, the decision was perhaps not made under the best of circumstances, as she recalled that when she told her male editor of her possible presidency, he informed her that if she accepted, she would no longer have a job at his paper. The earliest reference I have found to Kirk's participation in the Working Woman's Association appears in a brief news item covering a meeting of the wwa in the *New York Tribune*, 12 November 1868. The primary account of Kirk's refusal of the presidency of the wwa appears in the New York newspaper *The Sun*, 15 October 1869 under the dramatic heading “Mrs. Kirk's Hand Grenade.” See also Paul Collins, “How to Pitch a Magazine (in 1888),” *The New Yorker*, 2 September 2014; Collins' article focuses primarily on Kirk's publishing endeavours—and her business acumen in writing books that served as a guide for individuals who might want to get paid work as writers, though his article does also present some biographical material on Kirk. This article is the only significant piece of historical research focusing on Kirk that I have found; while Kirk's name appears in a few scholarly articles, it is typically only to list her among early suffrage workers or later New Thinkers.

compensated for some of her “name brand” endorsements, she also endorsed numerous small, women-run business ventures, providing support for these less-established entrepreneurs. In many columns, Kirk served as a kind of Miss Manners or Dear Abby, responding to letters and inquiries written to her by readers.

In the late 1880s, Kirk began to commodify the requests for advice concerning writing—which had begun to overwhelm her in the column. She developed a profitable “Bureau of Correspondence,” which provided manuscript reviews to aspiring writers.⁵ The success of, and demand for, this work also led Kirk to publish two books in 1888, *Periodicals that Pay Contributors*, a directory of publishers, and *Information for Authors*, a handbook of practical advice for writing and publishing for amateur writers. While Kirk’s writing about writing tended to emphasize the practical aspects of writing, in *The Christ of the Red Planet*, Kirk would demonstrate a much more spiritual understanding of writing, linking writing with to the ability to “recollect”—and thus to understand and communicate—the true nature of her Martian revelation. After a period of writer’s block, in which she was trapped by “Prejudice, Personality, and Private Grief,” she at last overcame her stagnation, turning to the Bible and being “suffused with the red light” which she took as “proof of the nearness of power, the presence of a mighty friend” (Kirk 1901: 17). In penning her Martian revelation after a lifetime spent writing, she would finally communicate what she saw as her most vital—if most unwieldy—work. Examining Kirk’s major religious influences will aid in an analysis of her final work, as it fused Kirk’s various Christian, Spiritualist, Mental Scientist, and Astrological views.

10.4 The Revelation of Occult Sciences: Mental Science and Astrology

Kirk’s investigations into esoteric religious ideas began in the late 1880s, though she seems to have remained sceptical about most of these ideas until the

5 “Eleanor Kirk’s Letter,” *Vicksburg Evening Post*, Vicksburg, Mississippi, 17 July 1888. Notices for her new magazine *Eleanor Kirk’s Idea* noted further that “For some years Mrs. Kirk has been receiving from twenty to seventy-five letters a week from women asking advice in matters of health, dress, family troubles, social usages, etc. She has answered these letters privately and in her correspondence hitherto. Now she will answer them in her own paper and add to them besides other topics of vital interest to women. She has seen so much of life herself in its ups and downs and asides that if she cannot make a good paper for women nobody can.” *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, Logansport, Indiana, 20 January 1892; *Topeka Daily Capital*, Topeka, Kansas, 22 January 1892; *Sunday Leader*, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 24 January 1892; *Marion Star*, Marion, Ohio, 30 January 1892.

early 1890s.⁶ As noted briefly above, Kirk was never a proponent of Theosophy, though it is certainly probable that, within the occult milieu, she absorbed and adapted some theosophical ideas. But she was quite outspoken in her criticism of Theosophy, writing in her newspaper column in 1891 that

my main objection to Theosophy is its utter lack of warmth. It seems to contain the Christ precepts without any of the Christ love.... For my own part I would rather have a little love to give to my fellow creatures, and the capacity to receive affection, with a spirit alive to the great and beautiful, than be able to tinkle an astral bell or drop letters of wisdom at the feet of my chelas. The whole teaching of Theosophy as far as I can understand it is towards the ultimate extinction of human feeling. Science divorced from love is worthless to me.⁷

Kirk's interest in astrology seems to have been one of her earliest positive forays into the occult. In advertisements for her magazine *Eleanor Kirk's Idea* in 1892 and 1893—the first two years of its publication—Kirk offered subscription deals that included “character and prophetic readings” by “an eminent astrologer.”⁸ While this astrologer does not seem to have been Kirk herself, her interest in and knowledge of astrology intensified in the following years, resulting in the publication of two books on Astrology: *The Influence of the Zodiac Upon Human Life* (1894) and a novel titled *Libra, An Astrological Romance* (1896).⁹ While it is difficult to know Kirk's specific astrological influences, as she tended not to quote or make specific references in her writing, one probable influence was J. C. Street. *The Influence of the Zodiac Upon Human Life* contains an introduction by Street (with some early additions listing him on the title page as “assisting” Kirk). Street, about whom even less is known than Kirk, was the author of *The Hidden Way Across the Threshold* (1887) a massive

6 At least as early as 1887, Kirk began writing letters that were published and syndicated in a number of American newspapers under various titles, including “New York Letter,” “Letter from Brooklyn,” “Eleanor Kirk's Letter,” and “Eleanor Kirk's Gossip.” Without access to personal papers, it is in these (often almost weekly) published letters that her shifting attitudes towards Mental Science and occult ideas can be traced. Kirk would continue writing letters for newspapers until at least 1894; after this point, I suspect, her time would be primarily devoted to her own publishing interests—and refraining from writing her columns for regular newspapers likely encouraged long-time readers of those columns to subscribe for her own *Eleanor Kirk's Idea*.

7 “New York Letter,” *Wilkes-Barre Telephone*, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 23 May 1891.

8 “Eleanor Kirk's Letter,” *Vicksburg Evening Post*, Vicksburg, Mississippi, 17 January 1893. See also *Altoona Tribune*, Altoona, Pennsylvania, 9 December 1892.

9 Kirk, it should be noted, was herself a *Libra*.

and broadly metaphysical (and perhaps largely plagiarized) work that synthesized spiritualist, theosophical, and other occult ideas. Yet other than in her 1894 book, I have found no other reference to Street in later accounts of Kirk's activities or in her later writings, and she seemingly forged her own path, especially as concerning her use of astrology to help determine romantic relationship compatibilities.

In 1897, Kirk would help to found a Zodiac Club in New York City, for which she would serve as "club instructor" and which would use her book as its textbook.¹⁰ While Kirk's turn towards the occult seems somewhat surprising when considering her predominately social and medical concerns of the previous decades, her interest in astrology can, I think, be interpreted as largely compatible and consistent with those concerns. That is, in astrology, Kirk finally found an answer to the problems of marital strife that had so long troubled her; further, fusing astrology with mental science would help to resolve her long-held concerns about physical and spiritual health. While each of her "character readings" for the sun signs included a section on the diseases each sign was prone to, she also repetitively noted (in italics) for all that "All these ailments and every other known to man, can be entirely dominated, forever cast out, by those who realize that mind is the master and body the servant of mind." For Kirk, therefore, the influences of the zodiac and the planets shaped us at our birth, yet these influences could, with mental discipline and spiritual advancement, ultimately be overcome.

In *The Christ of the Red Planet* Kirk would note that the experiences she detailed challenged some of her earlier astrological beliefs. While her astrological interests and her extraterrestrial epiphany both exhibited her fascinations with the influences of the stars and planets, she noted that

Astrologically speaking, Mars is not one of my planets. In this respect, he would seem to have less influence upon my life than almost any other of the starry host. He is neither an enemy nor much of a friend, and yet, ever since childhood, I have been peculiarly attracted to the so-called God of War. This has been quite inexplicable, because not one of the alleged attributes of Mars was agreeable to me. I have never believed in the

10 An account of the club's first meeting appeared in the following articles: "Aries, Taurus, Jiminy!" *The Sun*, New York, New York, 18 December 1897; "Under What Star Born?" *The World*, New York, New York, 18 December 1897. Prior to the Zodiac Club, Kirk would also help to found The Brooklyn Metaphysical League. See *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Brooklyn, New York, 1 November 1896.

necessity of war, and all warlike conditions and preparations have been a sorrow and distress to me.

KIRK 1901: xi–xii

She concluded, however, that “While these experiences seem to challenge many things in astrology, they strengthen its spiritual aspect and power, that the universe is simply one great family, and that we find our brothers and sisters from every point of natural attraction” (Kirk 1901: xviii). While this could be read as a refutation of her earlier views presented in *The Influence of the Zodiac Upon Human Life*, I think that, like the ability to overcome the propensity to certain diseases through the power of the mind, Kirk may have understood her Martian attraction and experience simply as a sign of her own spiritual advancement. That is, while the less spiritually advanced might be bound more tightly to the characteristics—good and bad—of their astrological signs, spiritual progress allowed these limitations to be overcome.

Kirk’s most lasting—and perhaps most deeply held—esoteric religious views were those of Mental Science. When Kirk began publishing her magazine, *Eleanor Kirk’s Idea*, in 1892, the magazine initially advertised itself as simply “devoted to the interests of women.” However, the few extant copies of the magazine indicate that, by its later years, it had primarily become a vehicle for Mental Science.¹¹ Mental Science taught that thoughts controlled the human body and even the world around those bodies. Various Mental Scientists taught that health, wealth, and happiness could be achieved through practices of mental discipline which, in the 1950s, Norman Vincent Peale would simplify as “the power of positive thinking.” In *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875–1920*, Beryl Satter writes that “New Thought and Christian Science proponents ... attempted first to enlighten people about the creative powers of their minds, and then to teach them how to control their minds, and thus the world around them” (Satter, 1999: 3). Perhaps paradoxically, claiming that the mind was all-powerful did not entirely negate matter and the physical body. Unlike Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science, which would seek to “[reduce] the physical to the nothing

11 I have not been able to access any early editions of this magazine, though some advertisements for the magazine indicate its goals (and Kirk herself would mention her magazine in her weekly letter to newspapers); some newspapers also re-published articles that first appeared in *Eleanor Kirk’s Idea*. There is only one holding of *Eleanor Kirk’s Idea* listed in WorldCat; the library in question appears only to have one issue from 1892 and one from 1900. The last four issues from 1905 are available via database of The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals (IAPSOP): http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/eleanor_kirks_idea/.

that it was" (Albanese 2007: 295), many Mental Scientists thought that salvation would occur both in spirit and in body. The Protestant Christian fitness enthusiasts R. Marie Griffith examines in *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* include late nineteenth-century New Thought or Mental Science practitioners. Griffith writes that these "helped generate the historical shift in religious concern from spirit to body, joined by the scientific and medical advances they eagerly cited as proof that the flesh could and should be divinely refined in this life and not merely the eternal world to come" (Griffith 2004: 13). Kirk's Mental Science publications demonstrate this valorisation of the perfected body clearly even in their titles: *Perpetual Youth* (1895) and *The Prevention and Cure of Old Age* (1899).¹²

In fact, Kirk thought that much of her sex's emphasis on the maintenance of beauty through the use of cosmetics and fashionable dress was not simply a sign of vanity and intellectual deficiency. Instead, it was a misunderstood—and perhaps misdirected—desire for bodily health and perfection. In *Perpetual Youth* she wrote, "Beauty is one of the highest attributes of universal law, and every woman who is a woman has the God-given good taste to wish to perpetuate it" (1895: 59). The common Mental Science desire to gain or retain health and vitality was, for Kirk, also a desire for physical beauty. She wrote "The desire for the expression of beauty is just as legitimate as the desire to love and be loved. We have a right to beauty, and it is only because of our ignorance that we grow old and wrinkled, feeble and ill, and—resigned" (1895: 56). While Kirk's Martian revelation occurred in 1901, when she was 70 and, one would assume, assuredly wrinkled in her earthly form, the true self that she finds on Mars is physically, not only spiritually, beautiful.

For many Mental Scientists, Kirk among them, the power of the mind was indicative of the power—and possibly even the divinity—of the self. In the third chapter of *The Prevention and Cure of Old Age*, titled simply "Ego," Kirk wrote "This chapter commences with the biggest thing in the universe—the immortal, the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient *ego*—the *I*. The *I* is the only power that ever delivered us from bondage of any sort, and is the only

12 Notices for her new magazine noted further that "For some years Mrs. Kirk has been receiving from twenty to seventy-five letters a week from women asking advice in matters of health, dress, family troubles, social usages, etc. She has answered these letters privately and in her correspondence hitherto. Now she will answer them in her own paper and add to them besides other topics of vital interest to women. She has seen so much of life herself in its ups and downs and asides that if she cannot make a good paper for women nobody can." *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, Logansport, Indiana, 20 January 1892; *Topeka Daily Capital*, Topeka, Kansas, 22 January 1892; *Sunday Leader*, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 24 January 1892; *Marion Star*, Marion, Ohio, 30 January 1892.

force that will ever keep us out of the clutches of old age" (Kirk 1899: 23). Rather than denigrate the human individual, Kirk saw the individual ego—if rightly directed—as divine. Among Mental Scientists and New Thinkers, one method of harnessing the power of the mind was through affirmations, statements which could be recited internally or externally, and which aided in effecting the desired changes in health, wealth, or personal development. In *The Prevention and Cure of Old Age*, Kirk's recommended affirmation clearly and simply affirmed the power of the self: "*I can because I am*" (Kirk 1899: 36). These Mental Science elements are clearly at work in Kirk's Martian revelation. Though in *The Prevention and Cure of Old Age*, Kirk would state that "The God in the sky hasn't [delivered us from bondage]" (1899: 23), it was the case that the Gods of Mars could assist in the discovery that the self-possessed divine powers of its own.

10.5 Encountering the Divine on Mars, on Earth, and Within

As noted briefly above, a number of spiritualist mediums at the turn of the twentieth century travelled to Mars with the help of spirit guides (see Weiss 1903 and Flournoy 1900). Kirk was not one of these. Her journey to Mars occurs at night, with Kirk describing falling asleep with a sensation of "a strange falling off, a sort of sinking into buoyant pink and purple clouds.... Whether my eyes were opened or closed, there was the same lullaby motion, the same colours. At last consciousness ceased" (1901: 25–6). Kirk regains consciousness in what she calls "The Grove of Memory," finding herself in a grove among unusually large trees with birds singing and "strange and beautiful animals [playing] together merrily" (27). Of these animals, she notes that "The most remarkable things about these unusual companions were their apparent intelligence, their grace, and their color" (28). While the animals generally seemed to be of very different forms from those on earth which Kirk was unable to fully describe, she noted that she "Occasionally ... recognized a four-footed friend who bore some resemblance to the animals I had known. This was especially the case with dogs and horses" (29).

During her Martian journey, it is not clear exactly when Kirk realizes that she has travelled specifically to Mars, yet from the start it seems clear that she knows that she is on another planet. The frequent references to the colours red, pink, and purple as she begins her peaceful explorations of her new surroundings likely provided hints to her location. Kirk noted that "The atmosphere was most invigorating, yet so soft and balmy as to make breath a luxury. A part of the time the air seemed to be visible, and the colour varied from pink to purple

and red. Then it would change to a silvery shimmer, which communicated to the nerves an ecstasy which no pen could ever describe" (28). For some time, Kirk wandered around the grove, observing her new surroundings. While quiet and peaceful, Kirk observed a peculiar sound:

The murmur of the trees, the songs of the birds, and an undertone of some sweet and sentient power which I knew not how to explain, were all the sounds I heard. This under-tone was rhythmic, and as I stopped to listen to its strange and regular cadences, it seemed like a cosmic force made musical, sphere talking unto sphere, and I said aloud: "It is the voice of God" (29).

This "utterance" resulted in the many animals of the grove gathering around her "in great numbers." Kirk began to speak to them, recognizing one as a Martian lion and another as a Martian lamb who, upon her thinking the words "The lion and the lamb shall lie down together," did just that. She heard the voice, now forming words, saying "Every world has its correspondences and its scriptures. Everything that has being is formed of the substance of the Mighty One, all in different degrees of perfection" (32).

As Kirk continued on in her peaceful explorations of the Grove, she found herself in a garden filled with beautiful marble statues of gods and goddesses, which Kirk thought she may have recognized from Greek and Roman mythology, coming finally to a lake where she at last saw the reflection of her Martian self. She wrote "Glorious beyond words was this vision. For beauty I had always longed and prayed. It had been my one appeal ever since I could remember. As this thought of memory entered my mind a strange thrill swept over me.... I was overawed and overjoyed with this revelation of beauty. I was ravished of myself" (37). Kirk would at last see another "human" creature, one perhaps even more beautiful than herself. She wrote

I saw a man of giant stature approaching me. He was the personification of grace and power. He wore a white silken robe with a broad crimson sash, and pure white sandals. His neck and arms were bare. His large dark eyes were masterful and the poise of his head most beautiful to behold. Dark hair waved back from a broad brow—and oh! wonder of wonders! his complexion was of a burnished crimson. He was a Red Giant (45–6).

The encounter between Kirk and this Red Giant, who would later be identified by the name Arcturus, not coincidentally a real red giant star in the constellation Boötes. After this point, Kirk's account of her time on Mars is primarily

an account of her time with Arcturus. Arcturus calls Kirk by her true name "Ellene" and introduces her to "a pure white pony" named Alceste with whom Kirk wordlessly communicates. Throughout her conversation with the Red God, as Kirk comes to call him prior to learning his name, numerous confusions occur, as Arcturus does not understand the meanings of a number of words that Kirk uses, such as "mortal." He has, it seems, long since forgotten about the existence of death, and it is only through faint memory that he is able to recall such a thing. Kirk herself has trouble finding and explaining some of these words, as, due to the perfected Martian atmosphere, she herself has difficulty remembering the details of earthly existence.

Kirk and Arcturus recognize that Kirk cannot remain on Mars at this time, that her journey must come to an end, and so at last, Arcturus shows Kirk a view of the constellations from Mars. As he takes her to the place from which they will view the constellations, he tells her to close her eyes and listen. She wrote "I did as I was told, and then it seemed as if the encircling mass of feathery clouds by which we were surrounded, lifted, and I was aware of a rocking motion which was so grand, so wonderful, so inexplicable, that I could only grasp my companion's hand more tightly, and hold my breath in awe and wonder" (104). Upon opening her eyes and surveying the constellations from this new Martian vantage point, Kirk felt "a tremendous vibration all about" which Kirk saw also as "rays of every color" (112–13). And she could only describe the sensations received from these vibratory rays as "Love! Love! Love!" (113). These vibrations turn out to be Cecelia, a spirit of music. Another more recognizably human spirit, a sprite named Fragaletta, at last appears to remind Kirk of the need to return home. From their heavenly explorations, they return to the "Grove of Memory." Like her journey to Mars, her journey back to Earth occurs quickly and almost inexplicably. With Arcturus whispering "Farewell, my sister," "everything seemed to dissolve into nothingness. A Red God and a White Horse were the last objects to meet my loving gaze" (122).

There is one final chapter in Kirk's account of her journey to Mars. After returning to earth, she receives a final revelation. This revelation comes to Kirk at night, as she lay in alone in her bedroom in a state of physical agony, struggling through some sort of medical attack. She forced herself to say "I will be free from this misery," yet the pain continued. She wrote, "At last I said to *Myself*: 'Soul of God in this body, where are *You*? Come to the front and vindicate Yourself.' In an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, everything changed. The pain died down like the sobs of a child held close in its mother's arms" (132). Yet after a period of calm, the pain returned. Kirk at last recognized that "[calling] upon *Myself* from the depths of *Myself*" was the only cure. "Too long have I waited for outside assistance and the medicament of angels. Come out, O Soul of God in

myself. Take the helm and keep it!" (133). At last she wrote, "The God in myself had responded, as the God in all ourselves always does when called in earnest and relied upon" (135). As the relief set in, Kirk was blessed with another vision. She wrote "The earth ... vibrated with the red light" and in the corner of her room that was in shadow, she perceived two doors opening, through which "a streak of light" appeared. "The streak grew wider and brighter, and then the face and partial figure of a man became visible. The radiance and nobility of this face were beyond anything that my most fervent imagination had ever conjured—and—*It was Red*" (135–6). The being speaks to her saying

There is no other God but me ... Know this and thou knowest all! In every soul this God must reign supreme. Except the Sacred Self, no saviour can there be.

By living thine own life in harmony with Love's eternal Law, thou wilt save thyself and help thy fellows on every plane of every star.

Know that life is a unit and that thy mission is universal. Everywhere in Love's domain thou hast a work to do. Spoil it not by private grief or selfish sorrow. Watch and wait. Let the dead bury its dead, and go thy way in Peace and Joy. *Thou hast conquered* (137).

The being vanishes, and Kirk spends "days and weeks" wondering who this divine visitor was exactly. At last, Kirk realizes that her visitor had been "*The Christ of the Red Planet*" (138, emphasis hers) and it is this recognition and these words that conclude Kirk's book. Kirk's Martian revelation, first on Mars and then back on Earth, enabled her to—in her mind at least—fully actualize the real truth of the Mental Science principles she had earlier recognized intellectually. The self was sacred because the divine love of the universe was present in all beings, whether Earthly, Martian, or otherwise starry. And for Kirk this revelation of the truth of self occurred at last by means of extraterrestrial gods who could show her that she too, was divine.

10.6 Conclusion

Although Kirk's vision does not include UFOs, the presence of powerful alien beings, guiding humans towards higher consciousness, foreshadows many developments in the UFO religions which would flourish half a century after her experience. Kirk's belief that her earlier experiences in mental science had prepared her to receive gifts of higher knowledge, transmitted by divine—or at least spiritually advanced—alien beings resonates strongly with

contactee religious experiences. Further, her experience was primarily one that she saw as aiding her spiritual self-development, allowing her true self to finally emerge after having received this guidance. Saliba writes that “the contactee goes through a change in self-awareness that has religious connotations. For, through the experience of encounter with these superior beings, one feels that one has come in contact with something divine or transcendent and that, consequently, one has undergone a developmental change in one’s spiritual condition” (Saliba 1995: 51). Though Saliba is writing on later contactee experiences, his comments are strongly resonant with Kirk. For contactees and for Kirk, encounters with superior beings facilitate the transformation and development of the self. While theosophy is certainly one important occult foundation for later UFO religions, Kirk’s extraterrestrial epiphany may suggest another important if overlooked occult foundation for later UFO religions: mental science. With its emphasis on the self’s ability to ascend to power, perfection, and greatness, Kirk’s mental science opened up the possibility of ascent to—and communion with—beings from other worlds.

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Of *Polenta* and *Elohim*: Mauro Bigliano's 'Ancient Aliens' between Anti-Religion and New Religiosity

Stefano Bigliardi

11.1 Introduction

Italy seemingly occupies a special place in the history of “ancient astronauts” literature. Notably, one of the pioneers and most prolific authors of such genre was Peter Kolosimo (pen name of Pier Domenico Colosimo, 1922–1984), who published, between the late 1950s and the early 1980s, multiple books touching upon the subject that were translated into dozens of languages, as well as innumerable articles in magazines, including the monthly *Pi Kappa*, which focused on “mysterious archaeology,” a publication that he created and directed between 1972 and 1973.¹ In fact Kolosimo produced and propagated a “soft” version of the genre in which he only hints at “ancient aliens,” frequently but generally lacking specific details, within texts bordered on popular science as it is properly understood. In other words, Kolosimo used the references to “ancient astronauts” as a device to spice up his main subject (such as archaeology, history, space exploration, and rocket science) and remained vague in order to conceal the fact that—as confirmed by his acquaintances—he *did* believe in the veracity of such narrative, although he was sceptical about present-day UFOs and extraterrestrials.² Kolosimo stands out for his productivity and is still remembered among UFO aficionados in his home country. His prose was remarkably neat. However, if one takes into account all the Italians who either interpreted the Bible (or other sacred scriptures) in a “paleoastronautic” vein

- 1 In his copious production of articles Kolosimo also made use of pseudonyms. His work has not yet been entirely mapped and discussed in detail in a scholarly publication focusing specifically on his production and profile as an author; however, at the time of writing, Kolosimo's writings are being collected, systematized and investigated by a few Italian speaking experts affiliated with the CISU (*Centro Italiano Studi Ufologici*, in Turin); such experts discuss Kolosimo-related issues through the mailing list *ASK-ing* (where ASK stands for *Associazione Studi Kolosimiani*) of which I am part. Furthermore, Kolosimo is extensively touched upon in Ciardi 2017.
- 2 A hypothesis warranting further investigation, and currently examined by the abovementioned ASK, is that Kolosimo's reference and approach to “ancient aliens” may have gradually shifted towards a rather “hard” one.

and those who expanded, more in general, on “ancient aliens” and “mysterious archaeology,” considering as well amateurish, self-published ones and those who only published one book, such authors number around 135 between the late fifties and the early eighties (see Pupilli 2015).

Over the past decade, a new, vocal and prolific author from Italy has rapidly emerged and taken over the scene with sixteen books (some of which are co-authored or recompiled from older publications),³ a serialized graphic novel that at the moment of writing has reached fifteen volumes,⁴ countless conferences whose videos are uploaded on *YouTube*,⁵ a vast array of articles, and plenty of exposure on the web as well as in other media: Mauro Biglino (b. 1950). Biglino's books have so far been translated into nine languages (Spanish, Croatian, Portuguese, French, English, German, Czech, Latvian, and Dutch)⁶ and sell, according to the claims of one of his publishers, in the hundreds of thousands.⁷

The gist of Biglino's narratives is far from being new: according to him, in ancient times beings from another planet seeking new sources of energy descended on Earth and intervened in human history, namely to genetically modify early hominids so to yield human beings, and eventually implementing

3 Given Biglino's productivity, these data are subject to rapid change. See internet site, <https://maurobiglino.it/i-libri-in-italia/>, accessed 07/03/2019. This chapter only references a (large) selection of his books that I read from cover to cover. Biglino's books were published until 2015 by a small publisher specializing in “spiritual” and “alternative” books (including for instance those of the Indian mystic Osho), Uno Editori, founded in 2009 in Orbassano (a municipality that is part of the city of Turin). Uno's owner, Mr. Prabhat Eusebio, specified in a personal interview that the enterprise as it currently is resulted from merging the original one, in 2010, with another one, Infinito records (also owned by him). Mr. Eusebio claimed as well that the revenues had been increasing by 30% between 2012 and 2013 and by 60% in 2014 (personal communication, 21 April 2015 and 8 October 2015, see Bigliardi 2015: 2, note 2). In 2015 Biglino's book *La Bibbia non parla di Dio* [*The Bible does not speak of God*] (Biglino 2015) was published by the major, prestigious house Mondadori (Milan) and, according to Biglino, it sold in the thousands over the first several months (personal communication, 1 October 2015, see also Bigliardi 2015, 2, note 6). After *La Bibbia non parla di Dio* one more book by Biglino (Biglino 2016b) and another one co-authored with Lorena Forni (Biglino and Forni 2017) were published by Mondadori.

4 *Elohim*, illustrated by Riccardo Rontini.

5 At the moment of writing, a simple *Google* search for “Mauro Biglino” and “conferenza” yields 20,600 results. Interviewed in 2015, Biglino's publisher stated that they managed 40 events per year (Bigliardi 2015: 2, note 5). Biglino's official web page includes an updated agenda of events (<https://maurobiglino.it/eventi/>).

6 See internet site, <https://maurobiglino.it/i-libri-di-mauro-biglino-nel-mondo/>, accessed 07/03/2019.

7 Internet site, <https://maurobiglino.it/2017/04/la-bibbia-e-un-libro-di-storia-la-trilogia-in-un-nuovo-volume-unico/>, accessed 12/06/2019.

on Earth a feudal system of sorts that included establishing special power relations with selected humans such as Moses and Jesus, who later came to be seen as prophetic or even divine figures. The traces of such an alien presence and domination, that mostly took place in what is presently called the Middle East, can be found in the Bible, most notably, but not exclusively in the Old Testament. The aliens' hyper-technological means of transport, their instruments and devices, as well as the aliens themselves, were naively interpreted by human beings as divine. In the course of time, after the aliens left our planet (or somehow disappeared), ancient chronicles or texts, originally meant for human beings who enjoyed a special relationship with the aliens, morphed into sacred scriptures, with the main world religions emerging as the result of a misunderstanding of the ancient texts⁸ and also of the intentional and cynical agency of sacerdotal classes interested in maintaining the power structures that had originated with the alien domination.

Biglino is a very effective public speaker, who often employs rather visual and down-to-earth images to convey his ideas and narratives. He claims that he started realizing the possibility of reading the Bible in a non-theological way (or the impossibility of reading the Bible theologically) while working as a translator of ancient Hebrew for a Catholic publisher; however, at some point he understood that the Bible was not a book about God. Biglino, who is originally from Turin, is fond of likening his personal story to that of someone who is served *polenta* (a dish of boiled cornmeal that represents the epitome of lower-class, Northern Italian cuisine) by a cook who claims that the meal is in fact extremely special and refined. You may buy the cook's claim at first, asserts Biglino, but "after the seventh slice you realize that it's *polenta*!"⁹

Whereas Biglino's interpretation of the Bible is far from being novel (with the exception of some sub-narratives that I will mention below), what is quite original about him are his communicative strategies, well exemplified by the kind of autobiographical storytelling just mentioned. In the present chapter, rather than engaging in a meticulous reconstruction of Biglino's ancient-alien

8 Biglino claims as well that the very development of the grammar used to analyse and decode the Bible has been influenced by theology, thus establishing a vicious circle between the tools used to extract the theological message from the text and that very message. In other words, experts of Biblical Hebrew have, in Biglino's opinion, developed, propagated and implemented a biased or distorted grammar and lexicology whose rules, once they are followed by a translator, invariably result in yielding texts in line with a monotheistic creed (see for instance Biglino 2016b, 11).

9 Biglino uses this narrative very frequently in his conferences. For a written version, see internet site, <https://maurobiglino.it/2013/11/dopo-anni-di-studi-ho-deciso-di-applicare-questo-assunto/>, accessed 07/03/2019.

related narratives or a deconstruction thereof, I focus on the storytelling surrounding them, and on the stylistic/rhetorical devices Biglino employs, with a particular emphasis on his deconstruction and criticism of religion, so to grasp the reasons for the fascination that he exerts on a composite readership and audience to the point of eliciting quasi-religious reactions through his narratives that in fact include a strong anti-religious element.

11.2 Biglino's Autobiographical Narrative

Biglino came to the fore in his late sixties, with a series of books published in rapid succession. He is rather discreet (not to say reticent) about his professional activities prior to achieving fame as an author and lecturer; however, when pressed a bit in a personal interview he stated that one of his main professional activities had been inspecting and declaring legal "genetic laboratories" (belonging to schools, universities, etc.); he also provided me with other bits of biographical information such as that he served with the Alpine Soldiers (*Alpini*), the mountain warfare infantry corps of the Italian Army, between 1972–1973.¹⁰ A piece of biographical information that he does release in public, one that elicited strong reactions on his *Facebook* page, is that he used to be a Freemason and that he reached the degree of Grand Master (*Maestro Venerabile*) to which he adds that he currently is "in sleep": at some point he simply found the tasks required of him overwhelming.¹¹ His main publisher's biographical blurbs somewhat elusively state that Biglino has edited "multi-media products related to history, culture, and education for important Italian publishers."¹²

There is, however, one autobiographical narrative that Biglino is very fond of sharing with his readership and audiences, time and again, and that is essential in the construction of his public persona. I report it here according to the version he provided me in person.¹³ Biglino narrates that, around the

10 Such bits of information about Biglino were provided to me by him over a conversation we had in person on 25 October 2015 during which I took notes (reported in Bigliardi 2015; see in particular pp. 33–35; the information about his activity as a laboratory inspector was also reiterated in a personal communication on 17 March 2019). It should be noted that the Alpine Soldiers are a highly prestigious branch of the Italian Army and carry an aura of rigor and respectability in the eyes of many.

11 See Bigliardi (2015: 35).

12 The text of the blurb is also used on web pages selling Biglino's books, see for instance the internet site, https://www.ilgiardinodeilibri.it/autori/_mauro-biglino.php#fullDescription, accessed 07/03/2019.

13 See Bigliardi (2015: 34–35).

age of fifty, he developed an interest in Biblical Hebrew, and that he started studying with a private teacher in Turin who followed a method used in the Israeli *kibbutzim*. The teacher imparted to him around 20–25 evening lessons. Later on, when the tutor began suffering from severe health problems, Biglino began studying autonomously with the books of the British Biblical Society that he used for over eight months. Eventually he started reading the Hebrew Bible published by the Edizioni San Paolo, an important Catholic publisher.¹⁴ Then he happened to spot a “little mistake” in a translation (i.e., a prefix had been overlooked by the translator) and he sent Edizioni San Paolo an e-mail. The publisher begged him to further inform them about other mistakes, and Biglino eventually found “three or four little things.” At that point the publisher asked him to send them his own translation of the Book of Genesis that he had done in pencil out of interest and that he forwarded to the Edizioni San Paolo in a photocopied version. The publisher also asked him to confirm whether he was still familiar with the Latin and Greek that he had learnt in high school. After this he was asked to check the translations of Genesis and Exodus and, finally, he was entrusted with the translation of the *Five Megillot*: the Song of Songs, the Book of Ruth, the Book of Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and the Book of Esther (Beretta 2008) as well as of the Books of the Twelve Minor Prophets (Beretta 2010). Biglino was in charge of producing the interlinear translation, while Ravasi Cardinal Gianfranco (b. 1942), a renowned Biblical scholar and prelate, wrote a more literary translation of those very texts. Biglino claims that such translations were withdrawn when he became a famous author himself, although they are still present in the libraries of major Italian universities, and two more translations by him (the Book of Joshua and the Book of Judges) were never published.¹⁵ Biglino emphasizes, following the aforementioned *polenta* analogy, that he was no longer able to translate the sacred books the way the publisher wanted because he finally recognized it for what it was. In other words, the publisher (and, more in general, the Catholic church) was like a cook claiming that Biglino was being served a sophisticated dish (i.e. that the Bible is a religious book), but upon consuming it time and again (i.e., upon intensively and frequently dealing with the text) he realized it was simply *polenta*, that is, to follow the metaphor, that the text was not about God at all.

14 Internet site, <http://www.edizionisanpaolo.it/>, accessed 12/06/2019.

15 This narrative is repeated by Biglino time and again on different occasions and in different texts, including a personal interview he gave me via e-mail between February and March 2015 and published with Biglino's consent in Bigliardi (2015; see in particular p. 25); the aforementioned conversation we had in person on 25 October 2015 is also included in Bigliardi (2015).

11.3 “Let’s Pretend That ...”: Biglino’s Interpretive Method

Whereas the narrative of his activities as a translator and of his rejection on behalf of the Catholic publisher is used by Biglino to establish his authority as scholar (and his aura of insider/whistle-blower, on which I will say more later), he also insists that his ideas about the Bible are *not* based on his own translations, but on translations of the Bible that are currently circulating, including the one authorized by CEI, the Episcopal Conference of Italy’s Roman Catholic Church. He frequently encourages his audiences to bring their own copy of the Bible to his talks, or to peruse it once they are home, and he claims that his conferences are aimed at making the very conferences useless, in the sense that he wants to render his ideas about the Bible as common knowledge among large audiences. Biglino then proceeds to emphasize how each and every Biblical word has multiple interpretations, and that the sacred scriptures accepted by different denominations of Christianity are different as the result of different historical processes of selection and socialization. In so doing, Biglino creates an impression of competence on the one hand while eroding the credibility of any univocal translation of the Bible on the other. Given the mysterious origins, the polysemy of the Bible, and the substantial haphazardness of the historical processes that have led humanity to accept certain texts as sacred, Biglino claims that there are two extreme options: either we hold such texts as hopelessly inconsistent, or we stubbornly read in them a reference to the God of monotheism. However, according to Biglino the former option is too radical, while the latter one is simply untenable because of not only the irremediable richness of meanings in each Biblical term but also, more substantially, because the term usually translated with “God” (*elohim*) can be interpreted only as referring to multiple concrete beings with concrete attributes (and so is the case of other notable names theologically interpreted as referring to gods, angels, spiritual properties, and so on). To this last observation Biglino adds that he does not necessarily want to foster atheism (he describes himself as an agnostic) but just that he wants to make clear that the Bible is not theological in character. There is, however, a third, or middle way according to Biglino: we can read the Bible while “we pretend that” (in Italian, “*facciamo finta che*,” one of Biglino’s catchphrases) the text contains a linear narrative based on historical events (without being an historical text proper). This, according to Biglino, is precisely the line of interpretation he follows.¹⁶

16 All the ideas and “slogans” I recall in this section are used by Biglino in almost all of his conferences. For a written discussion on behalf of Biglino of the principle “*facciamo*

11.4 No God but Aliens in the Bible: Some Examples of Biglino's Narratives

According to Biglino, a philological and accurate reading of the Bible according to the above-mentioned interpretive line does not warrant a theological interpretation. The Biblical term *elohim* (grammatically a plural noun, which is usually translated as “God,” its plural form being interpreted as a “plural of excellence” or emphatic honorific) can be meaningfully and consistently interpreted, according to Biglino, only as a substantive in the plural proper, and therefore concretely referring to multiple beings, i.e. those beings who “came from the sky,” and genetically manipulated the hominids. The whole narrative contained in the Book of Genesis, following Biglino, refers to such a modification. Accordingly, Biglino’s reading of the Bible consists of the systematic interpretation of key terms, figures, and narratives in a similar “down-to-earth” (pun not intended) and “scientific” (or perhaps: *scientified*) way. Most notably, he claims (and this statement is made time and again both in his books and lectures) that *tselem*, the “image” of God in which man, according to the Book of Genesis, was created (Gen. 1:26), refers to “something that is cut out” and hence can be interpreted as DNA—the alien genetic material with which humans were improved (Biglino 2010: 44–45). Some more examples: God’s “glory” that guided the Hebrews in the desert was nothing but a flying machine emitting dangerous radiation (Biglino 2010: chapter 5); the prophet Elijah was abducted on a flying device (Biglino 2011: chapter 13); the Ark of the Covenant was a sophisticated device that released lethal electric shock if not operated carefully (Biglino 2010: chapter 9); Yahweh (and other Biblical terms usually translated as “God”) was not “God” but one of the many Elohim who ruled the ancient world (and, more particularly, the Middle Eastern area) after having divided it into areas of influence (Biglino 2011: chapter 6). Similar alien/scientific interpretations are given by Biglino of Homeric gods (Biglino 2015: chapter 8), of traditional Hindu texts (Biglino and Baccarini 2017) and, more recently, of the Qur’an.¹⁷ The sacrifices required both by the “gods” of the Bible and by ancient Greek gods, for which so many detailed instructions were given, were likely aimed at producing a kind of smoke that acted as a tranquillizer of sorts due to its chemical components, and a smell that reminded the aliens of the olfactory sensations they felt in space; Biglino even backs up this interpretation with the

finta che” see for instance <https://maurobiglino.it/2012/12/facciamo-finta-che-la-bibbia/>, accessed 08/03/2019.

17 See the claim made at a conference in Genoa, 21 May 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BegmhRAllg>, accessed 08/03/2019. See also Biglino (2016a: 137).

testimonial of contemporary astronauts (Biglino 2011: chapter 8; Biglino 2015: chapter 11). Interestingly, Biglino's narratives are far vaguer concerning the reasons why the Elohim at some point decided to leave planet Earth. However, on some occasions he hinted at the fact that "a couple of them" may be sitting in the American Congress, or that perhaps "they are still here and control us," or that our economic and financial system likens (or is the same as) the one that the Elohim established on Earth; usually such "theses" are delivered as punch lines at his conferences or as a reply to questions put by his audiences.¹⁸

Readers familiar with "paleoastronautics" surely have recognized multiple motives that can be found in innumerable other authors, whereas some sub-narratives are, in all likelihood, Biglino's own invention. Biglino mentions for instance the French UFO contactee and religious leader Rael (né Claude Vorhilon) and Erich von Däniken, at least among his bibliographic references;¹⁹ however, most notably, right at the beginning of one of his books he creates a strong connection between his interpretation of the Bible and the narratives of one author in particular, the American/Azeri writer Zecharia Sitchin (1920–2010), a pseudoscientific, controversial, and prolific writer, according to whom the Earth was colonized, some 430,000–400,000 years ago, by extraterrestrials called Anunnaki that came from a planet known as Nibiru

18 The comparison between the Anunnaki's economic system and the current one was made for instance at the 25 October 2015 conference in Lugano, Switzerland "*La Bibbia, gli alieni, il fumetto*" (The Bible, aliens, and comics) whose discussion is included in Bigliardi 2015. The statement about the Elohim in the US Congress can be heard here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofhWBM_dF3k, accessed 23/03/2019); the clip is from an unidentified talk by Biglino, who is asked by a member of his audience how he "explains the fact that we have found no trace of these supposed Elohim." Biglino replies by claiming, "Unfortunately I don't know ... I don't try to explain this" and added that the Elohim may have been "some tens, two hundred, three hundred ... [so] either they left, or they died, or they are well camouflaged"; then he adds that the claim according to which two of them are sitting in the US Congress has been made public at a recent UFO conference in Florence (i.e., "*UFO Evidence—Congresso internazionale di ufologia*," 6 November 2016, NH Hotel). Biglino does not specify who made such a claim at the Florence conference, and he further references to similar claims made by "a former Canadian prime minister" (whom he does not name) and Rev. Barry Downing (b. 1938), Presbyterian minister and proponent of the ancient aliens theory (in particular with his 1968 book *The Bible and the Flying Saucers*). Such elusive hints and references are not infrequent at Biglino's conferences.

19 In each bibliography (Biglino 2010, Biglino 2011, and Biglino 2012, published as a single volume in Biglino 2017) three books by von Däniken (the Italian translations of, respectively, von Däniken 1992, 1999, and 2001—cf. Biglino 2017: 680) are indicated although they are not extensively discussed in the text, and both Biglino (2010) and (2011) provide the reader with links to a web page from which one can download the texts by Rael (cf. Biglino 2017: 678).

in search of gold that they needed to nebulize in the atmosphere of their own planet in order to slow down its cooling. According to Biglino, his Elohim and Sitchin's Anunnaki are the same extraterrestrial race (Biglino 2010: chapter 1 and *Appendix*). In other, minor publications Biglino claims that the Catholic Church and Freemasonry share the same basic structure and ideals (Biglino 2009a) and that the main world religions, contrary to their common interpretations, do not contain clearly defined concepts of reincarnation and resurrection (Biglino 2009b).

Based on such ideas about the Bible and the ancestral past of humanity, Biglino argues that traditional theologians, be they Jewish or Christian, just engage in futile hair-splitting and in cherry-picking (deciding for instance which parts of the scriptures should be taken literally and which not). In one of his books Biglino likens theologians to hyper-specialized physicians who animatedly argue over the nail of a patient trying to establish whether its colour is normal or is the symptom of disease, etc., yet ignoring the fact that the whole body has been run over by a truck (Biglino 2013: 30–31). On one notable occasion Biglino and his publisher even managed to set up a lengthy public discussion with “theologians” from different confessions, a debate that, in all likelihood, was perceived by Biglino’s fans as a major victory on his behalf and one that was in fact a dialog of the deaf.²⁰ Institutionalized religion, according to Biglino, emerged out of a process in which both genuine misunderstandings were involved (i.e., the perception of alien technology as divine by those humans who interacted with them in person, the “naïve” reading of the chronicles over subsequent generations), as well as the cynicism and complicity of those first humans who were interested in conserving a special relationship with the alien lords, and later of those who wanted to keep a hierarchical structure based on a distinction between “initiates” and “non-initiates” (Biglino 2013: 123–124).²¹

20 “Cosa dice davvero la Bibbia?” [What does the Bible really say?], Novotel Milano Nord, 6 March 2016, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlqFOdzQThI>, accessed 12/06/2019. The debate went on for more than four hours. The “theologians” were Daniele Garrone (Waldensian), Ariel Di Porto (Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Community in Turin), Mons. Ioan Avondios Bica (Archbishop of the Orthodox Church in Milan), and father Ermis Segatti (professor of Theology and History of Christianity at the *Facoltà Teologica dell’Italia Settentrionale*, a Catholic university in Milan). The moderator was the journalist Sabrina Pieragostini, who also wrote the Preface to Biglino (2013). A transcription of the debate is available here: <https://unoeditori.leadpages.co/trascrizione-incontro-teologi/>, accessed 12/06/2019. In order to get a general idea of how the event was perceived by Biglino’s fans, one can take a look at the comments posted under the *YouTube* video.

21 See also Bigliardi (2015: 28).

11.5 Interpretation: The Multiple and Ambiguous Layers of Biglino's Narratives

Even a quick look at the comments below one of the innumerable videos of Biglino uploaded on *YouTube*, or on his *Facebook* page, can provide one with a general sense of the fact that his works elicit extremely enthusiastic and extremely negative reactions alike (the former seemingly being prevalent among those who take the pains to write such comments). I will return in a moment to the positive reactions and to their possible reasons. Critical discussions on the web, to which Biglino often responds directly with his own posts on *Facebook* or articles on his official web page, can be grouped into three main categories, with possible overlaps: (a) “philological” discussions, aimed at beating Biglino, so to speak, at his own game (for instance arguing in favour of the legitimacy of translating *elohim* as “God”); (b) attempts at discrediting the originality of Biglino's work, by pointing out its similarity with the production of authors like Sitchin, von Däniken, etc.; (c) attacks *ad personam*, including accusations of being a Freemason, a Satanist, an alien in disguise, etc.

At the moment of writing, not many scholarly publications discuss Biglino's work. In fact, there are two worthy of remarking: a lengthy article in Italian of which the present chapter is an elaboration (Bigliardi 2015) and an analysis of the “Biglino phenomenon” by Manuel Ceccarelli (Ceccarelli 2016). Ceccarelli is by academic training a Sumerologist. However, he produced an examination of Biglino's work that goes beyond the simple assessment of Biglino's translations and interpretations of ancient civilizations. Ceccarelli has focused on the reception of Biglino as represented by the comments posted by Biglino fans on *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Amazon*, and other web pages (Ceccarelli 2016: 953). Drawing upon an analogy between pseudoscience and cargo-cults put forth by the physicist Richard Feynman (1918–1988), Ceccarelli describes the kind of discourse assembled by Biglino, and, more in general, by all producers and propagators of paleoastronautics as a form of investigation that pathetically mimics science in the same way that founders of “cargo cults” mimicked landing strips and control towers: a perfect imitation, in their perception, except the fact that the desired and idolized airplanes did not land (what makes this comparison particularly sarcastic is that the very supporters of paleoastronautics, including Biglino,²² often resort to the example of cargo cults in order to explain how ancient religions were born imitating alien technology and trying to entice the extraterrestrials to come back). Authors like Biglino, points out Ceccarelli, while trying to “rewrite human history” are in fact amateurish

22 See Biglino (2016a: 31).

and not conversant with specialized literature: they are prone to oversimplification; they base their “hypotheses” on wild extrapolations and vague analogies among culturally distant civilizations; they obsessively criticize academia while at the same time posing as scholars; they reference outdated sources, misquote legitimate ones, cite authors without qualifications while omitting to mention their real background or even by attributing to them an academic background that such authors do not have; they make excessive use of rhetorical questions; they cynically adopt a “relativistic” approach according to which, if nothing is certain then all hypotheses are equally worthy; they confuse *probability* and *possibility*; they use incorrect language, fallacious arguments, and cherry-picked cases with the omission of data contradicting their own “findings”; they encourage conspiracist and paranoid thought according to which their own “truth” is being threatened by larger plots aimed at suppressing human self-awareness, etc. (Ceccarelli 2016: 954).²³

Ceccarelli expands on some translations and interpretations by Biglino, most notably on Biglino’s discussion and rendition of the word *elohim*, showing in detail why it is not philologically correct and why, more in general, Biglino’s approach to and discussion of monotheism is fallacious (Ceccarelli 2016: 957–959). Ceccarelli is especially and highly critical of some oversimplifications made by Biglino in regards to Sumerian civilization (Ceccarelli 2016,

23 Bigliardi 2015 was a pioneering article (though not a peer-reviewed one) written for the Italian CESNUR (*Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni*, Turin) in response to the multiple inquiries received by CESNUR itself on behalf of curious readers who asked for a thorough analysis of Biglino’s work. It included an interview with Biglino as well as the report on a conference given in Lugano (*La Bibbia, gli alieni, il fumetto*, mentioned above) by Biglino, during which I interacted extensively with Biglino himself, with the conference organizers, and with Biglino’s fans. It is relevant to underscore here that the conference took place at an auditorium of the *Università della Svizzera Italiana* that can actually be rented for non-academic events. Ceccarelli credits such article but also chastises it for attributing “solid philological credentials” to Biglino, hence incurring, in his opinion, a “wrong assessment” (Ceccarelli 2016: 957 note 26). To be sure, I recognize that the 2015 article is not as critical an analysis of Biglino’s work as Ceccarelli’s, being rather conceived as a preliminary mapping of the production and arguments of such a prolific and popular writer. However, the alleged attribution of “solid philological credentials” to Biglino in such text is rather the result of a misunderstanding on behalf of Ceccarelli, who *partially* quotes a passage that in fact refers to the *perception* of Biglino on behalf of his audience that Biglino creates by “legitimizing himself based on association [with the Catholic publisher] *although not based on formal training and on an academic career*” (I have italicized the translation of the passage skipped by Ceccarelli), and not to *my own* assessment of his credentials, that also emerges from the rest of the article *including my interview with Biglino*—in which I make it quite clear that Biglino has no formal training in the languages he claims to be translating from and that he was appointed by the Edizioni San Paolo only for the interlinear translation of some texts.

960). For Ceccarelli, however, what is central and decisive in Biglino's work, and what is also the key to understanding its popularity, is the invalidation of organized religion, and most notably of the Catholic Church, that is promoted by Biglino. Ceccarelli reads Biglino's texts as a reflection of two more general and intertwined phenomena that mark modernity: *secularization*; i.e., the loss of social relevance for religion and churches, and *religious subjectivization*; i.e., the creative construction, on behalf of individuals, of religious beliefs and identities based on the most diverse materials and in a sort of spiritual *bricolage* (Ceccarelli 2016: 962–963). According to Ceccarelli, the fact that Biglino is appreciated among ufologists, as well as by supporters of antireligious discourses and atheists, is a somewhat marginal aspect of the phenomenon. Biglino's reception should rather be read as part of “alternative spirituality” and related discourses and fields (Ceccarelli 2016: 964). Ceccarelli finds confirmation of this in the kinds of bookshops and circuits that usually host Biglino and provide him with a showcase, with the editorial line of Uno Editori (Ceccarelli 2016: 965–966), and with the kind of positive comments that Biglino's work receives on the Internet, ones which more often than not carry “religious” tones; for instance, when Biglino is praised as a spiritual liberator or the bearer of some kind of “enlightenment” (Ceccarelli 2016: 967 and 969–973).²⁴ In this sense, the “Biglino-phenomenon” appears, according to Ceccarelli, like “a quasi-religion,” although, as far as his expressed intentions are concerned, Biglino is far from founding a new religion (Ceccarelli 2016: 968).²⁵

In my opinion, Ceccarelli's analysis of how the “Biglino-phenomenon” starts off as anti-religious and ends up looking like a quasi-religion is accurate and compelling, and so is his description of the pseudoscience that fuels (and is encouraged by) “paleoastronautics.” However, I am also convinced that one has to go back to Biglino's texts and discourses and analyse their recurring topics and underlying logic if one wants to understand in depth and detail the reasons for Biglino's appeal on different audiences. An important role in Biglino's fame is played, of course, by the marketing strategies implemented by his publishers (for instance ensuring Biglino's constant and intensive Internet presence), the organization of events in tight succession, and Biglino's talent and stamina as a public speaker. It can also be argued that one of the keys to Biglino's success

24 Ceccarelli is somewhat critical towards Bigliardi 2015 for not analysing Biglino's reception within “alternative spirituality” circles, although he acknowledges that such study does place Biglino within the “alternative” and “conspiracist” field (Ceccarelli 2016: 964, note 58). In fact the article does emphasize that Biglino's message harmonizes with the one of ufologists and “alternative exegetes” of the sacred scriptures whose message sometimes overlaps or blends with that of new religious movements (Bigliardi 2015: 3).

25 See also Bigliardi (2015: 3).

lies in the very fascination that “ancient aliens” generically speaking have always exerted on the public. However, these observations, in my opinion, do not fully explain the “Biglino-furor” nor do they explain what is peculiar in his own version of the somewhat trite “ancient aliens” narrative. The deeper reasons for the fascination he exerts on his readership and audience are, I think, inscribed in his very texts and marked by some fundamental ambiguities.

Consider: all advocates of “ancient aliens” propagate, by and large, the same grand narrative, possibly enriched with some original narrative additions and with differences in style. The idea that the Elohim enjoyed the smoke of sacrifices offered by humans because its odour reminded them of one they had perceived in space is, in all likelihood, an original contribution of Biglino to that grand narrative, and his usage of Hebrew (and ancient Greek) texts with inter-linear translation is probably his most peculiar stylistic device (analogously, during his conferences, he writes Hebrew and Greek words on whiteboards and comments on them).

However, a decisive factor is Biglino’s persona as it is constructed through his discourse (written and oral alike). The peculiarity of such construction can only be appreciated *comparatively*, with reference to other prominent authors who contributed to the sub-genre of paleoastronautics. I have already recalled Peter Kolosimo and his “soft” treatment of ancient aliens, but a brief digression is warranted here about two other major producers and propagators of “mysterious archaeology” that have already been mentioned and that are referenced by Biglino as well: Erich von Däniken and Zecharia Sitchin. Throughout his decades-long production von Däniken has been able to present himself as the marginalized, amateurish yet brilliant enthusiast, the traveller-adventurer who could look at archaeological remains with fresh eyes, seeing connections and analogies where supposedly narrow-minded archaeologists could see none. Through the profits of his business as hotelier (and thanks to the strength of the Swiss currency) he could reach, in the 1960s and 1970s, travel destinations that were prohibitively far and expensive for common European tourists; so as to enrich his books, some of which read like travelogues, with fascinating tales and glossy pictures of archaeological sites (a typical image of his books being von Däniken roaming around ancient ruins with measuring tape). The Swiss author was even able to capitalize on his legal troubles as a businessman, claiming that the real and ulterior reason behind his indictment and incarceration for fraud were in fact the subversive ideas expressed in his first book.²⁶

26 An enlightening discussion of von Däniken’s interpretive strategies in approaching the Bible and other ancient/sacred texts is advanced in Richter (2012), who employs the expression *interpretatio technologica*. Such notion applies as well to Biglino. Richter also

The case of Sitchin is different. In a late phase of his life he did take up the role of chaperon for a series of guided tours of the “mysterious” locations discussed in his books (such travels are narrated in two separate volumes: Sitchin 2004 and Sitchin 2007), but in most of his works he rarely talks about himself; he rather projects the image of a scholar buried in books who bases his ideas on the meticulous discussion of extensive sources, which, however, he reports in his final bibliographies rather than in footnotes.²⁷

Through the narrative of his affiliation with, and eventual rejection by, a famous Catholic publisher, Biglino manages to project simultaneously the image of an intellectual and an expert in philology, a persecuted rebel, and an honest, determined whistle-blower with an insider’s view into the Church’s manipulations and conspiracies. He also strengthens the legitimacy of his ideas by referring constantly to vocabularies written by Hebrew experts who do not fall within the (supposed) area of influence on the Catholic Church, and, as we have seen, he deflects the possible accusation of being biased by pointing out that the same conclusion he reached as a translator can be reached by reading *any* translation of the Bible. Lastly, over the past years he has been co-writing books with authors who qualify (or at least *are described as*) prominent experts in other fields: Enrico Baccarini, a journalist specializing in “mysterious archaeology” (Biglino and Baccarini 2017); Lorena Forni, a researcher in philosophy of law at the University Milano-Bicocca (Biglino and Forni 2017); Massimo Barbetta, an eye doctor who is fond of ancient languages and mythology (Biglino and Barbetta 2018); Pietro Buffa, a molecular biologist (Biglino and Buffa 2018). It is also important to stress that Biglino is constantly presented as a “free thinker” and that his readership and audience is constantly invited to approach his ideas “with an open mind,” “unprejudiced” and the like (for instance, the subtitle of Biglino’s web page is *Una ricerca per liberi pensatori* [Research for free thinkers], but cf. also the subtitle to Biglino 2009b). Biglino frequently emphasizes the interdisciplinarity of his work (cf. Biglino 2016b). Furthermore, Biglino constantly peppers his lectures with statements

draws a parallel between von Däniken and Rael (Richter 2012: 243–245). Interestingly, Richter seems to suggest that defining von Däniken’s texts as “pseudoscientific” is tantamount to superficially dismissing them (Richter 2012: 245); however, I think that a study like Ceccarelli 2016 shows how a scholar can well use such category while understanding in depth the logic and appeal of a narrative relating to “paleoastronautics.” I have too analysed von Däniken’s production and the logic of his texts in Bigliardi (2018). See also Swartz and Hammer’s essay in this collection.

27 A scholarly mapping and analysis of Sitchin’s work is a *desideratum*; however, at the moment of writing the present chapter I am also engaged in such an enterprise.

like, “I am ready to change my mind if confronted with compelling evidence,”²⁸ thus creating an “aura” of modesty, open-mindedness, and calmness. On other occasions, he recalls life threats or insults he supposedly received, thus giving the impression that he is a persecuted outsider.²⁹

So far we have addressed, so to speak, the “outer packaging” with which Biglino presents himself to his public. However, on closer scrutiny, what is most relevant is that his message turns out to be two-layered or, in other words, two complementary halves.

The first half is the idea that the very existence of the Catholic Church in particular, and of monotheistic religions in general, is the result of misunderstanding and manipulation, the Bible not being what it is presented as; that is, not being a book about God. This side of Biglino’s discourse, which is in fact far from being novel and original,³⁰ definitely appeals to critics and detractors of religion.³¹ Interestingly, Biglino sends out a double message, further claiming, on one hand, that the origin of all religions is the fear of death, but also that, on a personal level, he is an agnostic, not an atheist, and that he is only deconstructing the sacred scriptures, not faith or spirituality per se. It should be mentioned here as well that Biglino emphasizes that he has never seen any UFOs.³² Belief in the alien origin of UFOs, belief in aliens currently visiting the earth, and belief in “ancient aliens” are in fact three distinct issues,³³ but by implying that he is somewhat dubious about present-day UFOs, Biglino is also able to send a reassuring message to his most rational and sceptical readers.

The second half of Biglino’s message is the very “alien narrative”: the creation of human beings by extraterrestrials through genetic engineering in a remote past, and the aliens’ very presence and domination on the planet. Such

28 See Bigliardi (2015: 29).

29 See for instance “Minacce di morte a Mauro Biglino” (Death threats against Mauro Biglino), 12 December 2013: <https://maurobiglino.it/2013/12/minacce-di-morte-a-mauro-biglino/>, accessed 23/03/2019. The letter, reproduced on the web page, included a bullet. It was signed with the (mysterious) acronym FLCM and it was sent to a Kundalini Yoga Center in Milan that was to host a conference by Biglino.

30 For a highly readable introduction see Hyman (2010: 81–100).

31 Biglino is also very insistent and vocal in questioning the righteousness of a God that supposedly ordered and approved multiple killings and massacres, thus drawing on another classical line of attack on the Bible (see for instance the whole Biglino [2016a], in which Yahweh is even called anti-Semite: 244–245).

32 See Bigliardi (2015: 34).

33 Such “soft disavowal” of extraterrestrials through the statement that one has never seen a UFO or does not believe in the UFO’s extraterrestrial origin is in fact common among the advocates of the “ancient alien” narrative as it is shared, to the best of my knowledge, by von Däniken, Jean Sendy, and Kolosimo.

narrative, as we have seen, is presented by Biglino with strong conspiracist undertones that can even overlap with “extreme” theses such as those of the author David Icke (b. 1952), known for the propagation of the narrative according to which our planet is secretly steered, at high political levels, by malignant aliens.³⁴ Biglino even advances conjectures about the possibility that the character of Superman (an alien disguised among terrestrials whose original name is *Kal-El*) may be a sort of allusion to the Biblical *elohim* on behalf of the “two North American Jews” who invented him (Jerry Siegel, 1914–1996; and Joe Shuster, 1914–1992 [Biglino 2016a, 236–237]). Both messages are propagated by Biglino simultaneously and they are well represented by two of his titles: *The Bible Does Not Talk about God* (2015) and *The Bible’s Alien God* (2011).

However, it should be emphasized that such halves, taken separately, can be appreciated by (or, vice versa, that they tap into) two different *audiences*. In all likelihood, one component of Biglino’s public is more fond of the “philological deconstruction” of the Bible and the subsequent criticism of the Church, whereas another one enjoys instead the “alien tale” in conspiracist fashion. Interestingly, a favourable review of Biglino’s 2013 book *La Bibbia non è un libro sacro* was published in the official magazine of UAAR, the Italian Union of Rationalist Atheists and Agnostics;³⁵ furthermore, a positive hint at Biglino’s theses was included by Francesco Cavalli-Sforza in his 2017 book *L’inganno delle religioni* (“How religions deceive”). Paradoxically, the son of the great geneticist Luigi Luca (1922–2018), and himself a notable populariser of genetics, in his brief book about the “deception of religions” decided to briefly and generically mention “paleoastronautics” and a possible “alien hypothesis” for the origin of religious narratives, along with Biglino’s specific work and figure, emphasizing that Biglino’s collaboration with the Catholic publisher was discontinued, without focusing on the fact that, overall, Biglino’s theses are a form of nonreligious creationism and include plenty of pseudoscience (Cavalli-Sforza 2017: 102–104).

34 The bibliography of Biglino (2009a) references a book by David Icke that is, however, not discussed in Biglino’s book (its presence should rather be interpreted as an indication of further reading). For a scholarly discussion of Icke’s production, see Robertson (2013).

35 *L’Ateo* 5/2016, p. 33. The review was authored by Pierino Giovanni Marazzani, who was not a member of the editorial team but an external contributor to the magazine. *L’Ateo* was run by an editorial team of volunteers who communicated and discussed via a mailing list and it was open to external contributions by lay readers, UAAR members, and specialists. The review was probably accepted because no editorial team member in charge of examining external contributions was familiar enough with Biglino’s work (at that time I was a team member but either I was not requested to check the review proposal or it simply escaped me). Further proposals of reviews of Biglino’s books (Biglino 2016a; Biglino and Baccarini 2017) by Marazzani were declined by the editorial board upon internal debate.

Two more related events, that took place in tight succession at the time in which the present chapter was undergoing a final revision, seemed to confirm the ambiguity and chameleonic character of Biglino's work. On May 12, 2019 Biglino gave a joint talk with Piergiorgio Odifreddi (b. 1950) at the Turin International Book Fair (*Salone internazionale del libro di Torino*) titled "Cose dell'altro mondo" (literally "Things of the other world": an Italian idiom that refers to anything extraordinary or outlandish).³⁶ The talk was moderated by journalist Sabrina Pieragostini. Odifreddi, formerly a professor of Logic at the University of Turin, is a prominent essayist and public intellectual, whom can be described as an "Italian Richard Dawkins" of sorts³⁷ and who is one of the honorary presidents of UAAR, the Italian Union of Atheists, Rationalists, and Agnostics.³⁸ During the first half of the talk Biglino and Odifreddi seemed to agree, although for different reasons, on discarding the Bible as a religious and ethically significant text, although Biglino encouraged the audience to read it because of its cultural relevance, and Odifreddi, somewhat rhetorically, insisted on the importance of reading great world literature instead. Odifreddi did not seem to have read Biglino's books and in any case did not discuss them in detail. Somewhat inconsistently he kept praising the exactness of the natural sciences as opposed to the fuzziness and pretension of philosophy, except that he also referenced to and praised the Roman philosopher Lucretius. Only towards the end of the talk did Odifreddi point out that the "alien creation" advocated by Biglino is similar to theistic evolution advocated by some religions—this, of course, was a relatively mild objection if compared with detailed, and science-based objection refutation of Biglino's core narratives and may have been easily overlooked by the public. Furthermore, when the conference was drawing to its end, Biglino came up with a veritable *coup de théâtre*: he was joined on stage by a woman who introduced herself as Elisabetta Soro, a surgeon, pharmacologist, and an independent researcher in the field of "archaeomedicine." Soro showed on a screen a series of pictures that she had taken at the Luxor Temple in Egypt in March 2019. Such pictures showed a relief on which, next to the representations of a Pharaoh as well as to that of an Egyptian god of fertility, some images were carved, that both Soro and Biglino interpreted as spermatozoa. Such move "*à la* von Däniken," that for reasons of time was not commented upon by Odifreddi, gave the impression that Biglino "won" the debate. A few days later, on May 24, Italian Raelians organised a talk at a public library in Cuneo (in Piedmont, some 100 kilometres from the region's capital

36 See internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Lkr745s5dA>, accessed 12/06/2019.

37 See internet site, <http://www.piergiorgiodifreddi.it/>, accessed 12/06/2019.

38 See internet site, <https://www.uaar.it/>, accessed 12/06/2019.

Turin) titled “Our extraterrestrial origins and the philosophy of infinity” (“Le nostre origini extraterrestri e la filosofia dell’infinito”).³⁹ The speaker was Giuseppe Caruso, a spokesperson of the Italian Raelian Movement in charge of the Piedmont group, and the conference was opened by showing a clip of Biglino’s discussion of the “spermatozoa” in the Luxor relief given in Turin a few days earlier. Biglino was referenced to by the speaker without expanding on his background, work, and credentials, but rather taking for granted that the audience already was familiar with them. The suggestion was, of course, that Biglino’s theory aligns with Raelian beliefs.

To be sure, Biglino’s reading of the sacred scriptures is also an *interpretation*, and not exactly a literal one. When I pointed this out to him, he replied that ancient texts produced by different civilizations on different continents seem to converge on the narrative of “those who came from the stars” but in fact, he added, “the reference to the possible existence of aliens is the least important part of my work [...] I would serenely accept the discovery that such aliens were in fact members of some ancestral if highly developed terrestrial civilization, but what counts most is understanding that the Bible is not about religion.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, the interpretive method advocated by Biglino is provided by multiple clauses (“this is just a hypothesis”; “we are just *pretending that ...*”) that function like veritable loopholes with which Biglino can astutely play fast and loose with his interlocutors. He is, in fact, fond of stating that the “alien hypothesis” is the least important part of his work, that the Elohim may even turn out to be of terrestrial origin, and that what is most relevant for him is, ultimately, suggesting that the Bible does not talk about God (cf. Biglino and

39 See the internet site, <https://it.rael.org/print.php?news.837>, accessed 12/06/2019. The fact that the talk took place at such venue shouldn’t be interpreted as a sign that Raelians enjoy official support on behalf of Cuneo’s local authorities or more in general of Italian ones. Although the Library belongs to the municipality of Cuneo, it is available for free for public conferences given that a conference room is requested in due time through an official form; selection and approval of speakers and initiatives, on behalf of the Library’s Direction, does not seem to be strict—in fact the Library’s official rules state that usage *may* be denied in case of religious or philosophical “propaganda” (see the internet site, http://www.comune.cuneo.it/fileadmin/comune_cuneo/content/amm_organiz/cultura/moduli_regolamenti/biblioteca/linee_guida_attivita_in_biblioteca.pdf, accessed 12/06/2019) and this obviously did not happen on such an occasion.

40 Bigliardi 2015, 26. I also asked Biglino why the Elohim would have taken the pains of explaining to ancestral humans the procedure, for instance, of cloning, since the humans themselves would only have understood such procedures very approximately. In other words, the Elohim may have chosen not to disclose such events at all. Biglino insisted that some selected humans were educated and knowledgeable enough to share such information (Bigliardi 2015: 28–29).

Forni 2017: 20⁴¹) a claim that is obviously strident with the very titles of some of his main books, with his own insistence on aliens, with the way in which his work is marketed by publishers, and with the very venues of his talks. It should also be noted that Biglino claims that if the interpretation of a text yields a result that cannot be explained by science or even contradicts it (in some cases, as Biglino himself states, geneticists pointed out to him that the “scientific protocols” supposedly contained in the sacred texts did not match current techniques), we can still “take note” of it; in other words, Biglino is astute not to discard any interpretation and to suggest implicitly that, since science changes, we may at some point interpret scientifically a passage that at first was unclear or even seemed to contradict science. In so doing, Biglino seems to have found a formula for the a-critical, cumulative construction of texts, be they scientific or just scientific-sounding while being in fact pseudoscientific.⁴²

If criticism is levelled at his anti-religiosity, Biglino can always retort that he is “just an agnostic” and that he is “just” deconstructing the Bible. He also insists that he arrived at his conclusions about the Bible independently and through his philological deconstruction of the sacred texts; however, as I have already pointed out, in one of his earliest books Biglino carefully inscribed such an interpretation in the grand narrative advanced by Sitchin, thus full catching up with, and tapping into, the “ancient aliens” genre (also raising doubts, for the historian of ideas, as to the fact that Biglino really developed his own narrative as an autonomous “conclusion” based on his specific “studies” and not from being inspired by the pre-existing plethora of “ancient alien” work that, as we have seen, is remarkably present in his home country⁴³).

One hypothesis that warrants further investigation is that, in all likelihood, the component of Biglino’s audience and public that self-identifies as atheist, rationalist, and agnostic and that appreciates his books and talks in fact

41 While co-authoring and publishing a book with the far more known and visible Biglino, Lorena Forni is careful (and somewhat astute) in briefly specifying that she, in her turn, agrees with him mostly as far as the criticism of the Bible, and of its centrality in ethical debates, is concerned, whereas the “ancient astronauts” hypothesis seems to her far-fetched, while also exceeding her competence and areas of investigation and interest; at the same time Forni points out that the existence of extraterrestrial life may be demonstrated or rejected by science, as the very discovery of exoplanets suggests (Biglino and Forni 2017: 17–18).

42 See Bigliardi (2015: 27–28).

43 My guess at the moment of writing is that the earliest Biglino was careful to catch up with the established “ancient aliens” genre and that his anti-religious tones increased over time while “paleoastronautics” slowly receded in the background; however, this warrants further comparative analysis of his texts and talks, and does not essentially impinge on the interpretation advanced here.

approaches his discourse unconsciously selecting the main layer or half of his message they are most passionate about while leaving the other one in the background and undiscussed. Perhaps, if appropriately guided, this kind of reader may quickly realize that Biglino's theses are nothing but a form of *non-religious creationism*, relying on as many illogical or far-fetched elements as those for which Biglino blames religion and theology.

It is relevant to note that none of the elements of Biglino's book, taken by itself, is really new (aside from the original aforementioned additions in the form of sub-theses or sub-narratives), both of which can be detected, for instance, in von Däniken, although not as widely and not as systematically used. In other authors such as Kolosimo and Sitchin, the anti-religious message is simply absent,⁴⁴ while the "alien narrative" is presented in softer tones. In sum, what is really novel about Biglino's work is the astute balance with which they are mixed and exploited, and served in the package of his persona of rebel and rejected philologist.

The "Biglino furor" is remarkable for the rapidity of its expansion and for its multifacetedness, that has been well described by Ceccarelli. As I explained beforehand, in his study Ceccarelli mostly focuses on the *style* in which Biglino's fans express appreciation for him in their comments on social media and other web pages. Drawing upon Ceccarelli's results and observations, and complementing them with the analysis of Biglino's texts that I advance in the present pages, I suggest that further investigation may be carried out among Biglino's fans so as to further understand their background, the way in which they became aware of Biglino's production, the motives for their appreciation, and their way of interpreting Biglino's texts. It would be intriguing to investigate whether interest and enthusiasm on behalf of readers and audiences are mainly triggered by the anti-religious tones and implications of Biglino's discourse, or by the "ancient aliens" narrative—the latter being possibly perceived by them as Biglino's contribution to a more general trend, represented by authors like Sitchin and von Däniken, of which they may already be aware and consume; in this last case it would also be relevant to investigate if and why Biglino is perceived as more original, convincing, etc. than similar authors. Finally, I find that it would be highly interesting to determine the extent to which all those Biglino readers and followers who consider him as a scholar proper, or as a champion of science and rationality (and may even self-identify

44 This is particularly remarkable in the case of Kolosimo, who politically self-identified as Communist (and at times even as Maoist) and who, in his books, heavily drew upon the theses of Soviet supporters of "ancient alien" narratives that had been conceived in communist Russia as a form of "secular deconstruction" of the Bible.

as such) are aware of the abovementioned inconsistencies and scientific/scholarly flaws in Biglino's narratives, especially but not only that emerge in consideration of some genetic notions; and, if so, how such readers possibly rationalize said inconsistencies. All this may be verified through the collection of questionnaires at Biglino-related events and is left open for future investigation on behalf of scholars specializing in social sciences.

11.6 Addendum

On 1 August 2019, when the present chapter had already undergone final editing, an Italian YouTuber posting by the name "Omega Click" released a ten-minute video in which, wearing a "Guy Fawkes" mask, while specifying that "[he] very often, personally, found Biglino's work enlightening," made extensive reference to a series of articles published in the Turin newspaper *La Stampa* between 1988 and 1993.⁴⁵ These articles reported on a case of major financial fraud involving several persons, and including Mauro Biglino in his capacity as a broker. The YouTuber reported that the fraud targeted hundreds of poor people in the rural areas of Piedmont, and that Biglino played a major role in targeting them in person or through a local radio broadcaster, owing to his remarkable communicative skills including usage of local dialect; Biglino allegedly gained from the fraud 1,463,000,000 *lire* (roughly corresponding to 700,000 Euros of today). The YouTuber referenced the online historical archives of *La Stampa*, which contained such articles, as well as to a 2019 anti-Biglino self-published pamphlet,⁴⁶ which disclosed and commented on a selection of them in the context of an overall rebuttal of Biglino (Di Benedetto and Fallisi 2019). Such booklet called Biglino "a paleocrook," with a double reference to him having been involved in a fraud in the past as well as to his "paleoastronautics" that likewise, according to the authors, qualifies as a fraud. Interestingly, the two authors are credited and thanked by Biglino among the "scholars and

45 Omega Click, "MAURO BIGLINO EX TRUFFATORE?" ("Mauro Biglino former fraudster?") 1 August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouClnP--M44&feature=youtu.be>, accessed 02/08/2019.

46 The publisher is indicated as Sonnenmenschen (German: "Humans of the Sun," recalling the authors' Facebook page "Uomini del Sole") and the publisher's location as Berghof; such term translates as "mountain farm" but it was also the name of Adolf Hitler's residence in the Bavarian Alps. The pamphlet, among other things, compares Biglino to "something in-between a Mormon and a Jehovah's Witness," it casts strong doubts on Biglino's competence in ancient Hebrew, and points out the similarity of his narratives to those of other authors (Di Benedetto and Fallisi 2019: 10–11).

researchers” that contributed to one of his 2016 books (Biglino 2016b, 263). The *YouTube* disclosure followed by some months the circulation of similar claims on Internet pages hostile to Biglino. The YouTuber, whose channel, according to its description, “aims at transparency and freedom of information”⁴⁷ called Biglino “a former criminal convicted for fraud [*truffa*] and embezzlement [*appropriazione indebita*],” citing the articles and the pamphlet and added that, since not all the victims had been reported to Italian authorities, the aforementioned amount of money was only an estimate, that the money was never paid back to the victims, and that some of them had committed suicide. The YouTuber also emphasized how Biglino’s theses were not original; furthermore, he sarcastically commented on Biglino’s reference, in a talk, to a large, complex and non-specified “project” coming “from abroad” (i.e. not from Italy) on which Biglino had been working for two years, and that concerned “the whole planet Earth,” being aimed at funding “research and experiments” (in fact, from the clip of Biglino’s talk included by the YouTuber in his own video it was unclear whether Biglino implied that his audience was required to contribute financially to such project). The video received thousands of hits within a few hours. On the same day Biglino’s Wikipedia page in Italian was updated with a paragraph about the scandal referencing the aforementioned newspaper articles. Biglino immediately released a reply through his publisher’s official website, claiming that unspecified people hostile to him, being unable to deconstruct his work, were now trying to discredit him personally by digging out facts occurred more than 30 years earlier. He further claimed that he had been the victim of a discrepancy between “factual truth” and “judicial truth” after wrongly trusting the other people involved in the fraud, and added that he had never been found guilty of fraud. He further emphasized that he was entitled to “make a new life.”⁴⁸

At the moment of writing it is impossible to determine the impact of this newest turn on Biglino’s initiatives and on the audience perception of Biglino. However, the comments posted by Biglino’s fans under the aforementioned video may be indicative of the spectrum of positions that may eventually emerge: (1) disappointed, disheartened, and outraged reactions; (2) claims according to which the scandal is irrelevant, being either the result of a

47 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLrgUeP56dUPUwp4vCy6RIQ/about>, accessed 02/08/2019; other videos published included discussion of topics such as UFO sightings, extraterrestrial contact, alien abduction, conspiracy theories, “out of place” artifacts, and the like; channel subscribers, as to 2 August 2019, amounted to 27,654).

48 Mauro Biglino, “Mauro Biglino chiarisce una volta per tutte!” (“Mauro Biglino clarifies once and for all!”), official webpage, 2 August 2019: <https://maurobiglino.it/2019/08/mauro-biglino-chiarisce-una-volta-per-tutte/>, accessed 02/08/2019.

misunderstanding (i.e., the “Mauro Biglino” reported in the news may have been someone else with the same name) or of a conspiracy against Biglino given his opposition to the establishment (the former position is obviously inconsistent in the light of Biglino’s own reply); (3) claims that, even if Biglino as a person is discredited, the scandal does not impinge on the credibility of his ideas.⁴⁹

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49 It must be specified that long before the 2019 disclosures the aforementioned articles about the fraud were known to scholarly historians of paleoastronautics and other researchers, including the author of the present pages, who had also questioned Biglino via e-mail regarding his background and received a reply similar to the one officially released. However, after long reflection it had been decided not to make reference to such articles and exchanges for a number of reasons: (a) the articles in question were not detailed or clear concerning the final outcome of the trials (the Italian judicial system comprises three degrees of judgment that the available articles did not cover entirely); (b) further investigation would have required archival research as well as juridical knowledge that exceeded the author’s capacity and competence; (c) although such articles were virtually available to a large public, they had not been used yet in the public discussion over Biglino; disclosing them in a scholarly article that could be perused also by participants in the debate could have influenced the debate itself, and radically so.

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Maitreya, Crop Circles, and the Age of Light: Benjamin Creme's UFO Thought

Lukas Pokorny

12.1 Introduction

A staunch flagbearer of Theosophical thought specifically indebted to Alice Ann Bailey (1880–1949), Benjamin “Ben” Creme (1922–2016) was one of the major protagonists of the New Age. He is particularly remembered as chief populariser of the esoteric Maitreya narrative. The related millenarian programme as advocated by Creme (cf. Pokorny 2021) highlights the vitally important role played by humankind’s “Space Brothers.” This chapter focuses on them and the wider ufological context in Creme’s teachings.¹ Born on 5 December 1922, into a Jewish-Catholic family as the second, and only boy, of three children in Glasgow,² Creme—by his own account—early on attracted the attention of the “Hierarchy” and, in particular, his later unnamed Master.³ Already as a teenager he was resolved to become a painter, a career path that was allegedly prompted by the Hierarchy. He married Peggy (d. 1965) and, following the end of World War II, relocated to London, where he resumed his artistic activities

- 1 The existing scholarship on Creme is scarce. Scattered encyclopaedic or otherwise relatively terse mentions aside (see, e.g., Hammer 2015: 356; Kranenborg 1994; Melton 2001: 352), I am only aware of two very recent papers thoroughly addressing Creme’s teachings (cf. Poller 2019; Pokorny 2021).
- 2 For Creme’s official obituary, see *ST* 35:10 (2016 December): 3–4. In 2014, Creme revealed his spiritual progress to be that of a 3.46-degrees initiate. In Theosophical terms, “initiation” refers to “the process of undergoing an expansion of consciousness” (Bailey 1977: 12; cf. Rudbøg 2019), that is, one’s spiritual evolution in a multi-stage scheme. Mastership is attained at the fifth level of initiation. On Earth, there are currently only a few thousand living individuals who have arrived at the third and fourth stages (Creme 1996: 195). Hence, Creme’s self-proclaimed spiritual score renders him part of humankind’s spiritual elite. For a better illustration, while an ordinary person, who still dwells in the “0.”-degrees range (the average is 0.3 degrees) of initiation, uses some twelve per cent of his/her brain capacity, a third-degree initiate would already utilise up to sixty or seventy per cent (Creme 2010: 134).
- 3 The Hierarchy responsible for human evolution consists of sixty-three highly evolved spiritual masters (i.e., the Masters of Wisdom), all of them being fifth- or sixth-degree initiates, under the lead of Maitreya, the World Teacher and a seventh-degree initiate (Creme 2001a: 74).

until the 2000s when his eyesight deteriorated. In the 1950s, Creme developed a keen interest for the incipient UFO phenomenon when he came across George Adamski (1891–1965; a second-degree initiate)⁴ and Desmond Leslie's (1921–2001; a 1.5-degrees initiate) jointly authored *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (1953), as well as its sequel, Adamski's *Inside the Space Ships* (1955).⁵ Driven by a surging fascination, he would become member of George King's (1919–1997; a 1.7-degrees initiate) London-based Aetherius Society from 1957 to 1958, the involvement in which was to exert a lasting influence upon Creme's ufological system. Moreover, it enabled him "to transmit the cosmic spiritual energies from the Space People" (Creme 2007a: xii), vesting Creme with the power to heal. When he parted with King he intensified his telepathic collaboration with the Space Brothers, commencing, albeit unknowingly, his work towards the emergence of Maitreya and the externalisation of the Hierarchy. At the time, Creme, allegedly, alongside George Adamski was, for a short while, part of a group of contactees, who gathered regularly in out-of-the-body meetings deliberating on their missions received by the Space Brothers (Creme 2010: 63–64). In 1959, eventually, Creme was telepathically approached by an individual, himself member of the Hierarchy, who was later to become his Master. He was informed first-hand of the Cosmic Plan, the expectation of the Christ's imminent descent, and that once it had transpired he would be called to publicly promulgate His coming. In fact, next to Creme, supposedly four other "disciples," residing in New York, Geneva, Darjeeling, and Tōkyō, were requested by the Hierarchy to engage in this task, but only Creme was to accept (*SI* 20:8 [2001 October]: 30).

When contacted by the Master, the message fell on highly receptive ears, for Creme was apparently familiarising himself with facets of the "Ageless Wisdom Teaching" since his youth (Creme 2007a: ix–xi). A first eye opener had been Alexandra David-Néel's (1868–1969; a 1.7-degrees initiate) *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet* (1931; translation of the 1929 *Parmi les mystiques et les magiciens du Thibet*). Thereafter, in the late 1940s, he extensively studied the writings of Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957; a second-degree initiate). Another momentous read was Rolf Alexander's (1891–?; a 1.8-degrees initiate) *The Power of*

4 A recurrent popular feature of his publications was to provide spiritual statistics of mythical, historical, and recently deceased personalities. Overall, Creme explicitly follows Bailey's understanding put forth in her *Initiation, Human and Solar* (1922), adding some further details and explanations. Where available, the initiation level assigned by Creme to important figures mentioned is added. This gives additional indication, which figures of history he viewed to be following the path of Maitreya (and his own).

5 Creme dated back his first hesitant encounter with the UFO subject to some point between 1945 and 1948.

the Mind (1956). In addition, he immersed himself in substantial portions of Theosophical literature as well as the writings of varied neo-Hindu masters, such as Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), and Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963; a fourth-degree initiate). The former two are believed to be avatars from outer space invited by Sanat Kumara or the Lord of the World to assist humankind in their spiritual evolution. Another even more spiritually advanced avatar, later held by Creme in highest esteem alongside Maitreya, was Sathya Sai Baba (1926–2011), whom he deemed “the *most* fully Divine Being to grace this planet with His presence” (*SI* 30:5 [2011 June]: 14) acting as the Spiritual Regent of Earth.

As a disciple and disseminator of the Ageless Wisdom, Creme considered himself to be foremostly carrying on the work done by the three chief mediators of the Plan (Creme 2007b: 3): Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891; a fourth-degree initiate); Helena Ivanovna Roerich (1879–1955; a fourth-degree initiate); and Alice Ann Bailey (a 3.2-degrees initiate)—themselves key exponents of Theosophy. Indeed, Blavatsky’s two-volume *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (1888) would represent the “preparatory phase” of disclosing the Plan in our age, whereas the full corpus of Bailey’s teachings signifies the “intermediate phase.” The spreading of the “information” would ultimately come to fruition through radio and television broadcasts of Maitreya’s speeches. This last stage, the “revelatory phase” which would be imminent, has been heralded by Creme (2007a: 211–212). Of the many Theosophists—his three “predecessors” aside—Creme has been especially intrigued by Charles Webster Leadbeater (1847–1934; a 2.4-degrees initiate), whose contributions were significant for both the expansion of the Maitreya narrative and the formation of the religious UFO current (Rothstein 2013: 226–228).

Following the initial steady stream of telepathic messages, throughout the 1960s Creme virtually went into spiritual hibernation until late 1972 when his Master summoned him for a “most intensive period of deglamorization, disillusioning, training and preparation.” His Master, as Creme recounts, “forged [...] an instrument through whom He could work, and which would be responsive to His slightest impression [...]. Everything I see and hear, he sees and hears. When He wishes, a look from me can be a look from Him; my touch, His” (Creme 2007a: xiii–xiv). In March 1974, the Master had Creme invite fourteen hand-picked individuals to instruct them the basic tenets of the Plan. Twelve eventually committed to form the very first Transmission Meditation circle (Creme 2001b), that is, a group meditation reminiscent of Bailey’s Triangles (1937), which is intended to safely transmit Hierarchical energies to the world. From mid-1974, in addition to the messages delivered by his own Master, Creme became the “overshadowed” mouthpiece for Maitreya. In early 1975,

he was then commissioned to finally turn to the wider public, spreading the Plan and announcing the imminence of Maitreya's dense-physical emergence. Two years later, Creme solemnly disclosed that Maitreya was in fact beginning his mission, for he now left his dwelling place in the Himalayas and moved to London where he arrived on 19 July 1977; there Maitreya is held to be residing within the Indian-Pakistani community. His mission would culminate on the Day of Declaration from when the new age's materialisation would gain tremendous pace with the Hierarchy now having been fully externalised. Since then Creme lectured worldwide. In 1982, the publication of the magazine *Share International* commenced. Creme also established the Share International Foundation registered in Amsterdam, which serves as the core body of an international network of related institutions. His talks, columns, and messages published in *Share International* were re-published thematically arranged in seventeen books. Today, Transmission Meditation groups are found across five continents in more than forty countries. Creme passed away at the age of 93 on 24 October 2016, in London, survived by his second wife Phyllis (b. 1942) and three children. His physical absence notwithstanding, he is believed to still spiritually sustain the movement. Creme did not leave a formal (physical) successor; since his death, Creme's daughter-in-law and *Share International* editor-in-chief, Felicity Eliot, and her husband, Creme's eldest son Julian, have become the public faces of Share International.

12.2 UFOs and the Pursuit of the Millennium

Creme's penchant for things ufological pervade his movement's major communication channel, *Share International*, with a rising number of articles and notes from the 1990s and, especially, the late 2000s. The latter shall reflect the increasing activity of UFOs in the face of the soon-to-unfold Day of Declaration. *Share International* volumes are replete with pertinent book reviews, interviews, reports of UFO sightings and traces of their activities, and related photographic evidence. Almost always enclosed readers find a confirmation of authenticity and/or clarifications/corrections given by Creme. The information is scattered throughout decades of *Share International*—frequently in the form of brief responses in the Q&A appendix. In 2010, when *Share International's* attention vis-à-vis the UFO subject went to new heights, Creme released a structured compilation of previously published information. The volume entitled *The Gathering of the Forces of Light: UFOs and Their Spiritual Mission* was dedicated to “a very brave man and colleague, George

Adamski" (Creme 2010: v), the veracity of whose ufological accounts Creme emphatically confirmed.

12.2.1 *The Pursuit of the Millennium*

Creme's UFO thought is deeply rooted in and only comprehensible by looking at his wider millenarian doctrine. Drawing specifically on the messianism of Annie Besant (1847–1933; a 2.15-degrees initiate), Leadbeater, and Bailey, Creme's teachings centre on the reappearance of the Christ (cf. Bailey 1978). "Christ" refers to the embodiment of the Christ Consciousness or Christ Principle, the energy of spiritual evolution, which navigates the human soul—a "spark of the Almighty" (Creme 2005: 38)—on a trajectory to the Universal Logos or God. Through his action, the Christ or World Teacher awakens this energy in humans, therefore unleashing a general commitment for spiritual progress, that is, fostering self-realisation. This collective turn of consciousness would create a new system based on sharing, for "[s]haring creates trust. When there is trust among the nations there will be peace among the nations" (Creme 2001a: 27). Moreover, on an individual level, sharing and subsequently trust will remove anger and resentment (Creme 2007b: 11), creating increasing self-awareness which spells out as happiness and harmony. The new age (or Age of Light) so envisioned would be close at hand. In fact, after World War II the Christ had announced to descend in the flesh in 1950; however, the burgeoning Cold War kept him from doing so until 1977. Since 1982, he would be ready at any given time to come forth from his London abode (he switches between Hindu temples), telepathically and via TV and radio broadcast addressing humankind globally on the Day of Declaration (Creme 2001a: 70). Creme now identified the Christ to be an individual named Maitreya, the leader of our Planetary Hierarchy. Multiple times already the Day of Declaration was delayed owing to the Forces of Darkness, which persistently attempt to thwart the dissemination of the Plan. The Plan refers to the truth of our own divinity, the way how to unravel it, and its implications for creation. As the central facilitator of the Plan, the head of the Forces of Light (i.e., the Hierarchy), Maitreya, is thus sought to be stopped by evil from fully reaching out to humankind. For if Maitreya succeeds, salvational change would accelerate effecting the consummation of the new age, a borderless world of bliss and peace. As Maitreya has it:

My plan is to take you on a journey into a New Country, a new approach to living in which all men can share [...] to realise within you that which you truly are, to show you that you stem from the Godhead Itself, and to

that Divine Source you must return [...] to show the path which must be trodden [...] into Harmony, Beauty, and Justice.

CREME 1992: 54, 134, 32

12.2.2 *The Space Brothers*

The Master of Masters, Maitreya can seemingly count on many helping hands in his salvific mission—the Hierarchy; adepts of the Ageless Wisdom such as Creme himself, of which some of them deliberately spiritually “fell on” Earth from other planets;⁶ a range of extraterrestrial Avatars, twenty-four of which were living on Earth as of 2008; and the Space Brothers in general. Normally ranging from initiation stages six to nine, Avatars are temporary Earth dwellers hailing from other more evolved celestial bodies. They descend on Earth in response to spiritual-evolutionary needs, bringing with them cosmic salvational energy. Most human-incarnated Avatars named by Creme largely fall into three categories: Indian gurus;⁷ historical-religious/mythical figures;⁸ and other historical personalities.⁹

The Space Brothers, sometimes called by Creme “Space People” or rarely so “Extra-planetary Brothers,” shoulder especially important tasks, occasionally resulting in deeds of utter self-sacrifice. Without their caring assistance, humankind would not only be already extinct largely through self-annihilation, but much more spiritually inhibited. Chiefly, the term “Space Brothers” is used by Creme in reference to those on board of extraterrestrial spacecraft or

6 They do so because while on Earth they are capacitated to carry out very distinctive spiritual work. In order to incarnate on the dense-physical Earth, they need to lower the vibrational rate. Examples given by Creme include, among others, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750; a 3.1-degrees initiate); Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827; a 3.1-degrees initiate); Maria Callas (1923–1977; a second-degree initiate); and especially the Venusian George Adamski.

7 In more recent times, Avatars seem to be predominantly incarnating on the Indian sub-continent, such as Vivekananda; Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918); Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950); Yogananda; Anandamayi Ma (1896–1982); Swami Premananda (1951–2011); Ganapathi Sachchidananda (b. 1942); Balasai Baba (b. 1960); and, most importantly, qua Cosmic Avatar Sathya Sai Baba.

8 Creme mentions the likes of Hermes; Adi Shankaracharya (eighth century); Moses (a 2.3-degrees initiate who's originally a Martian); Siddharta Gautama (fifth century BCE); Hercules; Krishna; and Rama. The last five are currently dwelling on Sirius, incidentally, in company of the biblical John the Baptist, who is slated to become an earthly Avatar in 500 or so years.

9 Most prominently featured in Creme's teachings are William Shakespeare (1564–1616; a 3.5-degrees initiate) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519; a 4.4-degrees initiate). Whereas the former entered Earth's evolutionary system coming from Jupiter, the latter was a Mercurian, presently living on Sirius as an eighth-degree initiate.

UFOs, some of which decide to visit or even live on Earth temporarily. “Space Brothers” may also include those who willingly enter human evolution for some time (see note 6). Creme estimates the number of Space Brothers currently residing on Earth at around 2,000 (*SI* 29:2 [2010 March]: 13). The origin of Earth-dwelling or -visiting space folk is exclusively limited to our solar system, with the majority being Martians and Venusians. Mars and Venus are the two planets within the solar system most influential for Earth. Mars, like almost every other celestial body in the universe is populated, yet, ordinarily their inhabitants cannot be perceived for they are of etheric matter (in the case of Mars this shift from the dense-physical state occurred some three million years ago).¹⁰ Creme states that Mars is bustling with nine billion people; typical Martians would look like smaller-sized humans. Overall, Mars is spiritually on a par with Earth but technologically tremendously superior because they did not make the many “mistakes” humankind did (Creme 2001a: 231). Creme divides Martians into three categories of spiritual evolution: those who are like gods to us; those of lesser but still remarkable spiritual progress; and those of very low spiritual quality. Moreover, contrary to humans, Martians are mostly holding fast to the Plan; however, unlike Earth, Mars has hitherto not witnessed the creation of a Christ. Like Earth, Mars is not considered a “sacred planet.” Both are in their fourth round (of a total of seven) in terms of planetary evolution, which renders them lagging behind the other ten [*sic*] planets of the solar system.

Vulcan, the planet closest to the sun, is the most advanced having recently completed its seventh round of planetary evolution and thus transitioned to the highest level etheric matter.¹¹ Vulcan is also home to the headquarters of the Interplanetary Parliament with its representative being the “most distinguished” (*SI* 31:9 [2012 November]: 23).¹² Consisting of envoys of all twelve planets where they are parts of the respective Hierarchies, the Interplanetary Parliament’s objective is to assist each other in pursuing the Plan. Collaborative

10 Creme explains that etheric matter is tantamount to dark matter, which had already been discovered by Wilhelm Reich. He called it the “orgone.” In this regard, Creme recommends scientists to turn to the esoteric literature such as Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* in lieu of, for example, building cyclotrons worth many billions of pounds (Creme 2010: 66–67). What is more, Creme unveiled that the universe would follow the Big Bounce scenario (*SI* 33:3 [2014 April]: 23), so the current scientific mainstream theory of Big Rip/Heat Death would be wrong.

11 According to Creme, spiritual progress generally expresses itself in rarefying matter density be it in people or entire planets; hence, upon completing its seventh evolutionary round Vulcan shifted to the most subtle etheric matter.

12 In this regard, Creme, for example, confirms Adamski’s famous account in which he reported to have attended a meeting of the Parliament in late March 1962 on Saturn.

efforts are fed through emotional links in addition to the fact that all the planets are intertwined energetically. Hence, every single planet affects the other parts of this interplanetary energetic network.

Furthermore, the Parliament is connected to an even higher organisational entity, the Galactic Federation of Light, which encompasses civilisations across the universe (*SI* 32:9 [2013 November]: 23). Unsurprisingly, our solar system's Interplanetary Parliament is also in constant contact with other Interplanetary Parliaments, such as, most importantly, that of Sirius.¹³ Following Vulcan in terms of planetary evolution and representing altogether the Seven Sacred Planets are Mercury and Venus (7), Jupiter (6), Saturn, Neptune, and Uranus.¹⁴ The non-sacred ones are Mars and Earth (4), Pluto, the 1977 discovered 2060 Chiron orbiting Pluto and not the Sun [*sic*], and the 2002 discovered trans-Neptunian Quaoar (2). Of all the planets, Venus carries a very distinct position being Earth's "*alter ego*, our Higher Self" (Creme 2001a: 229). Venusians are extraordinarily evolved. In fact, Sanat Kumara (a ninth-degree initiate), that is, the reflection of Earth's planetary logos, is a Venusian who moved to Earth some 18.5 million years ago to instil the Plan in early humankind. Sanat Kumara is known by many names; he is the one God of the Abrahamic traditions. Upon his arrival he created Shamballa, Earth's central energy node "located in the Gobi Desert, on the two highest etheric planes" (Creme 2007a: 67, 116), from which he governs the planet. While the Plan was originally introduced by a Venusian, the first humans stem from the Moon (*SI* 29:8 [2010 October]: 23).¹⁵ The Moon was actually created through a surplus of gas when Earth aggregated. Today, the Moon is scarcely inhabited, mainly by small animals; in contrast, the sun is thought to be abundant with life. Reincarnational planetary travel is not one-sided; in fact, many higher degree initiates aim to—Creme, for instance, reports that Diego Velázquez (1599–1660; a 2.4-degrees initiate) would be eager to relocate to Mercury—or effectively move on to other planets—Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528; a 2.4-degrees initiate) would now dwell on Vulcan as a Master—both to speed up their spiritual progress. Others travel even outside our solar system, mainly to Sirius, where the progress develops at

13 Similarly, Earth's Hierarchy is viewed as a branch of the Sirian Hierarchy.

14 Creme largely adopts Bailey's esoteric astrology but introduces some rearrangements and novelties, which he does not always handle consistently. For instance, in another earlier list (Creme 1996: 167) Uranus ranks as our solar system's most spiritually progressed planet, followed by Mercury and Vulcan. The figures in the brackets indicate the planet's present evolutionary round.

15 Some humans, apparently, stem from a predecessor solar system of ours. More concretely, Creme indicates that the Jewish people "as a group came from the previous solar system" (*SI* 25:9 [2006 November]: 31).

an incredible pace. Only Masters of the fifth initiation stage may choose the Path to Sirius; famous figures who have done so upon achieving mastership include, among others, Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506; a 2.2-degrees initiate), Michelangelo (1475–1564; a 3.3-degrees initiate who is now already a seventh-degree initiate), and (the mythical) Lǎozǐ (a 4.2-degrees initiate)—all of them now being at the initiatory level of Maitreya or even beyond, such as da Vinci, who presently is an eighth-degree initiate on Sirius. In addition, initiation into the fifth degree bestows the power to communicate directly with the Sirians. Sirius is not only one of the Seven Sacred Solar Systems of our Galaxy that centre on the Galactic Logos, the One About Whom Naught May Be Said, but it is to our solar system what Venus is to Earth—its alter ego. Hence, the two maintain a special connection. The light received from Sirius, for example, would manifest as the Law of Cause and Effect or Law of Karma (Creme 2001a: 229–230).

12.2.3 *Spacecraft*

Up to ninety per cent of the UFOs in our solar system are held to be manufactured on Mars, variously called the “great factory planet” of space ships (Creme 1997: 337) or the “spacecraft factory for our solar system” (*SI* 28:7 [2009 September]: 26). Other civilisations order most of their spacecraft with their own distinctive technology and design from the Martians. UFOs are constructed by pure thought and, like the Space Brothers themselves, consist of etheric-physical matter. Consequently, UFOs are invisible (unless one has etheric vision) and cannot be harmed, let alone destroyed if not caused purposely by the crew. On board of a typical UFO are largely male crew members, and among them may often be Masters or even members of other planetary Hierarchies. Creme claimed to have been entering UFOs multiple times. When UFOs are indeed observed, this is because their pilots want them to be recognised for a particular reason, which will be discussed further below. In order to do so, a space ship’s vibrational rate is lowered and thus transitions into dense-physical matter. However, even then would an UFO preserve its invulnerability due to an impenetrable magnetic field that “protects it by deflecting any missile aimed at it” (*SI* 35:9 [2016 November]: 23). Occasionally, UFOs are disguised as clouds. Also, condensation trails might be traces of spacecraft. UFO technology allows for crossing any kind of distance instantaneously, for time and space is deemed simply an illusion that is voided at “higher levels,” to which it grants access (Creme 2010: 59, 128). UFOs appear in a wide array of forms—cigar-, bell-, fish-, or saucer-shaped; some can effectively morph into any form (*ibid.*: 55). UFO mother ships may be up to 6.5 kilometres long, whereas regular scout ships are around eight to ten metres in diameter. UFO bases are to be found almost everywhere on Earth—under the oceans as USOs, or unidentified

submerged objects, traveling under the seas (*SI* 25:2 [2006 March]: 31); in caves; or in mountainous areas. Altogether, Creme counts some 400,000 [*sic*] active UFO bases on Earth as of early 2012 (*SI* 31:1 [2012 January/February]: 35). Since 2007, UFO sightings worldwide are thought to be skyrocketing, a harbinger of the soon-to-transpire Day of Declaration.

12.2.4 *UFO Activities*

All of the Space Brothers' action is viewed to be driven by one all-pervading purpose, namely to assist humankind in its spiritual evolution. Born out of great love and service for Earth and the solar system at large, their overall activities establish a spiritual platform to receive Maitreya. According to Creme, there are no evil space-faring extraterrestrials. This does not mean that there does not exist evil outside Earth. In fact, on planets like Mars or Pluto we would encounter evil, yet it is contained and therefore cannot enter into space. The mission pursued by the Space Brothers is indeed most crucial, especially so with the inception of the atomic age, for humankind on several occasions was at the brink of self-extinction, which could only be averted through the Space Brothers' intervention. An example oft-times shared by Creme concerns the early Cold War hostilities erupting, among others, during the Cuba or Berlin Crisis. Apparently, it has been largely Martians and Venusians who via government contacts successfully counselled President Kennedy (1917–1963; a 2.4-degrees initiate) how to have the tensions relieved. They were thus capable of “nullifying” the negative energies at play (Creme 2010: 10–12).

The Space Brothers have always been present; accordingly, UFO sightings go back to ancient times. In this respect, Creme, for instance, confirmed Alexander the Great's (356–323 BCE; a 1.5-degrees initiate) UFO encounter—additionally disclosing that the space ships were actually from Mars (*SI* 25:2 [March 2006]: 30–31)—a story which enjoys popularity in the wider ufological community (Makeeff 2019: 365). What is more, the biblical “Chariot of the Gods” would indeed allude to UFOs; the Star of Bethlehem guiding the biblical magi was nothing other than a UFO; likewise, several of the biblical angels were effectively Space Brothers. Given their apparent angelic portfolio, the Space Brothers may indeed be contacted through prayer; and they will act on it (*SI* 29:10 [2010 December]: 26). It seems that establishing contact may be particularly easy when humans go to space. Already during the first Moon landing mission, three UFOs approached Neil Armstrong (1930–2012; a 1.2-degrees initiate). Astronauts while in space are in steady contact with the Space Brothers ever since.

The range of help provided by the Space Brothers spans from very minor rescue missions, such as the extrication of Laika, the dog sent to space by the

Soviets in 1957, to the continual stabilising of Earth's axis through a "ring of light" put there by the Martians in 1979 to prevent a devastating pole shift, as well as the perennial transmission of enormously powerful salvific cosmic and planetary energies to Earth's Hierarchy, which subsequently passes it on to humankind through the Transmission Mediation groups qua energetic transformers. Another feat accomplished by the Space Brothers at times alongside the Masters of our Hierarchy is to regularly deflect potentially dangerous meteors on their trajectories to populated areas (*SI* 32:3 [2013 April]: 22). Notably, this happened, for example, at the 1908 Tunguska event or with the Chelyabinsk meteor of 2013. Another most pivotal field of UFO action concerns global nuclear decontamination. A recurrent topic in Creme's lectures pertains to the all-devastating potential of nuclear energy and weapons. Indeed, the rising number of nuclear powers—Creme counts twenty-eight—is considered the very reason for Maitreya to have descended at this point in time.¹⁶ The nuclear pollution heretofore created would have rendered this planet uninhabitable already many times. It was again thanks to the Space Brothers that this grim scenario did not run its course, for they keep cleansing our planet from pollutants, specifically nuclear radiation. It is the latter that is deemed the number one cause for death worldwide. Nuclear radiation would enfeeble our immune system, generally increasing the level of vulnerability to illness or enabling some diseases to crop up after all, such as AIDS or Alzheimer's disease (Creme 2008: 56). Creme (2010: 29) elucidates:

The space people are concerned with making this planet habitable. They go through the skies [and the oceans] mopping up and neutralizing large amounts of the nuclear waste and the general toxic filth that we pour into the atmosphere. They are not allowed by karma to clean up the planet completely, but within karmic limits they do so. Otherwise life on this planet would be very painful indeed: more people would be dying [...] and daily we would be more and more asphyxiated. So we owe the Space Brothers a tremendous debt.

Due to the karmic restrictions, the Space Brothers are able to remove around twenty-five per cent of the nuclear radiation and some forty per cent of other pollutants soiling the Earth (*SI* 30:9 [2011 November]: 23). An ensuing effect of the Day of Declaration would be a surging consciousness towards the

¹⁶ Interestingly, it has been the Hierarchy, after receiving approval by Sanat Kumara, which gave American scientists access to nuclear weapons in the first place in order to end World War II (Creme 2001a: 204).

ongoing enormous level of contamination of the planet and, concomitantly, a timely response. In all the major nuclear incidents, UFOs were not only coping with the immediate disastrous consequences—in Chernobyl, for example, the Space Brothers reduced the radiation all across the contaminated areas in Russia and Europe saving millions—but they remain on the spot in order to be able to respond quickly if the need be, as in the case of Fukushima, where they could hitherto neutralise the most severe levels of radiation. Their decontamination work aside, UFOs also engage in mitigating the effects of karmically induced natural disasters as in the case of an earthquake near Tōkyō in the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku Earthquake. Some Martian UFOs reportedly absorbed the earthquake energies and thereby prevented catastrophe (*SI* 30:4 [2011 May]: 11). Similarly, the Space Brothers keep turning to decision makers to give warnings regarding impending man-made disaster, such as, most saliently, in the case of 9/11 where President Bush was approached three months prior to the attacks but to no avail. Many Space Brothers who took permanent residence on Earth are acting as advisors in transnational companies or political agencies, which allows them to positively influence the ruling elite. Moreover, both the Hierarchy and the Space Brothers are collaborating with scientists. For example, the incipient American and Soviet space programmes only progressed because Earth's and other planets' Hierarchies imprinted on the minds of scientists (Creme 2007a: 223). Since then it has been largely the Space Brothers who offered training to various scientists. In addition, UFOs are now and then intentionally crashed on Earth by the pilots who are also killed in the process. This happens in order to enable scientists to closely examine both UFO technology and extraterrestrial physiology. Traces of these great sacrifices, however, vanish soon, as Creme argues (*SI* 35:8 [2016 October]: 23) with a reference to the Roswell (Martian) UFO crash of 1947:

There were five occupants, four were killed immediately and one survived for a time. [...] After some time the bodies disappeared, melted into a jelly-like substance, because they have bodies of etheric matter. [...] The US authorities learned a lot; they gathered a lot of information from the vehicle before it, too, disappeared or disintegrated.

Following the Day of Declaration, the Space Brothers will openly and even more comprehensively collaborate with humankind. They will embark on releasing “their divine science” (Creme 2007a: 219). First, cold fusion will be introduced, which allows for unlimited access to energy. In a next step, perhaps only a few decades from now, humans will eventually gain full access to the Technology of Light directly harnessing the energy of the sun. This technology, utilised by the

Space Brothers, will have an unbelievable impact upon humankind. Humans will enter the interstellar space age, healing will be ubiquitously available, and all forms of pollution can be wholly eliminated, just to name a few fruits of this virtually limitless technology. The Space brothers work in various ways in order to proliferate the Science of Light. On the one hand, they have already granted scientists in the USA and Russia to experiment first-hand with this technology, albeit only in a very basic fashion. On the other hand, UFOs commenced to reproduce Earth's magnetic grid to set the physical conditions required for the technology's fully effective usage. Some condensation trails are traces of this process. Another more durable sign of the Space Brothers' work of worldwide energetic replicating is the crop circles.¹⁷ According to Creme, the vast majority of crop circles are authentic; only some four per cent he considers to be hoaxes (Creme 2010: 187). Collecting and discussing photographs of crop circles have become a central point of interest within the Share International movement, also sustaining attention within the wider esoteric community.

Crop circles also serve another key function on top of being "an outer expression of the grid of energy [the Space Brothers] are making" (Creme 2012: 147). They are verily "calling cards" (as are, incidentally, the Nazca Lines and similar geoglyphs) crafted through thought-cum-technology foremostly by the Martians and Venusians to make humankind mindful of their presence and the Plan.¹⁸ In this way, the Space Brothers are also countering the political elites that are honeycombed by the Forces of Darkness, determinedly trying to smother the existence of space people and UFOs.¹⁹ They are afraid that once the truth is revealed their materialistic world order would fall into ruin. Agencies like NASA, as Creme exposes, would fear that they will be "superseded because

17 These "vortices" of magnetic energy or "batteries of energy" are thought to be produced worldwide also on other surfaces like bedrock or water where they are not seen. They resemble mostly Atlantean ideograms, whose ratios are all based on the number "9," the true all-underlying mathematical ratio instead of "10" (Creme 2010: 190). The Atlantean age is viewed as humankind's Golden Age (which, however, will be greatly surpassed by the Diamond Age that is nigh). The building up of Earth's indigenous Hierarchy was taking great leaps during this time with Maitreya and the Buddha (who since recently is an eight-degree initiate at Sanat Kumara's council on Shamballa acting as the intermediary between the Hierarchy and Shamballa) receiving their third initiation. At the time particularly highly evolved Space Brothers invited by Sanat Kumara during Lemurian times formed an interim Hierarchy (Creme 2007a: 63).

18 Occasionally, also Space Brothers from outside our solar system attempt to make humankind aware of their existence. Most recently hello signals were supposedly sent from the planet Gliese 581g.

19 Creme repeatedly recounted the story of his visit to the British Air Ministry in the mid-1950s. He enquired about UFOs and was surprisingly given the opportunity to skim through a number of classified flying saucer files (*SI* 29:1 [2010 January/February]: 22).

of the attitude they have taken vis-à-vis UFOs" (*SI* 34:8 [2015 October]: 23). Responding to this threat, the governments secretly (by frequently mobilising their military) spread misinformation about the "aliens"—evil greys who would carry out mass-abductions, cattle mutilations, and other conspiratorial stories are devised to portray the space people in a negative light. Creme views this as a vicious circle, for the more the Space Brothers are brought into discredit, the greater the governments' fear to divulge the truth. More precisely, the authorities "are also afraid of panic, because they have sown so many seeds of hatred, violence and mysterious occult practices in the minds of the public about the Space Brothers" (Creme 2010: 48). Supporting this global cover up, a plethora of formerly decent UFO websites were subverted over the years by "shadowy groups [...] ridicul[ing] and debunk[ing] sighting reports" ever since (*SI* 29:9 [2010 November]: 22). Creme assures to have truly first-hand knowledge that the British Ministry of Defence pays farmers to cut down the crop circles on their properties. With London being Maitreya's present-day "point of focus," the south of England has become the hub of crop circle appearances, specifically the southwestern county of Wiltshire. Their number will increase even more in the years ahead. Parallel to this, a rising accumulation of other signs are heralding the Day of Declaration such as the emergence of wells of healing water,²⁰ wondrous salvific light signs put in place all over the world since 1997/1998 by Maitreya and the Space Brothers, and, more recently (i.e., since late 2008), the appearance of the Maitreya Star. The Maitreya Star is actually four "stars," which are no stars after all but gigantic (about 500 metres long) shape-shifting, mostly appearing as rounded diamond-like space ships—two from Mars, and one each from Venus and Jupiter—called in by Maitreya²¹ and hovering in the four cardinal directions. Their purpose is to symbolically reenact the Star of Bethlehem, that is, the heralding of the Christ.²² According to Creme (2010: 98):

20 They are created by Maitreya and charged by him with cosmic energy. Eventually, their number will reach 777 worldwide.

21 Creme stated that Maitreya possesses his own UFO, the Light-Ship. He frequently takes people there to give them glimpses of future events. Creme even recalled that, upon being tasked to work on behalf of Maitreya, the latter brought him to his ship to show him a panorama of time involving the past and the future (this is how Masters would perceive time, both past and future being steadily present) as well as his own future spreading the Plan (Creme 2010: 102–103).

22 In Creme's thought, Jesus was not Christ (or Maitreya) himself, but he was overshadowed by him starting when he was twelve years old. When he passed away he was a fourth-degree initiate. Since 1991, Master Jesus lives in Rome. Two members of the Roman Curia are his disciples.

These huge spacecrafts have a propulsion system that needs to be charged directly from the sun. For some hours each of them goes higher in the atmosphere so that they are nearer the sun and recharge the batteries. That means they cannot be seen all the time.

12.3 Concluding Remarks

Woven into Benjamin Creme's UFO thought one encounters a large variety of popular ufological narratives and wider conspiracy theories, engrafted into a Theosophical mindscape. Poller (2019: 161) thus speaks of a "*bricolage* of existing Theosophical and ufological discourses." Notably, Creme always stridently criticised what he deemed to be actual conspiracy theories, largely taken by him as crazy inventions hailing from the USA, such as chemtrails or, generally, the negative imagery concerning the space people. To him, most self-professed encounters, experiences, or channelling messages of Space Brothers, the Masters (including Maitreya), or spirits and deities, were either deliberate falsehoods or based on overheated astral-imaginings, that is, a "glamorisation." Working through the vast corpus of esoteric literature he likened to a veritable mine-field; the seeker had to be very cautious in knowing his/her way around. Creme saw his own role exactly at this juncture. Following in the footsteps foremostly of Blavatsky, Roerich, and Bailey, he would be relating the voice of truth in our times. Empowered by his Master and Maitreya, he would point to the shining beacon, that is, the Plan, guiding the seekers on the right path. His immediate followers (outwardly largely those practicing Transmission Meditation) he deemed part of a growing spiritual elite, being somewhere in-between the first and the second stage of initiation (Creme 2001b: 172) but also above. Together with Maitreya, the Space Brothers, and their many aides, they would be the spiritual builders of the Age of Light.

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Raymond W. Bernard, Hollow Earth, and UFOs

Holly Folk

13.1 Introduction

In the 1960s Raymond W. Bernard (born Walter Isidor Siegmester) was an important channel between believers in UFO religions and believers in Hollow Earth theory (HET).¹ Two of his books—*Flying Saucers from the Earth's Interior* (1960) and *The Hollow Earth* (1969)—fostered a merger between the movements. On close examination, much of Bernard's work is derivative, so that his real role in the world of alternative religions is questionable. Concerns regarding the integrity of his business ventures also overshadow his ideas. What truly motivated Bernard and whether he believed the fantastic tales he told others remains an enigma. Yet precisely in this respect, Bernard reflects traits shared by other figures who navigate the border between fantasy and fraud. His persona reflects a distinct social type often found in the milieu of alternative spirituality: a “charm artist” who believed in the implausible and sold it to others.

13.2 Hollow Earth Theory

Hollow Earth theory is an interesting example of populist science, with a consistent appeal now lasting more than two hundred years. Modern Hollow Earth theory started in the early nineteenth century, when an entrepreneurial writer from Ohio named John Cleves Symmes printed a manifesto proposing there was a hidden world in the interior of the planet (Symmes 1818). Like many later exponents, Symmes maintained that despite lower temperatures as one approached the polar regions, the actual North and South Poles were temperate places. The real shape of the earth was an elongated tube. At the North Pole, the sea spilled down over the rim, on a gradual slope. Symmes proposed it would be possible to sail a boat into the interior, where an underground world

1 Walter Siegmester wrote under several pseudonyms, but he used “Raymond Bernard” in his Hollow Earth publications. This article uses Siegmester's real name in most of the biographical information, and “Bernard” in text for the period after his name as needed.

was waiting to be discovered. Symmes tried to raise money for an expedition to the North Pole that could prove his hypothesis, but he died in 1829, before effecting this plan. Although later writers updated Symmes' calculations for the dimensions of the polar openings, his configuration of the earth as a cylinder remains the main theory for Hollow Earth topography—with one revision. Symmes proposed that the interior of the planet was illuminated by sunlight coming down through the polar openings. Subsequent writers have generally asserted that there is a small star inside the planet, an internal "sun" which provides both light and heat, and is referred to in most of the canon of Hollow Earth writing.

Through the nineteenth century Hollow Earth theory developed into a genre of popular literature that imbricated scientific discoveries, religious innovation, and new genres of mass market fiction. A series of works emerged, proclaiming discoveries about the structure of the planet, and possible civilizations preceding our own. In his own books, Raymond Bernard cited many of the classic works: Marshall B. Gardner's book *A Journey to the Earth's Interior* (1913), William Reed's *The Phantom of the Poles* (1906), Willis Emerson's *The Smoky God* (1908), and Ferdynand Ossendowski's *Beasts, Men and Gods* (1922). Hollow Earth ideas were disseminated through this literature, but several subcultures were important receptive audiences for Hollow Earth belief.

In the Western United States, the inner earth exists as a folk belief in the Latter-day Saint tradition (Folk 2017b), but generally this belief is more commonly associated with esotericism and New Age spirituality. Hollow Earth belief was carried through Theosophical and Rosicrucian sources; among the earliest exponents were Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre and Hargrave Jennings. Since then Hollow Earth ideas have been transmitted through several esoteric religions, including Mankind United, the I AM Movement, Church Universal and Triumphant, and the Order of the Solar Temple.

Hollow Earth theory reaffirmed the theological universalism described in the early twentieth century as "Perennial Philosophy," in which all religions led to a single higher truth. It is useful to note how Hollow Earth theory thrives in the open framework of the Metaphysical worldview: one that supports a personal knowledge of truth based on investigation, and an enthusiasm for synthesis and intercultural exchange. With many cultural affinities to draw on, Hollow Earth theory animated its potential for meaning by identifying specific locations around the world as possible inner earth entrances. Modern Hollow Earth theory connects the physical world to the occult interior from several entry points, including Mt. Shasta in California, the Giza Pyramid in Egypt, several caves in South America and the Himalaya mountains in Asia. All these places carry broader significance in New Age mythologies, and are recognized

as important sites in “sacred geography.” Just as alternative spirituality allows for the personal selection across an array of religious options, these diffuse symbols connect Hollow Earth belief to multiple threads of religious content.

Fiction also played a significant role in developing popular interest in Hollow Earth theory. Since the nineteenth century, many writers have set fantasy novels in the “inner earth.” *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1871) by Jules Verne is one of the best known renditions of this theme. Edgar Rice Burroughs, the author of the adventure story *Tarzan of the Apes*, set a series of novels in an interior kingdom he called “Pelucidar.” The most famous and influential Hollow Earth novel was *The Coming Race*, by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1871). Lytton’s book established a pattern that intensified in the twentieth century: many readers believed the novel was true, and deceptively presented as fiction.

The threads contributing to Hollow Earth literature are helpful in interpreting Raymond Bernard’s own work. The historic interwovenness of scientific investigation, entertainment, and religious inquiry shed light on their later incorporation into UFO religions. But despite its popularity as a literary theme, Hollow Earth belief was mostly an idea circulating in esoteric circles for several decades in the early 20th century. Starting in the 1940s, it gained wider adherence, when a writer named Richard Shaver began sending accounts of his visits to Ray Palmer, the editor of several science fiction magazines. Shaver’s stories warned readers that the Inner Earth denizens possessed dangerous technologies, including “detrimental robots” called “Deros.” Yet Shaver’s biography presents as much ambiguity as Bernard’s. He was accused of being a con man, in league with Palmer in promoting the truth of his experiences to boost sales. Readers suspected that the “Shaver Mystery” was a hoax, but rumours that the writer was mentally ill led many people to believe he was sincere.

13.3 From Walter Siegmeister to Raymond Bernard

Walter Siegmeister was born in New York City, most likely in 1903. He came from a middle-class background: his parents were secular Jewish immigrants from Russia. His father was a physician, and his younger brother Elie became a popular composer. Siegmeister attended Columbia University as an undergraduate, earning a degree in 1924. He developed an interest in esotericism at a young age. In 1932 Siegmeister completed a Ph.D. in educational pedagogy at NYU, where he wrote a dissertation on the Waldorf Schools started by Anthroposophy founder Rudolph Steiner.

Walter Siegmeister had a lifelong interest in vegetarianism. By the 1930s Siegmeister had become a strong advocate of the health benefits of soy lecithin,

and had started his first mail order business selling dietary supplements (Shurtleff and Aoyagi 2012: 100, 103, 106–107). Siegmeister's views on nutrition, health and human society are frequently dismissed or ignored by readers of Hollow Earth Theory. Bradley Whitsel argues for giving them greater scholarly attention, noting how Siegmeister sought perfection of the social body, as well as the physical body, and mind and spirit of the individual (Whitsel 2001). His visions of life extension through nutrition mark him as an early transhumanist.

In 1933, shortly after earning his doctorate, Siegmeister moved to Florida, where he tried to found an intentional community near the town of Lorida (Lovewisdom n.d.; Kafton-Minkel 1989: 192–216).² His Lake Istokpoga Colony was devoted to vegetarianism and health culture. Siegmeister had a partner in this endeavour: George R. Clements, another entrepreneur in health and spirituality, who later published under the names Hilton Hotema, Karl Kridler, and Kenyon Klamonti. In addition to advertising health options, Siegmeister and Clements promoted investments in real estate, seemingly for plots of farmland to grow tropical fruit. The Lake Istokpoga Colony was the first of two times in Siegmeister's life when an attempt to create a utopian society ran aground. In 1940, when the land proved not to be arable, their venture collapsed and this may have been what motivated Siegmeister to leave the country.

In 1941 Siegmeister settled in Ecuador, where he again sought to establish a health community (Solomon 2011; Childress and Shaver 1998; Kafton-Minkel 1989). His business partner for this venture was John Wierlo, who had lived at Lake Istokpoga. Probably in an effort to raise publicity for the health commune, the two befriended an American journalist named Jack Sheppard, and enjoined him to publish an article about their imagined community. The piece ran in the tabloid *American Weekly* in 1944. Allegedly, Siegmeister had plans for the creation of a new race of super-humans through selective breeding and vegetarianism. He claimed to have found a young woman, Marian Windish, living in the wild, evocative of Rima, the forest girl from the novel *Green Mansions* (Hudson 1904). Ostensibly, Windish was to be paired with Wierlo, who Sheppard depicted as an idealization of masculinity. The story fell apart on examination of its details, including suspicions that Windish actually was married to another man. Siegmeister may have faced charges of mail fraud, and it is possible he had to leave Ecuador over the incident. While solid proof of criminal charges is hard to find, Wierlo left an assessment of the project that was highly critical. Like both Siegmeister and Clements, Wierlo later mounted

2 Much of the information about Siegmeister's business ventures comes from accounts by his former business partners, and need to be read critically. But the events told by his ex-associates are supported by evidence from Siegmeister's own writing.

a career as a popular spiritual innovator, under the name Johnny Lovewisdom. In a book published years later, Lovewisdom told his version of events in Ecuador, asserting that J. M. Sheppard had colluded with Siegmeister in deceiving the readers of *American Weekly*. Lovewisdom also debunked one of his most famous miracles, explaining that Siegmeister had used stilts to create the impression in photographs that he could walk on water (Lovewisdom n.d.: 8).

Siegmeister returned to the United States around 1945. He continued to sell food supplements, including lecithin, ginseng and sarsaparilla (Shurtleff, W., and A. Aoyagi 2016). In 1946, he was sanctioned by the United States Postal Service (USPS 1946). A fraud order was filed against the companies he had operated in Florida a few years previously: Nutritional Adjuvants Co., New Age Products, New Age Publications, The New Age, Diet and Health, Department of Nutrition, Essene School of Biosophy, and Essenian Health Products. Around this time, he began writing under the pseudonym Robert Raymond, possibly as a way to circumvent mail regulations (Baker 2000: 103–110). Over the next few years, he lived in several places, including California, Hawaii, Guatemala and Puerto Rico. He continued to write health literature, and manifestos on a variety of topics, sometimes using the name “Uriel Adriana.”

In the 1950s, Siegmeister was contacted by an individual named Ottmar Kaub, secretary for George Marlo, who was the director of an organization based in St. Louis, Missouri, called UFO World Research. In their correspondence, Kaub and Marlo explained the secrets of the inner world, whose inhabitants were 14 feet tall. Walter Kafton-Minkel found that at the time, Marlo and Kaub were running a type of UFO-based fraud, advertising to UFO believers that they could book “rides” in flying saucers and then cancelling the trips (Kafton-Minkel 1989: 192–216). Kaub wrote that Marlo had visited the Hollow Earth, and hoped to join the New California settlement. Alan Baker asserts that Marlo and Kaub misled Siegmeister, “tantalising” him for several years. Though he often is accused of having deceived others, Baker’s interpretation finds Siegmeister the victim of the prestidigitations of his associates (Baker 2000: 103–110).

Siegmeister also corresponded with Richard Shaver, starting around 1959, when he wrote a letter that Shaver forwarded to Richard Palmer, and which was reprinted in *SEARCH* magazine (October 1959, 48). It is significant that the letter came before Bernard’s major Hollow Earth publications. Bernard, with or without Shaver’s assistance, was likely testing the waters for venturing into Hollow Earth theory.

In the early 1950s Siegmeister made the acquaintance of a psychic channeller from Puerto Rico named “Mayita.” He reported on her prophecies about an ancient epic battle between two races of alien beings in several books,

including *Escape from Destruction* (1956a) and *Flying Saucers from the Earth's Interior* (1960). Siegmeister may have had her warnings in mind when he moved to Brazil in 1955. It is alleged that Siegmeister chose Brazil because the country offered safe haven from the impending nuclear war that would kill most of the world's population. His mother is reported to have died, leaving him an inheritance large enough to buy 2000 acres in Joinville, Santa Catarina. He named the property the New California Subtropical Settlement. (Kafton-Minkel 1989, Solomon 2011). Around this time, he took the name Raymond Bernard, possibly in honour of the 18th century French esotericist Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat (1773–1838).³

In Brazil Siegmeister resumed his established set of activities, selling health foods and supplements by mail order, and seeking pioneer investors to join his new utopian community (Siegmeister 1963). In 1962 the United States Postal Service filed additional fraud orders against Siegmeister, and several of his companies in Joinville: the Order of Isis, the “Eden” Subtropical Organic Farm Community, Santa Catarina Land Developments, The New California Subtropical Settlement, the Aghartan Order, and the Biosophical Foundation. An associate named “Dr. F. Carminatti” was named in the June 21 order (USPS 1962–20312; USPS 1962a–20318). Many reports circulate on the internet claiming that Siegmeister was investigated by the United States Postal Service for mail fraud, which at the time was a conventional way of blocking sellers of patent medicines. It is not clear how many other times he actually was charged, beyond the mail restrictions in 1946 and 1962. The limited record is in itself revealing, being possibly evidence of a mostly honest business career. Alternately, it might show that Siegmeister successfully avoided prosecution despite announcing his products and ideas across the United States for thirty years, which takes considerable psychological and cognitive abilities.

13.4 Raymond Bernard's Hollow Earth

Bradley Whitsel sees Siegmeister's interest in the Hollow Earth as a late development, a turn to the fantastic that came after two failed attempts to create actual communities. It remains unclear whether Siegmeister believed his own rhetoric, however much he beguiled others to follow the path he lay into alternative belief. Starting around 1960, Siegmeister—writing as Raymond

3 Some sources conflate Raymond W. Bernard with a French occultist of the same name. The fact that both “Raymond Bernards” wrote about Aghartha can be confusing for researchers, because information is misattributed online and in information databases.

Bernard—published a series of books that amalgamated Hollow Earth Theory and UFO beliefs. The early editions were self-published without dates of publication, and there is some uncertainty to their first dates of issue. Across the Hollow Earth genre, writers repeat the work of previous sources. This establishes a pedigree for their own ideas, as well as Hollow Earth belief in general. Bernard's version of Hollow Earth Theory built on earlier presentations, summarizing for readers the work of writers like William F. Reed and Marshall B. Gardner. Like them, Bernard presented scientific reasons to doubt the solidity of the planet, such as questions about the mass of the earth. He explained the correct dimensions of the polar apertures, and reprinted reports from visitors about the inhabitants. Bernard drew on the work of Ferdinand Ossendowski for many of the details of the inner earth, such as their superior technological abilities.

Bernard did not credit everyone who possibly influenced him. Most important, he did not cite Robert Ernst Dickhoff, whose book *Agharta* makes similar arguments about a hidden kingdom of Tibetan Buddhist origins (Dickhoff 1951). His copying without attribution actually is characteristic of both the genre of alternative earth literature, and metaphysical writing in general. Lars Lindholm noted that metaphysical writers have so frequently copied each other, that “pilfering” is a trait associated with this type of religion (Lindholm 1993:67). To the extent that metaphysical knowledge is understood to be universal truth, believers may regard it as in the public domain, and something anyone can share without concern for copyright or crediting.

Earlier Hollow Earth writers had proposed various sites around the world as potential entrances, most often Mt. Shasta in California, the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt, and the Himalayas in Asia. These held special meaning for the Theosophical and Rosicrucian traditions. Bernard added others, and created a “map” of the earth's interior and exterior that has become one of the most popular images depicting the Hollow Earth into the present day. His diagram is an excellent metaphor for the cultural topography of Hollow Earth ideas as well. Hollow Earth belief appeals to the individualist eclecticism of contemporary spirituality. Whether the initial concern of an adherent is with Mesoamericans, Buddhism, or paranormal studies, Inner Earth belief has many initial access points—both literally and figuratively!—and channels multiple currents of alternative knowledge into one discursive stream.

In *Flying Saucers from the Earth's Interior* (Bernard 1960), *Atomic Age Angels* (Bernard 1960a), and *The Hollow Earth* (Bernard 1969), Bernard proclaimed that UFOs were real, but that rather than come from other planets, they actually flew out from the inner earth through openings at the north and south pole. In *Agharta: The Subterranean World* (Bernard 1960b) Bernard asserted

that the “Gods” of Atlantis had established the kingdom of Agharta. Bernard told readers these advanced beings travelled through the polar openings in flying saucers. While older books could locate the entrance to the planet in unexplored territory, the poles had been explored by the 1960s when Bernard was writing. Bernard argued that the government was hiding the truth from an unknowing public. Bernard claimed that the “citizens” of the Inner Earth had superior technology to human beings. Though always aware of our doings, they had tried to conceal their existence so as not to be bothered by humankind. These beings had commenced launching flying saucers from the interior of the planet, because the development of nuclear weapons had triggered their concern. The appearance of UFO beliefs on the cultural landscape was arguably very serendipitous for Hollow Earth belief, in that they solved the problem of potential disconfirmation for Inner Earth believers. In the 1820s, John Cleves Symmes could, not too unreasonably, propose sending an expedition to the North Pole to find the entrance. By the 1960s it was much more difficult to find unexplored geography that might offer a plausible opening. Nonetheless, Bernard promoted his Hollow Earth publications in UFO journals, inviting settlers to move to the inner earth (Bernard 1965).

Raymond Bernard’s presentation of UFO content bore a Theosophical imprint. He reported having discovered Hollow Earth theory while browsing in a bookshop, where he found a copy of a book called *The Subterranean World To The Sky: Flying Saucers* (Huguenin 1957).⁴ Western occultism was well established in Brazil—not only was Hollow Earth theory a known idea, some Brazilian writers had connected the inner earth to UFO phenomena (Goldstern 2019). Bernard claimed to have met Paulo Strauss and Henrique de Souza, who each had written about an inner Earth civilization whose inhabitants used flying saucers (Bernard 1969: 74–79, 94–100). He may have embellished the connections for his own promotional purposes, but he is known to have corresponded with many esotericists and UFO writers. Bernard’s citing of occult authorities may have been no more than an attempt to entice his audience, but their receptivity is understandable. The meeting of Hollow Earth theory and UFO religions happened on mutually familiar terrain; they each had roots in the nineteenth century Metaphysical movement and Esotericism (Partridge 2012; Zeller 2014).

4 Huguenin’s book (1957) is said to identify Hollow Earth inhabitants as “Atlanteans,” and link them to alien “Space Brothers.” This citation appears in several of Bernard’s books, but I have not been able to confirm that this text exists.

13.5 Conclusions

Walter Siegmeister and Raymond Bernard represent different sides of a person: mystical and cynical. Uncertainty about his honesty and motives creates problems for historical interpretation. It also is a window for understanding other spiritual innovators with questionable backgrounds, including figures important in the development of UFO religions, such as George Adamski (Ellwood 1995). Siegmeister's populist intellectual orientation is revealed in the eclecticism of his scientific interests, which included radical programs for diet, human sexuality, and techniques for prolonging the human lifespan. He seems to have needed to recreate the world on multiple levels, from the physical body to the foundation of reality itself. It is a human tendency to see the human body as a reflection of the moral universe, but there are strong elective affinities between alternative medicine and alternative cosmography, and with the impulse to create intentional communities. Strong radical beliefs in one area seems to occur alongside others. It is beyond the scope of this article to document these cases fully, but one might consider that: (1) the creator of Flat Earth theory, Samuel Birley Rowbotham was a vendor of patent medicines; (2) Wilbur Glenn Voliva promoted both alternative diets and Rowbotham's "Zetetic Astronomy" at the Pentecostal community Zion City, Illinois (Gardner 1957); (3) Cyrus Teed, the founder of the "Concave Earth" group the Koreshan Unity, was an eclectic physician (*ibid.*); and (4) the Order of the Solar Temple, which believed in Hollow Earth theory, had as one of its leaders a naturopath named Luc Jouret (Introvigne 2006).

An article does not usually end with two different conclusions, but Siegmeister's unusual persona asks for an exception. A generous interpretation would allow that Siegmeister believed his own ideas and felt entitled to make money out of them. In this view, his endeavours in Central and South America resemble those of Allie Fox, the protagonist of *The Mosquito Coast* (Theroux 1982). The few photos of Siegmeister that exist show him with a dishevelled appearance, feeding the impression he was not in command of his thinking. Bradley Whitsel sees Siegmeister as exceptionally imaginative and idealistic (Whitsel 2001). Here, Siegmeister exemplifies the social type of a spiritual autodidact: oppositional in his knowledge stance, and untroubled by the elision of boundaries between fact and fantasy. Whitsel offers a sympathetic interpretation, and a compelling defence of what he calls the "antireality community." In favour of this view, it is helpful to note that some psychological research suggests being open to the fantastic is a basic personality trait (Wilson and Barber 1983). Further, the cultural milieu of both UFO and Hollow Earth ideas can be highly supportive of the fantasies of participating individuals. Rodney

Stark and William Bainbridge found that few if any participants at a meeting for UFO believers actually believed in flying saucers. Rather, each had the mistaken idea they were they only a sceptic (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 272). From this perspective, Siegmeister's engagement with the UFO milieu deepened his Hollow Earth belief.

Other evidence undercuts the interpretation of Siegmeister as a "fanatic." His business practices, though arguably illegal, were consistent and effective over many years, and they required substantial calculation. Yet just as Catholic doctrine holds that the sacraments administered by a sinful priest are valid, a sceptical view of Siegmeister cannot erase the belief of thousands of people. Dismissing Siegmeister as either delusional or as a con artist overlooks his influence as a source for modern Hollow Earth theory. Taken separately, each evaluation captures only part of his persona.

Whether Siegmeister believed he had discovered the true entrance to the planet, or knowingly took advantage of the gullibility others, both cases show a disregard for cultural norms rooted in his epistemology. He is perhaps best remembered as a "maverick mystic," whose anti-authoritarianism made him doubt consensus-based, normative information, and left him open to his own pursuit of radical belief and disbelief. My sense is that these competing sets of qualities inhere in individuals very often, with calculation and enchantment being interdependent. This is something I have discovered that seems to animate a surprising number of religious actors, for whom an antagonism to authority shaped their belief and behaviour (Folk 2014).

Siegmeister perfected a combative writing style long before asserting that a government conspiracy hid aliens inside the planet. His exclamation points and use of capital letters were typical of the innovators in health and religion of his era, and place him in a longer historic lineage of populist intellectualism (Folk 2017a). Putting a focus on Siegmeister's intellectual orientation fits with what is known of his personal behaviour, such as his persistence in fighting federal bureaucracies. His disdain for the mindless acceptance of authority probably meant he was not ethically troubled by fooling the public, especially if doing so turned a profit.

It is helpful to take a light-hearted approach to Siegmeister's communitarianism. There are few records about the colonies, but they appear to have been poorly organized rather than heavily regimented. In fact, there is no evidence that Siegmeister ordered inhabitants to do anything toward creating a new society. Excepting his appearance, Siegmeister seems to have been the antithesis of a controlling cult leader. He was unlike Jim Jones, leader of the tragic Peoples Temple community in Guyana, but resembled more closely Elbert Hubbard, the enterprising journalist who founded the Roycrofters Community

in East Aurora, New York. If Siegmeister swindled a few people, he seems to have entertained even more. Walter Raymond Siegmeister Bernard was less a con artist than a charm artist.

References

Author's Note—Many of Bernard's books were self-published, and some bore no date of publication. Some of these works have been reprinted by Health Research Books, originally in Mokelumne Hill, California, and now in Pomeroy, WA. Fieldcrest Publishing printed the first editions of both *Flying Saucers from the Earth's Interior* and *The Hollow Earth*, but the earliest copies of both books are not dated, and there is some uncertainty about the first years of publication. *Flying Saucers* came out in either 1959 or 1960, and *The Hollow Earth* in 1963 or 1964. The conflation between the figures identified as "Raymond Bernard" extends to how they are indexed in major indexes such as WorldCat/OCLC.

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PART 4

*New UFO Religions Emerging
from the American Context*



Scientology

Hugh B. Urban

Up there are the stars. Down in the arsenal is an atom bomb. Which one is it going to be?

L. RON HUBBARD, *Dianetics, The Evolution of a Science* (1950: 87)



14.1 Introduction

The Church of Scientology is not exactly a “UFO religion” in quite the same sense as Heaven’s Gate, the Raelians, the Aetherius Society, or other groups with more explicit beliefs in extraterrestrials and flying crafts from other worlds. Founded in the United States in 1953 by L. Ron Hubbard, the Church of Scientology is a complex mixture of self-help therapy, modern esoteric and occult currents, Asian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and elements of Hubbard’s own active science fiction imagination (Urban 2011; Urban 2012; Lewis 2009; Kent 1999). However, Scientology did emerge out of the same general Cold War context of alternative religions, nuclear anxieties, and space exploration that helped give birth to many other UFO movements of the mid-twentieth century (Urban 2006; see Lewis 1995; Dean 1998; Partridge 2003; Zeller 2014). At the same time, Scientology also developed an elaborate cosmology and history of the universe—what Hubbard called “space opera”—that contains complex discussions of life on other planets, alien interactions with planet Earth, and the possibility of traveling outside the body to other worlds (Urban 2017a; Raine 2015). As such, Scientology should be considered a key part of the larger alternative spiritual milieu that was both shaped by and helped shape other more explicit UFO religions during the Cold War era.

This chapter explores three aspects of Scientology’s early history, beliefs, and practices that intersect directly with modern UFO religions: first, Hubbard’s own extensive science fiction writings, which were a key part of the larger imagining of space travel in the 1930s and 40s; second, the elaborate space opera cosmology of the early Church of Scientology as it developed in

the 1950s and 60s; and third, the more esoteric teachings about the past history of the universe contained in Scientology's higher and most confidential levels of training called "Operating Thetan" or OT, which contain the most explicit discussions of alien civilizations. It is also in these higher OT levels that the Scientologist is supposed to acquire the ability to "exteriorize" or travel outside the body to distant places, including to other planets (Hubbard 1993; Hubbard 2007d). Indeed, at the highest levels of training, the Scientologist is supposed to become a kind of "*disembodied flying object*," able to separate the spiritual self (*thetan*) from the physical body and journey at will to other realms (Hubbard 1993; Urban 2011: 77–79; Urban 2012).

To conclude, I will suggest that Scientology offers a particularly clear insight into the cultural and religious context of Cold War America, with its larger obsessions with space travel, nuclear war, and secrecy. Perhaps more than any other, Scientology is America's "Cold War religion" (Urban 2006; Urban 2011).

14.2 Space Opera and Soldiers of Light: UFO Themes in Hubbard's Science Fiction

If most non-Scientologists know anything about L. Ron Hubbard, they probably know that he was a hugely prolific author of science fiction (and also fantasy, Western, and adventure) stories in the decades shortly before founding the Church of Scientology. Indeed, Hubbard was one of the most—if not *the* most—prolific author of the "golden age of sci fi" of the 1930s and 40s, writing so much and so quickly that he had to publish under a wide array of pseudonyms because his stories were filling up the same issues of each sci fi magazine of the day (Urban 2017a; Raine 2015; Whitehead 1974). While science fiction was by no means his only genre, he did contribute significantly to the larger UFO culture in the United States, filling magazines such as *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Marvel Science Stories* with entertaining tales of space travel, life on other planets, alien races, super powers, and paranormal abilities (Hubbard 1948; 1950; 1951).

As many observers have noted, there are also clear continuities between Hubbard's science fiction tales and his later lectures on the Church of Scientology (Whitehead 1974; Urban 2017). Hubbard's general phrase for fictional narratives about the future (and/or) past history of the universe and life on other worlds is "space opera"—a phrase that also recurs in his Scientology writings, when he explains the church's complex metaphysics, cosmology, and the history of the universe (Raine 2015; Urban 2011).

At the same time, many of the themes from his most popular Sci Fi tales would carry over directly into the later structure and beliefs of Scientology. Perhaps the clearest example is his series of tales centred on the figure of “Ole Doc Methusaleh.” Published in *Astounding Science Fiction* from 1947–1950 under the pseudonym René Lafayette, these tales centre on an adventurous space hero and physician who is a member of the “the most elite organization of the cosmos” called the Soldiers of Light. Comprised of 600 selfless heroes who have dedicated themselves to the “ultimate preservation of mankind,” the Soldiers of Light take as their emblem the symbol of two crossed rods. On his spaceship “the Hound of Heaven,” Ole Doc embarks on an “unending journey through the trackless galaxy,” enjoying a series of “astonishing adventures on many worlds” (Hubbard 1992: xv; see Hubbard 2004: 210).

As we will see in more detail below, Old Doc and his Soldiers of Light would later provide sort of the fictional blueprint for many aspects of the Church of Scientology, which was founded just a few years later. Among others, the Soldiers of Light are a clear precursor to Scientology’s elite inner core known as the “Sea Organization,” which is similarly dedicated to the ultimate preservation of mankind; and Ole Doc’s adventures on distant worlds are a fictional precursor to the key Scientology concept of the liberated self or spirit, which can travel at will outside the body and beyond the Earth to distant worlds (Urban 2011; Urban 2017a).

14.3 Exploring the Time Track before Earth: Space Opera in Early Scientology

Beginning in the early 1950s, Hubbard turned his energies from science fiction to a new science of the mind called Dianetics. The transition between Hubbard’s science fiction writings and his work on Dianetics was, in many ways, a fairly smooth one. Dianetics itself first appeared in the May 1950 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*—a popular magazine to which Hubbard was a regular contributor. The cover of this issue featured an apelike, alien creature with yellow cat eyes, whom readers would learn is the Duke of Kraakahaym from the Empire of Skontar (Hubbard 1950: 43–87). As George Pendle notes, Dianetics was not presented as science fiction, but it did appeal to the same sorts of readers of this and similar magazines: “its language was clearly tailored to the science fiction fan. Like the Charles Atlas bodybuilding advertisements that also ran in the pulp pages, Dianetics promised to transform the reader’s ‘normal brain’ into an ‘optimum brain’ and thus help man continue his process

of evolution toward a higher organism" (2005: 272). The primary technique of Dianetics was called "auditing," in which a therapist (called the "auditor") would ask a series of questions of the individual being audited, in order to pinpoint and work through memories of pain or loss (called "engrams") that had been burned into their unconscious mind (called the "reactive mind"). Once identified and relived, these negative memories were said to be "cleared" from the reactive mind; and once all such negative memories were removed, the individual was believed to achieve a state of optimal physical and mental well-being called "Clear."

From the very outset, Hubbard claimed that his new science of Dianetics would lead to a vastly superior state of human existence and well-being. In an issue of *Marvel Science Stories* published in 1951, he presented Dianetics as the path to a new kind of human, a Homo superior or Homo novis, far surpassing the ordinary abilities, health, and intellect of mere Homo sapiens. Indeed, "Compared to a Homo sapiens, Homo novis is very high and godlike" (Hubbard 2007: 62–63; see Hubbard 1951: 111–113). As fellow science fiction writer, Jack Williamson, put it, Dianetics offered nothing less than "the promise to liberate the superman trapped inside us" (1984: 186).

Despite its initial success, Dianetics was already beginning to sputter as a movement by 1952 and soon entered into bankruptcy. However, just a year later, Dianetics was replaced by and subsumed into a new and explicitly religious movement called the Church of Scientology, which was first incorporated in December 1953 (Urban 2011). While using the same basic auditing techniques of Dianetics, Scientology also introduced several new, more explicitly "religious" aspects, including the idea of an eternal spirit or self, a belief in past lives or reincarnation, and an elaborate cosmology that described the past history of the universe in elaborate detail (Urban 2011: 73–77; Kent 1999). Despite the use of explicitly religious language, however, Hubbard's early Scientology lectures continued many of the science fiction themes already present in Dianetics. If anything, they took them much further, and we can see even more explicit continuities between Hubbard's fictional worlds and the cosmology of the Church of Scientology. As Susan Raine concludes, one could say "Hubbard designed Scientology as a space opera, transforming fiction into reality as a means to set out his elaborate ideas in a real-world setting" (2015:18).

One of the most important innovations in the shift from Dianetics to Scientology in the 1950s was Hubbard's concept of theta—his general term for spirit or spiritual reality—and the thetan—his term for the individual spiritual entity, which is our true identity as an immortal being. Beginning in 1951, Hubbard claimed that he had scientifically identified and isolated the spiritual self, the thetan, which is at once separable from the physical body and

possessed of unlimited powers (1956: 428; see 1975: 431). In Hubbard's early Scientology cosmology, the thetan is a godlike entity of infinite potential, originally able to create, maintain, and control its own universe. As David Bromley explains "At one time thetans were godlike, celestial entities, possessed their distinctive individuality and created and controlled their 'Home Universes'" (2009: 91). At some point roughly 60 trillion years ago, however, the once all-powerful thetans became enmeshed in this present universe of matter, energy, space, and time (MEST), which Hubbard describes as a kind of "trap," "prison," and "illusion" (2007b: 62–63).

As Hubbard explained in lectures from the early 1950s, he believed that he had also reconstructed the entire "time track" or past history of this universe going back these many trillions of years. During that vast span of time, we have each lived countless lives in various forms—sometimes as humans, sometimes as aliens, sometimes as animals, sometimes as beings with the power to destroy entire worlds:

So you've been in and out of bodies, you've been thought people, you've been this, you've been that. You've been sheep, goats, spacemen, space officers. You've been governors, kings, princes, ditch-diggers, slaves, glaziers, carpenters, bricklayers, amusement park barkers, operators. You have turned planets into parks and parks into cinders. You, at one time on the track, have had weapons in your hands of sufficient magnitude to just say "Boom!" and the whole planet goes up ... You talk about drama.

2007a: 341

In other works, such as *Have you Lived Before this Life* (1958), Hubbard records the past life memories of various individuals uncovered through Scientology auditing. Many of these include remarkable adventures on other worlds, often occurring tens of thousands of even trillions of years in the past, such as inhabiting a "Space Command post on Earth" 17,543 years ago, or being interrogated by Martian automatons, or swimming as a Manta Ray under the sea of another world, or flying a saucer over an ocean on a distant planet (1958: 108).

Unlike other UFO religion, Scientology never developed a really coherent or consistent cosmology. Throughout his lectures of the 1950s and 60s, however, Hubbard does discuss various alien civilizations and key events in the history of the universe. There is, for example, the Marcab Confederacy, which is a group of planets united into a vast civilization that emerged about 200,000 years ago and looks very much like our own society; indeed, they even have "automobiles, business suits, fedora hats, telephones" (1975: 243). Another significant event occurred one trillion years ago, when we were captured by the

“Arsclycans” (beings from Arsclycus, a “City in Space”). Meanwhile, on Earth, there was the “totally electronic society of Atlantis,” which was also “a kind of space opera society,” complete with all sorts of drama, such as “people blasting walls down with disintegrators” and so on (1985: tape 1).

These space opera themes also carried over in many ways into the structure and organization of the Church of Scientology. The clearest example is the Sea Organization or Sea Org, which was formed in 1967 as the innermost, elite core of dedicated Scientologists. Structured as a kind of paramilitary naval order—complete with naval uniforms and strict military discipline—the Sea Org has a great deal in common with the fictional Soldiers of Light from Hubbard’s science fiction tales noted above. Like the Soldiers of Light, who work under the symbol of the crossed rods to fight disease and save humankind, the Sea Org serves under the eight-pointed Scientology cross to fight both physical and spiritual disease. Like the elite Soldiers of Light, Hubbard’s Sea Org was also designed as the most committed and disciplined core of his church, each member sworn by a “billion-year contract” to return lifetime after lifetime to serve Scientology in order to save the entire planet (Many 2009). As Raine suggests, the Sea Org was originally imagined as a kind of “space navy, melding SF space ideas with Earthbound naval ones” (2017: 15). In fact, Scientology publications from the late 1960s to 1980s even advertise the Sea Org as a futuristic “Space Org,” voyaging aboard a Star-Trek like spaceship not simply around planet earth but also to distant realms on a mission to protect and save entire civilizations (*Advance!* 1987: back cover; *Advance!* 1969: 11).

Hubbard’s 1973 book, *Mission into Time*, describes the first voyage of the Sea Org as a kind of cosmic journey—an “exploration into space *and* time”—in search of not only distant earthly terrain but also of past lives and the deep history of the universe (1973: 22–23). As former Scientologist, Jon Atack, recalls, the ship travelled to the Mediterranean, where Hubbard told them that there was a concealed “space station” in the northern part of the island of Corsica. Apparently, this station housed “an immense Mothership and a fleet of smaller spacecraft” that had been left by an ancient advanced civilization for Hubbard to discover:

The spaceships were made of a non-corrosive alloy, as yet undiscovered by earthlings. Only one palm print would cause a slab of rock to slide away, revealing these chariots of the gods. The owners not only knew about reincarnation, they had even predicted Hubbard’s palm print ... The ship was protected by atomic warheads. It awaited the return of a great leader.

ATACK 1990: 179; RAINE 2017

Indeed, the crew were hopeful that Hubbard as the great awaited leader would be able to might Earth on the Mothership and so found a new, extraterrestrial Space Org (Atack 1990: 179). Sadly, however, the mission had to be cut short when Hubbard had problems with the Spanish port authorities, and the buried space station remained undiscovered.

In sum, while Scientology may not be best described as a UFO religion on a par with groups such as the Aetherius Society, it clearly incorporated a huge amount of science fiction and UFO mythology and was part of the same general alternative spiritual milieu of the 1950s and 60s. It is thus perhaps most accurate to say that Scientology came out of and also helped contribute to the larger UFO imagination of post-WWII America.

14.4 From Extra-Body Thetans to Super-Powers: Esoteric Cosmology and Out of Body Travel in the Operating Thetan Levels

Beginning in the late 1960s, Hubbard also began to develop a series of higher level, confidential levels of training designed to unleash the full potential and power of the spirit or thetan. Called “Operating Thetan” or OT, these levels are a graded sequence of advanced auditing that takes one beyond the basic goals of Dianetics into the deeper mysteries of the past history of the universe and the fullest abilities of the spirit. According to the church’s official map of the Scientology path called the Bridge to Total Freedom, there are fifteen of these OT levels listed; however, it appears that only eight of them were actually released before Hubbard’s death (Urban 2017b). Although once surrounded with intense secrecy (not to mention intense litigation), the OT levels became part of the public record in the course of a court case involving a former Scientologist named Steven Fishman in 1993; they were leaked to the media and then onto the Internet, where they now circulate promiscuously throughout myriad sites and databases (Urban 2011: 178–200; Rothstein 2009).

The most infamous of these confidential levels is OT III, which claims to reveal a key episode the history of the universe and the deeper secrets of human existence (this is also the narrative that was revealed and mercilessly satirized in an episode of the animated television show, *South Park*, in 2005). Because of its powerful and potentially dangerous contents, OT III is surrounded by a number of safeguards to insure its secrecy from all but the most qualified Scientologists: “They sign a waiver promising never to reveal the secrets of OT III, nor to hold Scientology responsible for any trauma or damage one might endure at this stage of auditing. Finally, they are given a manila folder, which they must read in a private, locked room” (Reitman 2006; see Atack 1990:

173). According to the documents provided in the Fishman case (and other sources), the story goes something like this: 75,000,000 years ago, there was a Galactic Confederacy consisting of 76 planets, ruled by an evil dictator named Xenu (or Xemu, in some versions of the story). In order to solve the problem of over-population in his federation, he brought billions of people to Earth (then called “Teegeeeack”) and placed hydrogen bombs in the Earth’s volcanoes in order to destroy them. The thetans of these individuals, however, survived and eventually adhered to the bodies of modern human beings. Hence, each one of us today has a mass of “extra-body thetans” stuck onto us, which are in turn causing us pain and unhappiness in this lifetime. These extra-body thetans must therefore be cleaned off through advanced auditing in order to liberate the full potential of one’s own true thetan (Spaink 1995; see Rothstein 2009; Urban 2011: 102–105).

In addition to a kind of esoteric, space opera cosmology, the OT levels are also supposed to reveal the increasingly powerful—and ultimately, unlimited—abilities of the thetan. The thetan is, after all, originally a being of infinite potential; the goal of these advanced levels of auditing is therefore to release it from its entrapment in MEST and so reawaken its tremendous power to shape and reshape reality. An “Operating Thetan” is precisely one that becomes increasingly freed from the limits of the world of Matter, Energy, Space and Time (the MEST universe) and so able to wield an array of “super powers.” Both Hubbard’s early lectures and various testimonials from Scientologists claim an array of powers for the liberated thetan. These include not just optimal psychological and physical health, but also paranormal abilities such as the power to see through walls, telepathy, and “remote viewing” or seeing events from distances outside the body. Scientology publications such as *Advance!* and *Source* include numerous success stories from individuals who acquire powers both miraculous and mundane. Some recount being able to prevent rain from falling, while others claim to be able to shut off a neighbour’s noisy sprinkler system and fix broken appliances (*Source* 1985: 13). “I love it,” wrote one enthusiastic Scientologist, “like Superman!” (*Advance!* 1973: 14–17; see Urban 2012).

One of the most often reported powers of the liberated thetan is “exteriorization” or the ability to travel outside the physical body. Although he eschewed the term “astral projection,” Hubbard’s descriptions of exteriorization are very similar to earlier ideas of astral projection that had circulated through esoteric groups such as the Theosophical Society and in the works of the great twentieth century occultist, Aleister Crowley (Muldoon 1951; Urban 2012). Beginning by first moving just a few feet in back of the head, the thetan eventually learns to travel at great distances beyond the body; thus, numerous testimonials from

Scientology publications describe various journeys outside the body, for example to visit Rome and other exotic destinations overseas.

Eventually, the exteriorized thetan is able to journey beyond the Earth itself, visiting the distant corners of the Solar System and beyond. As he advises the thetan in his 1954 lecture, *The Creation of Human Ability*: “Be near earth, be near the Moon, be near the Sun ... Now find a rock, be inside of it, be outside of it ... Be near the Center of the Earth, be outside the earth ... be near Mars, be at the center of Mars” (2007c: 65–66). Thus, an illustration to the Creation lectures shows the symbol of the thetan (the Greek letter theta, Θ) flying through the solar system (2007c: 55). The thetan should then embark on a “Grand Tour” of the universe, sliding down plumes on the Sun and going inside black holes. Significantly, Hubbard also makes a point to say that this is not mere fantasy or science fiction—the thetan really is visiting these extraterrestrial destinations:

One of the common practices in the Grand Tour is asking him to be inside a black star; outside it, inside it ... And oh boy does that rip him to pieces, because there are black stars up there which are so heavy and dense that electrons can't escape from them.

HUBBARD 2007d: 472; see URBAN 2012

So you say, ‘Find a plume and slide down on it on to the face of the Sun’... You could have him find Mars. ‘Be outside Mars and move down the surface.’ But he’s immediately going to discover the force field of Mars ... *It’s not science fiction.*

2007d: 471; my italics

As such, the liberated thetan itself becomes a kind of “disembodied flying object,” capable of traveling through the vast distances of both space and time. Just as the thetan has already lived countless lives over millions of years on other planets, it now has the potential to journey far beyond the limits of the physical body and Earth itself, exploring new worlds and the vast spatial-temporal expanse of the universe.

Ultimately, however, the powers of the OT go far beyond simply exteriorizing and flying beyond this planet. In its fullest liberation, the thetan has truly unlimited and indeed godlike power, the ability to construct, reconstruct, and deconstruct the MEST universe itself. Like the original thetan who ruled its own universe before becoming entangled in the MEST world, the fully realized thetan could in fact create its own universe and manipulate it in any way he chose. As Hubbard put it in lectures from 1952 and 1954,

[The Operating Thetan is] a person who is able to create his own universe, or living in the MEST universe, is able to create illusions perceivable by others at will, to handle MEST universe objects without mechanical means and to have and feel no need of bodies or the MEST universe.

2006: 175

He would be able to be anywhere as a finite point or be anywhere as a generalized area ... He could be anything at will.

2007d: 373

Indeed, the powers of the fully realized Operating Thetan are ultimately god-like, being the powers to create, maintain, manipulate, and destroy universes. As former member of Hubbard's staff, Cyril Vosper, put it, "He was saying that you and everyone else, with the use of Scientology (or Dianetics at that time) could become a god. And we were all, if you like, fallen gods" (Robinson 1997; see Urban 2019). Indeed, the powers of the liberated thetan would be even "*more* godlike" than those of the so-called "god" who created this inferior MEST universe in which we are currently and mistakenly enmeshed. In Hubbard's words,

What passed for God for the MEST universe was not the goddest God there was by an awful long ways ... Whoever made that MEST universe ... was a usurper of one's own universe. And this has ... sold the individual out of his ability to make a universe.

2001: 14; URBAN 2019

Here the goals of Scientology appear to go well beyond those of most other UFO religions. Rather than simply communicating with divine beings from other worlds—as the Aetherius Society claims to do—or ascending to a heavenly realm via spacecraft—as Heaven's Gate hoped to do—the Scientologist seeks to create its own universe within which it would be its own, all-powerful divinity.

14.5 Conclusions: Scientology, Secrecy, UFOs and the Cold War

To conclude, I would like to make some broader historical and comparative observations, by situating the early Church of Scientology more concretely in the context of Cold War America in the decades just after World War II. Although Scientology might not exactly be a "UFO religion" in quite the same sense as

the Aetherius Society or the Raelians, it did emerge out of much the same Cold War context that gave birth to many other movements looking to other worlds and visits from spacecraft. As Jodi Dean notes in her study of UFO culture in the twentieth century, “UFO discourse and community formed during the Cold War,” very much reflecting the larger fascination with space travel, technology, and other planets—as well as the deeper anxieties about Communism and nuclear war—that pervaded the decades after WWII (1998: 22). Moreover, the Cold War also played out in many ways in space itself, as the U.S. and Soviet Union vied with one another to dominate space exploration and so assert their superiority on this world, as well. As *Newsweek* magazine put it in a “Special Section on Space and the Atom,” “The cold war is being waged in outer space. All mankind may ride along vicariously with the first space man, and science as a whole may benefit from his findings. But the nation that gets up there first will score an important political, psychological and propaganda victory” (Dean 1998: 73; see also Whitfield 1991).

Perhaps more explicitly than another new religious movement of the twentieth century, Scientology articulated these larger aspirations and anxieties of Cold War America (Urban 2006; Urban 2011). The period from the birth of Dianetics in 1950 to the death of L. Ron Hubbard in 1986 correspond almost exactly to the period of the Cold War, from the detonation of the first Soviet atomic bomb in 1949 to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989. From the early 1950s onward, in fact, Hubbard marketed both Dianetics and Scientology as the most needed technologies for the Cold War and as perhaps the only means to prevent humankind from destroying itself by nuclear war:

With man now equipped with weapons sufficient to destroy all mankind on Earth, the emergence of a new science capable of handling man is vital. Scientology is such a science. It was born in the same crucible as the atomic bomb ... The only race that matters at this moment is the one being run between Scientology and the atomic bomb. The history of man ... may well depend on which one wins

1997: 163

Hubbard's early Dianetics movement and Church of Scientology also reflected many of the most acute anxieties and paranoias of the Cold War era. Hubbard himself was obsessed with Communism, writing numerous letters to the FBI and even to J. Edgar Hoover himself in order to identify subversive Communist elements around him (including his own ex-wife) (Urban 2006; Urban 2011). During the 1960s, Hubbard also became increasingly obsessed with secrecy, security, and surveillance, introducing a series of auditing techniques called

“Security Checks” or “Sec Checks” that were designed to identify and weed out subversive influences from within the church itself (see Hubbard 1960; Wallis 1976: 149). Still more remarkably, the church’s intelligence bureau, the Guardian’s Office, also engaged in aggressive acts of espionage, infiltrating the offices of the IRS and other government agencies during its long battle for tax exemption in United States (Urban 2011: 155–177).

However, perhaps the clearest example of Scientology’s uniquely Cold War form of spirituality is the Operating Thetan material discussed above. First released in the late 1960s, the OT materials coincided with the height of both Cold War tensions and fascinations with sci fi in popular culture. Not only is this material labelled “secret” and surrounded with all manner of safeguards—such as signing a waiver and vowing never to reveal it, etc.—but the sci fi contents of the OT III material in particular also reveal Hubbard’s lifelong fascination with “space opera,” alien civilizations, and super powers. However, while other Cold War UFO religions such as the Aetherius Society hoped to learn from Cosmic Masters from other worlds, Scientology had far grander aspirations. Rather than simply contacting aliens from other planets to help save ours, Scientology promised to unleash the super powers of the thetan, which could transcend this “prison” or “dumping ground” of Earth and finally go beyond the MEST universe itself. Indeed, Hubbard offered perhaps the most radical and grandiose response to the Cold War—the possibility that one could become a superman and even a god, capable of not simply escaping this war-torn Earth but of creating one’s own new and better universe. While down in the arsenal lay the atomic bomb, Hubbard and others were looking up “to the stars” and well beyond.

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The United Nuwaubian Nation

Susan J. Palmer

15.1 Introduction

The aims and significance of the United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors can only be understood within the context of North America's history of slavery and the social subordination of U.S. citizens of African descent. E.U. Essien-Udom, author of *Black Nationalism: A Search for an Identity in America* writes:

A century after Emancipation nineteen million black Americans, robbed of their traditions and of a pride in their past, are still seeking acceptance by the white majority but are continuing to live in semi-bondage on the fringes of American society.

1961: 1

Thus, this new religious movement (NRM), the Nuwaubian movement, is linked to the larger phenomenon of black nationalism in the United States—"the efforts of thousands of American Negroes to resolve for themselves the fundamental problem of identity and to provide a context for their moral, cultural and material advancement within the limits set by the American scene" (Essien-Udom 1962: vii).

The Nuwaubian response to this crisis is quite different from the political movements that strive for justice, racial separation and Black empowerment (like the Black Panthers). It is primarily a religious response, but quite unlike the response of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. or other Christian pastors who preach "this-worldly" strategies for building racial equality and brotherly love between the races. The Nuwaubians propose other worldly "spiritual solutions" to the social exploitation, subjugation and oppression of African Americans in America. In this way, they resemble other NRMs, like the Nation of Islam, the Five Percenters, the Nation of Yahweh, and Rastafari—all millenarian movements led by Black Messiahs. Each messianic leader is an intensely masculine and charismatic black man, an exemplary and inspiring Prophet who offers his followers spiritual and mythic alternatives to the complex psychological dilemma of being trapped in a spoiled identity. Each proposes a dualistic gnostic myth of race.

The purpose of this study is to explore the United Nuwaubian Nation's unique and essentially religious strategies for overcoming the "race problem" in America and its relation to UFO religion. By studying the movement's radical transformations we might begin to understand the radical gnostic worldview that informs the leader's myth of race, and gain insights into the movement's appeal for African Americans.

The Black Messiah who founded the Nuwaubian movement is Dwight York (1945–). Initially, he founded the United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors ("of Moors" was dropped from the title after 2002) in 1993 in the state of Georgia. But a study of York's charismatic career, which began in New York, reveals that he has founded and debriefed an elaborate series of spiritual groups. These include the Ansaar Pure Sufi movement (1967); the Nubian Islamic Hebrew Mission (1968); the Nubian Islamic Hebrews (1969); the Ansaaru Allah Community (1973–1992); the Holy Tabernacle Ministries (1992); the United Nuwaubian Nations [of Moors] (1993); and the Yamassee Tribe of the Creek Nation (1993).

Dwight York has assumed a series of honorific titles. He is consistently known as "Dr Malachi Z. York" to his disciples, but currently he is known by his prison wardens as Inmate #17911, serving a 135-year sentence in the "supermax" United States federal prison in Florence, Colorado. But for York's disciples, he is still the "Master Teacher," come to awaken the sleeping African American "Mummies" by "lifting us out of their Sarcophagus."

Dwight York's origins are debated. There is ample information on Dr. Malachi Z. York as a god, but very little data on the human man. Biographical data can be found in three sources: the 1993 Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) report; *The Ansar Cult in America* (1988) written by Bilal Phillip (a Muslim heresiologist); interviews with family members and old associates (Palmer 2010); and the hagiographies of the "Master Teacher" found in his books or "scrolls." York indicates that he was born in the Sudan on June 26, 1945. The 1993 FBI report places his birth in the state of Maryland. Bilal Phillips, author of *The Ansar Cult in America* (1988), claims he was born in 1935, but that he revised his birth date to support his claim to be the great-grandson of the Sudanese Mahdi, whose rebirth was prophesied to occur in the West exactly one hundred years later.

In his quest for his own charismatic identity, York leads his people on a journey back to their own ethnic, mythic, spiritual—and even extraterrestrial—origins. "Nuwaubian" is an Arabicized spelling of "Nubian." He claims he and his people came from the Nubian kingdom of Sudan. But before Sudan, he traces their lineage back to the ancient Egyptian and Sumerian civilizations,

and even beyond—to the stars. York appropriates Zecharia Sitchin's ancient astronaut's theory of the Annunaki, the angelic extraterrestrials from the planet Rizq who arrived on earth and built the first great civilizations. He is "the man from planet Rizq" who has landed on earth to teach his people how to break the "Spell of Kingu" by arming them with "Right Knowledge."

Dwight York grew up in New York City where, as a teenager, he was involved in street gangs. Convicted on rape and drugs charges and firearm violations, he spent two years in prison, where he was converted to Islam. On his release in 1967, York peddled African incense on the streets of Harlem and Brooklyn, engaging passers-by in what Gardell (1996) calls "Blackosophical" discussions. He attended the State Street Mosque (Sunni) where he met his mentor, Sheikh Daoud Faisal (1891–1980) the founder of the Islamic Mission of America, Inc. He married Dorothy Mae Johnson, when they were both 18. They had five children. Johnson became the chief administrator of his earlier movements in New York (Interview with Jacob York, Atlanta, Georgia, 19 August 2003).

York expounds his own, original myth concerning the origins of the Black man. Rejecting the theories of Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad, that African Americans are "Asiatics" (Gomez 2005:218–19), York argues the Black man originated in Sudan in Africa. York's followers define themselves as Nuwaubians of "Nuwaubu" or "Nuwaupu." The "Nubians" are the masses of African Americans still sleeping under the spell of "Kingu," not yet awakened to "Right Knowledge." In 1967 York dubbed himself "Isa Abdullah" and formed a spiritual circle in New York City with other teenagers, called "Ansaar Pure Sufi," adopting the eclectic symbol of the Crescent, Star of David and Ankh. In 1968, York became "Imam Isa" and renamed the group, "The Nubian Islaamic [*sic*] Hebrews." His disciples began to wear African robes (*dashiki*) and fezes. In 1973 York founded one of the largest, best known and longest lasting Black nationalist communes in American history—the Ansaaru Allah Community.

15.2 The Ansaaru Allah Community

In 1973 York suddenly revealed to his followers that he was the great-grandson and "Return" of the famous Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad (1845–85) who had led an uprising against the British in Sudan. He was now "al Imam Isa Adbullah Muhammad *al Mahdi*" of the "Ansaaru Allah Community" ("helpers of Allah community"). The Jewish features of the Nubian Islaamic Hebrews were discarded in favour of Islamic themes, and York's followers, now "Ansaars," adopted long white robes and turbans.

The Ansaar Allah Community (henceforth the AAC) expanded rapidly along Bushwick Avenue in Brooklyn, centred on their mosque. They set up a communal residence, a school, a recording studio, restaurants, a grocery store, and a laundromat. They produced a newsletter, *The Nuwaubian Village Bulletin*, and established a chain of bookstores called the Tents of Kedar bookstore which opened in several major cities of the USA. The bookstores were stocked with 450-odd booklets or “scrolls” that explored esoteric topics; Sufi mysticism, ufology, Blackosophy, Edgar Cayce, conspiracy theories, and Freemasonry, and functioned as missionary centres.

15.3 The FBI Investigation

The AAC entered a period of expansion. It sent out missionaries (“Propagators”) to the major cities of America and their Ministers held Sunday “Question-Answer” meetings in the Tents of Kedar bookstores. By the 1980s, AAC centres had opened found in Toronto and Montreal, Canada, in Trinidad, Jamaica, and in the U.K. In 1983 York purchased an eighty-acre lodge in the Catskills, and called it Camp Jazzir Abba. In 1989 York moved there to conduct military training drills and survival workshops.

By the mid-1980s the FBI and the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) were investigating the AAC for various crimes, including arson, illegal weapons, welfare fraud, and harbouring criminal fugitives. Strong counter-cult opposition had also formed among a network of Orthodox Muslim groups in the Brooklyn area, whose main concerns were theological. Sunni imams denounced York as a “Mahdi pretender” who blasphemed Allah and perverted Islam. Bilal Philips, an Islamic scholar, explains his purpose writing *The Ansar Cult in America* was to “[expose] the falsehood of heretical movements disguised under the cloak of Islam” (1988: v).

In 1992, York survived an assassination attempt by a notorious Muslim terrorist, Sayid Nosair (the man responsible for the 5 November 1990 assassination of Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League. After this, York closed down the Ansaaru Allah Community, transforming his movement into “The Holy Tabernacle Ministries,” a “Jewish” NRM that reverted to the earlier Black Hebrew motifs and the Star of David. York then wrote a book (“360 Questions to ask a Muslim”) in which he criticized Islam. He instructed his female followers to take off their veils and discard their modest robes. Women were now permitted to preach in the mosques (rechristened as “Tabernacles”). York’s new honorific title was “The Lamb, Liberator of Women.”

In 1993 York decided to sidestep police investigations and local “anti-cult” opposition by leading his people in a mass exodus from New York State. He decided to relocate his movement in the state of Georgia. He changed the title of his movement to the “United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors.” His disciples sold all their Brooklyn properties and headed south to the Bible Belt of Middle Georgia, where the group’s extraterrestrial teachings would soon rise to prominence.

15.4 Tama Re and the Yamassee Creek Nation

One hundred-odd Nuwaubians arrived in Eatonton, GA, in 1993 where they purchased 475 acres of land in Putnam County for \$975,000. They proceeded to construct an “Egyptian” style village they called “Tama Re.”

Upon arriving in Georgia, York suddenly revealed that he was directly descended from Pocahontas, and was henceforth to be addressed as “Chief Black Eagle.” His Nuwaubians now belonged to the “Yamassee of the Creek Nation.” Middle Eastern robes were discarded for the more practical gear for working in construction: jeans, boots and cowboy hats.

Tama Re was dominated by a forty-foot black pyramid. Its winding avenues led past a scarab beetle monument, a gigantic Sphinx with an African face, and a museum of Black History, and the tall statue of a Black Jesus crucified on an Ankh, crowned with an Indian feathered headdress presided over the village.

Tama Re functioned as an “Egyptian” theme park open for paying visitors, but it was also a site of pilgrimage, a Mecca in the West for Black Americans, and the sacred land of the Wahanee of the Yamassee tribe. York declared the property a Sovereign Nation. Visitors had to purchase an “Egyptian passport,” and change U.S. currency into Egyptian coins (Ellen Barry, “His Dream became their nightmare,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 January 2004).

Annual Saviour’s Day festivals were held to celebrate York’s June 26 birthday, a practice inspired by the Nation of Islam’s Saviour’s Day to commemorate Wallace Fard, their messianic founder. In 1993, York revealed himself to be “the Man from Planet Rizq,” an extraterrestrial come to rescue the 144,000 Chosen Ones from an impending earthly cataclysms.

I, YAANUUN, am an ANNUNAKI, or what you would call an extraterrestrial ... an Angelic Being from ILLYUWN [a tri-solar system with 38 moons and 19 planets]. I have incarnated here in this form for the Sole

Purpose of saving the Children of the ELOHEEM (ANNUNAQI) As You Bring Your Planet Nar to What Could Be Its Total Destruction.”

The Man from Planet Rizq [scroll, n.d.] circa 1993:23

York's disciples anticipated the 5 May 2003 descent of a “Mothership” carrying the beautiful black extraterrestrials, the Annunaki/Annunaki from the planet Rizq, who would land on Tama Re's 40-foot pyramid and to rescue 144,000 Nuwaubians just before the destruction of the world.

15.5 The UFO Connection

York has often been accused of plagiarizing his material, but his son, Jacob York explained in an interview how his father collects esoteric knowledge and incorporates it into his philosophy:

My dad was a *reader*. In the early days he wrote for days at a time—but he used to plagiarize a lot.... He was given Zecharia Sitchin's *The Twelfth Planet* by a brother who came in and said, ‘You've got to read this book!’ So he stayed up all night reading it. The next day he sent the brother off on a mission ... so he could get him out the way to steal the book.... He would give books and ideas to his all-girl research team and they would cobble it all together. He would then look over, edit it and it would come out in the next publication.

PALMER 2010: 24–5

Gnosticism teaches that Man is profoundly alienated, in exile from home, ignorant, perhaps unknown to his true Creator (Rudolph 1987). York's teachings show a synthesis of eclectic sources which point to his underlying gnostic message—a revelation of the Real Self—a Self that for African Americans has long been suppressed by slavery, racial stereotyping, self-loathing and prevailing ignorance. York resembles the Redeemer of the ancient Gnostics whose mission is to awaken the “sleeping soul” to free the “seeds of light.” He tells his disciples they are trapped in the “false prison” of racist America, held captive by evil wardens, the “Paleman” or the “Amorites” (the equivalent of the Archons the Gnostic myth). Nuwaubians believe that the Spell of Leviathan (“Spell of Kingu”) is cast over the Nubians of America, through the Christian Church, the U.S. Government, the media and popular culture. Dr. Malachi Z. York has come as a Saviour or Messiah to awaken the sleeping Nubians to their hidden glorious spiritual identities as the godlike descendants of the extraterrestrial

Annunaki (Palmer 2010:39). In York's shifting mythology of race, the Black man is a direct descendant of the angelic Annunaki, whereas the other races are the sad results of cross breeding experiments between other types of extraterrestrials (some quite ugly, like the Reptilians) and humans (Dr. Malachi Z. York, *Extraterrestrials and Creation*, Scroll# 136).

15.6 Mounting Conflict at Tama Re

The Nuwaubian community at Tama Re were perceived as an anomaly in the Southern Bible Belt of Middle Georgia, where confederate flags were still flying. As the construction of Tama Re progressed, a series of legal and bureaucratic obstacles led to conflict. Negative media articles appeared in local newspapers about the "Black Supremacist cult" (Vicky Eckenrode, "Mystery Circles Georgia's Clan of Nuwaubians," *Atlanta Chronicle*, 25 February 2001; Matthew Pinzur, "The Nuwaubians: Who Are These People?" *Macon Telegraph*, 15 May 2000). The locals began complaining about "the Waubs." In 1997 a minor dispute over a building permit threatened to result in armed combat. Howard Sills, the sheriff of Putnam County was called in. Sheriff Sills was to become the Nuwaubians' leading adversary.

On 22 June 1999, York ignored a summons to appear in the Putnam County court on zoning-related charges. The judge sent Sheriff Sills to padlock several buildings as thousands of visitors arrived to celebrate Saviour's Day. Racial tension mounted as hundreds of York's supporters protested his next hearing in Eatonton. One hundred state troopers and agents from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation were dispatched to the Eatonton armoury, ready for trouble.

In June 1999, an unexpected ally appeared in the person of Everett Stout Leon, of the Montana Freeman (a White Pride anti-government Patriot group) who had undergone the 1996 FBI siege of his group. Leon introduced himself a "common law judge" and moved into Tama Re to teach the Nuwaubians pseudo-law or "Common Law." He helped them sue various county officials for \$1 million, and drew up a fake lien on Sheriff Sills' property.

15.7 The FBI Raid on Tama Re

The FBI launched a raid on 8 May 2002. Strong objections had previously been raised in the wake of the 1993 Waco raid against the Branch Davidians, wherein the FBI had employed military weapons against U.S. citizens, in violation of the United States Posse Comitatus Act, which bans military involvement

in domestic law enforcement. Despite this, the FBI arrived at Tama Re with armoured vehicles, tear gas, and helicopters with mounted guns. Armoured vehicles carrying over 300 agents from the FBI, ATF and the County Sheriff's department rammed through the flimsy obelisks and gates of Tama Re. A SWAT team made a "dynamic entry" armed with submachine guns, Glocks and hand grenades. Agents leapt out of helicopters, kicked in doors and threw tear gas in windows.

The sixty-five adults present at Tama Re put up no resistance, so no one was killed, but the search failed to uncover any illegal caches of weapons, or any abused children. Dr. York was charged with 116-counts related to child molestation ("Nuwaubians Indictments allege more than 100 criminal acts," *Macon Telegraph*, 1 September 2002). Four of York's plural wives were also indicted. Five teens from the fifty-odd minors found at Tama Re were taken into protective custody and examined by doctors, social workers and psychologists. Four teens tested positive for STDs, but no evidence of any sexual contact between these minors and York was discovered.

The state charges of child molestation were compounded by federal charges when the Mann Act was invoked. The Mann Act of 1910 is a federal law that makes it illegal to transport minors across state lines for purposes of sexual exploitation (18 U.S.C. 2423[a]). After an abortive attempt at a plea bargain was rejected by the judge, York resorted to the "pseudo-legal" tactics he had learned from the Montana Freeman. At his pre-trial hearing in January 2003, York appeared dressed as a Moor in a red fez with a black tassel. He announced to the Superior Court Judge: "I am secured and do not give permission to use my name. If you proceed, it will cost you \$500,000." York's followers, dressed as Moors, handed out fliers stamped, "Clerk of Federal Moorish Cherokee Consular Court, USA" (Rob Peecher, "Lawyers argue details in York case," *Macon Telegraph*, January 18, 2003).

At his July 1, 2003 trial, York appeared in buckskin and feathered headdress as "Chief Black Eagle." He stated, "I am a Moorish Cherokee, and I cannot get a fair trial if I am being tried by settlers or Confederates" ("Officials are doing all they can to keep the courtroom from being turned into a circus," *Associated Press*, 5 January 2004). He then demanded to be turned over to the "Yamassee Native American Government" (Rob Peecher, "York Claims Immunity as Indian," *Macon Telegraph*, 1 September 2002 by Rob Peecher).

In January 2004, York was re-indicted for three counts of evading federal financial reporting requirements, as well as on racketeering or RICO charges. (The Racketeer-Influenced and Corrupt Organizations [RICO] Act is a 1970 anti-organized crime law designed to fight political corruption and corporate fraud). On 23 January 2004 the jury pronounced Dwight York guilty of four counts of

racketeering and six child-molestation-related charges. On 22 April 2004 he was sentenced to 135 years in prison.

Since had been York was found guilty of RICO, the government was able to claim the 450 acres of Tama Re (Rob Peecher, "Nuwaubian Leader Likely to Face New Charges, Including Racketeering," *Macon Telegraph*, 25 October 2003). Although York did not legally own the property, the land (worth \$ 1.7 million) was seized on July 14, 2004. The Egyptian temples were demolished, the gods were smashed and the "Mecca in the West" was sold at auction ("Former Nuwaubian property sold; demolition begins." *Associated Press*, June 10, 2005).

On September 14, 2005, York's defence lawyer, Attorney Adrian Patrick appeared before the Eleventh Circuit Appeal court in Atlanta to argue that York's conviction should be overturned ("Tenikka Smith Nuwaubian leader's case back in court," *First Coast News* 15 September 2005). Patrick pointed to errors in law, arguing that the state charges and the federal charges had been "improperly combined" and that the Mann Act had been "slapped on opportunistically." He challenged the assumption that the United Nuwaubian Nations was an organized crime syndicate, and pointed out that the application of RICO was based on the assumption that a State of Georgia-recognized church ministry constitutes an enterprise for illegal activities. He claimed the grand jury was tainted by pre-trial publicity (Daniel Yee, "Attorneys Argue Nuwaubian leader's appeal in court," *Associated Press*, 14 September 2005). Patrick declared the victims' testimonies unreliable, for there was no DNA evidence of sexual crimes, and the alleged victims gave no specific dates for the alleged acts of molestation. The witnesses kept changing their stories, and the star witness had recanted her testimony. Despite Patrick's compelling arguments, York's sentence was upheld (Palmer 2010:124–8).

Today, the Nuwaubians continue to raise money for their "Free Dr. Malachi Z. York" initiative. As York attempts to direct his movement from prison, new charismatic leaders auguring schisms have emerged, among them Dwight York's son, Prince York; Brother Polight; Nanya Shaabu Eil; and Chief Asaru.¹ The latter (Chief Asaru) claims to be York's direct successor and has proclaimed himself the President & Chief of the United Nuwaubian Nation.

This study documents a highly original and creative response to the pervasive situation of racial inequality and oppression in the U.S., most recently

1 These claimants stake their cases on YouTube. On Prince York, see internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJoAkNwLPaI>, accessed 16/08/2020; on Brother Polight, internet site, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGbigNmzd_w, accessed 16/08/2020; for Nanya Shaabu Eil, internet site, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zr55_SjJ3dA, = accessed 16/08/2020; and Chief Asaru, internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfaYp36uDGY>, accessed 16/08/2020.

dramatized by the Lloyd George incident (Bogel-Burroughs 2020). By retreating into Dwight York's series of theatrical movement and opening their minds to his Black gnosis, many African American urban youth have gained a temporary refuge and psychological distancing from the racial attitudes and stereotypes that permeate the wider secular culture of North America. The fact that Black utopias appear to pose a threat to law enforcement and their Black Messiahs are so often imprisoned (Palmer 2020) is a troubling question beyond the scope of this study.

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Norman Paulsen and the Brotherhood of the Sun / Sunburst

Carole M. Cusack

16.1 Introduction

Norman Paulsen (1929–2006) founded the Brotherhood of the Sun (Sunburst Farms) in Santa Barbara, California in 1969. Paulsen, a spiritual seeker and disciple of the Indian guru Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952), began teaching meditation in the late 1960s and found an enthusiastic following among countercultural young people (Knapp 2019). Paulsen taught a *mélange* of alternative spiritual beliefs, which drew upon ufology, Theosophy, esoteric Christianity, Native American (Hopi) traditions, and Yogananda's Kriya Yoga and meditation techniques (Hoesly 2019: 62). In the 1970s the Brotherhood owned the largest organic food business in the United States, including “four ranches on thousands of acres, four organic farmers markets, two health food restaurants, a dairy, a whole-grain organic bakery, a fresh juice-bottling plant, a fishery, a wholesale warehouse, and a trucking company to distribute fresh produce and natural foods” (Hoesly 2019: 60). The Brotherhood of the Sun/ Sunburst Farms has received little scholarly attention; to date, a chapter by Garry W. Trompf (Trompf 1990b) and an article by Dusty Hoesly, separated by almost three decades, are the only detailed studies of note about this fascinating movement. This chapter focuses on the UFO and alien-based aspects of Paulsen's vision, acknowledging that Sunburst Farms also fits into academic models of “intentional communities” (Miller 2013: 1).

The major source for the Brotherhood of the Sun's theology is Paulsen's autobiography, which was first issued in 1980, and has since been revised and updated twice (Paulsen 1980; Paulsen 1984; Paulsen 2016). The reliability of such texts is questionable as new spiritual leaders are perceived by followers as possessing extraordinary charisma and characteristically self-present as having had remarkable lives, in which it is clear from earliest childhood that they were destined for greatness or recognised as enlightened (Petsche 2011). Paulsen describes his father, the blind judge Charles Leonard Paulsen (or Poulsen) (1894–1970), as a spiritually advanced Buddhist who had studied with a Chinese master, Gin Chow (d. 1933), from the age of eighteen

(Paulsen 1980: 27). As a child and youth in Lompoc, California, Paulsen engaged in religious explorations and questioning. At sixteen, already tall and muscular and appearing much older, he became a merchant seaman and travelled to Asia and the Middle East, before enlisting in the United States Marines in 1946. In 1947 his mother died, he was honourably discharged from the navy, and he read Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946). In Los Angeles, Paulsen became a monk in Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF), where he acquired practical skills in construction and gardening, undertook intensive study of the religions of the world, and became friends with "Bernard Cole (c.1922–c.1980), who as Yogacharya Bernard became an independent spiritual teacher, and J. Donald Walters (1926–2013), better known as Swami Kriyananda, founder of Ananda Cooperative Communities" (Hoesly 2019: 63). After five years at Yogananda's retreat at Encinitas, Paulsen left after a difference of opinion about sexual matters in 1951 and continued on his spiritual quest.

Soon after Paulsen's departure from the Hindu-derived SRF he experienced a vision of esoteric Christian import, that is, of "God as Mother-Father-Spirit [and] the first-born, the Christ, the Light of all worlds and universes" (Paulsen 1980: 227). This was followed by profound encounter with "the Father of All Fathers, I AM that I AM, the Divine Creator, God" (Paulsen 1980: 238). At the same time, his interest in UFOs was piqued when he read George W. Van Tassel's (1910–1978) *I Rode a Flying Saucer* (1952). Paulsen joined Van Tassel's group, marrying and later divorcing Glenda, Van Tassel's daughter, with whom he had a son, Aarn Lothor. The visions he experienced in the 1950s were interpreted with reference to what is now termed the "Ancient Astronaut" theory, well known from the writings of Erich von Däniken, Charles Fort (Gruenschloss 2007), and Zecharia Sitchin (Trompf 1990b: 48). According to this macro-historical model, the early history of the earth and the origin of humanity was determined by the interventions of extraterrestrials who visited the planet and either designed human beings entirely or augmented their development through experimentation and inter-breeding. Ancient astronauts were often linked to the disappearance or destruction of "lost continents" such as Atlantis and Lemuria (Trompf and Bernauer 2012: 111). Andreas Gruenschloss credits Paulsen with founding "the first New Age Movement with a strong *Ancient Astronaut* mythology ... the Californian ... 'Brotherhood of the Sun' ... (later renamed [the] 'Solar Logos Foundation') (Gruenschloss 2007).

After his divorce from Glenda Van Tassel, Paulsen endured a time of poverty and health setbacks. He wed his second wife Lisa in October 1959, but the marriage was over by December 1960. In 1963 he was in a psychiatric ward of Santa Barbara County Hospital "trying to calm the voices in his head ...

after an overdose on his medication” (Knapp 2019). Paulsen recovered, decided to heed the voices and visions, and began teaching meditation in 1969 in an old ice-cream factory that he renovated with the help of friends (Paulsen 1980: 483). Paulsen’s view of meditation agreed with that of Yogananda, who asserted that “the advanced meditator’s consciousness expands to embrace the immensity of the universe, moving beyond all awareness of limitations” (Kalamaras 1997: 9). In 1970 he met the woman who would become his next wife, Mary (known as Mary Mu), whom he married two years later in 1972 on their joint birthday, 3 February. With his pupils he established a commune on what would become the original Sunburst Farm near Santa Barbara in 1971, where the idyllic lifestyle was captured in the images of Mehosh Dziadzio, a member who became a professional photographer (Knapp 2019). The group lived a strict and hard-working life, with no sex outside of marriage, no drugs, and all possessions being held in common. By the mid-1970s the Brotherhood of the Sun was a wealthy organization, and prosperity brought its own challenges (Nordheimer 1975). Paulsen bought schooners to run a charter boat business, the community began to accumulate weapons, and Paulsen developed a serious drug addiction. Sunburst expanded to sites in Nevada, Arizona, and Utah; however, in the 1990s the community, now reduced in size, returned to California. After Paulsen’s death in 2006, Patty Paulsen (his final wife) became the spiritual leader of Sunburst Farms (Hoesly 2019: 65). Fifty years after it was founded in 1969, Sunburst continues to exist (Sunburst Online 2019), an impressive fact given the high failure rate of both new religious movements and utopian communal enterprises.

16.2 Encounters with Extraterrestrials in Paulsen’s Autobiography

In *Sunburst: Return of the Ancients*, Paulsen describes his first meeting with George Van Tassel at Giant Rock in California’s Yucca Valley, in the company of his friend Daniel Boone. Van Tassel states that he has been expecting the arrival of these young men for two years (Paulsen 1980: 265). To date in the autobiography, though Paulsen’s spiritual energy and special status has been emphasised, the narrative of space aliens and UFO visitations has not featured. Van Tassel claims that while employed by Howard Hughes he and his wife Eve moved to the desert, seeking to contact aliens. Paulsen and Boone were convinced by his account of meeting an extraterrestrial and touring the spaceship he arrived in. They were treated to a demonstration of Van Tassel’s charisma when he addressed an audience of two hundred who had flocked to hear him

from Santa Barbara and nearby environs, and two key terms in Paulsen's theology, "The Builders" and "the Return of the Ancients" were used for the first time in his memoir (Paulsen 1980: 268). These beings were explained as "ancient culture heroes" from the lost continent of Mu, who "influenced evolutionary process[es] in humankind through genetic manipulation" (Gruenschloss 1998). It would later be revealed that The Builders had "selected Norman Paulsen as primary contact person" and would defeat their enemies upon their return; Paulsen saw himself as "an ancient Lord of Mu" but in the 1970s he would identify more as Christ (Gruenschloss 1998).

On their return journey to Santa Barbara after a revelation-packed week-end with Van Tassel, Paulsen and Boone had a "first contact" experience. They picked up a hitchhiker, Waldo, an alien who arrived on earth in a spacecraft. Waldo is humanoid, but different. Paulsen writes:

The figure was male, approximately five feet tall and very slender. The age was difficult to determine because the facial features were so different from what the ordinary human being looks like. His head was bare, revealing closely cut hair. The crown of his head was pointed very visibly above a broad forehead. His eyes were small, darting, deep set, and exceedingly wide apart. His cheekbones were wide set also, tapering down to an extremely narrow pointed chin. His ears were unusually large and pointed. He had no luggage and was dressed casually in a one-piece coverall.

PAULSEN 1980: 272

After conversing with Waldo, discovering that his ship had been destroyed and that he expected imminent rescue, that he never slept, and was a disturbing presence as he "seemed to be continuously annoyed by negative, curious, discarnate spirits" (Paulsen 1980: 276) Paulsen and Boone allegedly decided Waldo would be best off at Giant Rock with Van Tassel, and took him there directly. Van Tassel had apparently met others like Waldo, who remained with him until 1953, when he departed to join a rescue ship.

Paulsen notes that Waldo heralded a period of twenty years in which extraterrestrials and alien visitations were uppermost in his life. In May 1953 he and Boone moved to Giant Rock to be with Van Tassel, sleeping under the stars and working casually in order to encounter aliens and support Van Tassel's College of Universal Wisdom. That year Paulsen encountered alien ships and, while not taken aboard, experienced the visitation as a melding of esoteric Christianity and ancient astronaut theory:

Each star, it seemed, blinked a message of hope. The beacon lights of Spirit's presence in space, Father's and Mother's starlit flanks. I had seen the ancient vehicles. Sons and Daughters, the Christed, human angel beings, called The Builders were performing visibly in this dimension again. As I stood there looking at the strange and silent mount, which had now become a familiar image to my vision, I felt this encounter with The Builders was only the first chapter in a fantastic story which was beginning to take visible form around me. The great war between The Builders and The Nephilim, the Forces of Light and the Forces of Darkness, rages on. "Oh Father-Mother, give me the strength to be just a true Son, that I may someday stand before you with my mission complete, and a job well done. Good night my brothers and sisters ... thanks for seeing me."

PAULSEN 1980: 285

Paulsen's theology, as exemplified by this quotation, is eschatological and millennial. This orientation is typical of UFO and alien-based religions which developed after World War II and were particularly influenced by the paranoia characteristic of the Cold War, in which the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union generated fear and expectations of the "end of the world" (Cusack 2015: 340).

The struggle between America and Russia was portrayed in the West as a conflict between good and evil, Christian values and atheism, and liberal individualism and communist herd mentality (Saliba 1995: 214). The 1950s is often understood as a conformist decade that reversed the progressive social trends of the war years and reinstated a conservative social model; the 1960s is viewed as the decade of the counterculture and rebellion against inherited values. However, the 1950s is the decade of UFO religions: the Aetherius Society was founded in London in 1954 by George King; the Church of Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1954; George Adamski allegedly met the Venusian Orthon in the Californian desert in the early 1950s; and Mark L. Prophet founded the Summit Lighthouse in 1958 (Partridge 2003: 14–20). The theme of cosmic conflict was prominent in certain UFO-based religions: for example, Hubbard taught that millions of years ago there was an intergalactic conflict of vast significance for planet earth and its human inhabitants; the Summit Lighthouse became the eschatological Church Universal and Triumphant, which expected the end of the world in 1991 (Whitsel 2003); and the Aetherius Society espoused a less inflammatory type of apocalyptic rhetoric that emphasised its role in maintaining interplanetary peace (Saliba 1999).

Paulsen's encounters with extraterrestrials and their spaceships intensified at the start of the 1960s. On 1 January 1961 he met E-lith-EA, an alien female,

and she guided him through a forty day initiation in which he had alien objects placed in his body, and was circumcised by “a ring of fire” from the “presence of the Divine Spirit” (Paulsen 1980: 424). The aliens told him that they would return with ships that were the army of the Son, Christ “to deliver the final ultimatum to Lucifer and Satan who have had possession of the Earth for over twelve thousand years” (Paulsen 1980: 425). He was informed that his personal mission would bear fruit in ten years’ time, in 1971. After this encounter he went to Giant Rock, and was disappointed that the community, including his old friend Boone and his ex-father-in-law Van Tassel, did not recognise the truth of his visions, but thought him crazy and sent him away (Paulsen 1980: 428).

16.3 UFOs, Aliens, The Builders and The Nephilim in Sunburst Theology

Norman Paulsen’s autobiography is shaped by tropes that are typical of the biography or autobiography of a holy man, god-man, spiritual teacher, or charismatic leader of a new religious movement (Rothstein 2003; Petsche 2011). It is significant that Paulsen joined the Self-Realization Fellowship of Paramahansa Yogananda through reading *Autobiography of a Yogi*, one of the most famous modern spiritual memoirs (Farge 2009: 50). The power of the text to “convert” a spiritual seeker is a vital factor in the growth of non-traditional religion throughout the twentieth century. John Lofland and Norman Skonovd have proposed a model of conversion that is especially relevant to new religious movements and alternative spiritualities. They identified six “motifs” of conversion (intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive) and mapped them against five major variations (social pressure, time frame, emotional level, emotional content, “belief participation sequence”) (Lofland and Skonovd 1981: 375). Here emphasis is placed on the intellectual motif, as reading about NRMs (books, internet) is a major source of information to motivate personal conversion for seekers. After leaving the SRF in 1951, Paulsen was influenced by a second autobiographical account, George Van Tassel’s *I Rode a Flying Saucer*. It is reasonable to speculate that Paulsen was aware of the power of the memoir as a personal testimony, and that, as many spiritual teachers without formal college or university qualifications have done, he wrote an autobiography intended to impress and persuade potential converts.

Sunburst: Return of the Ancients contains a detailed description of Paulsen’s theology, which is complex and melds Biblical motifs with ufology, theosophical ideas, and other esoteric tropes. His falling-out with Van Tassel is explained as due to Van Tassel’s use of demonstrations of psychic and paranormal phenomena to the crowds that gathered to hear him, which Paulsen objected to

as “stumbling block” to human (he often writes hu-man) advancement. He argues that the Mother-Father-Creator’s divine will must direct the universe and is made manifest in “the divine powers of the Angel Man and Woman ... who found their conception and birth within the center of the Great Central SuN-SoN” (Paulsen 1980: 312). The Angel Man and Woman descend into the human being who is aiming for a higher spiritual state through deep meditation and confer immortality. The person is thus “Christed” and the “Christed beings in physical forms are known to us as The Builders, the divine caretakers of the creation” (Paulsen 1980: 313). Paulsen’s visions showed him the ongoing conflict between The Builders and The Nephilim over the aeons, and revealed the role he would play in the final conflict:

I became aware of who I had been and what my name was. All of the events reaching backwards through millenniums [*sic.*] raced through my consciousness. I saw the beginning of the great wars between The Builders and the Fallen Angels explode in all directions a million years ago in this galaxy. Twelve thousand years ago the lands of Mu were destroyed by the Dark Angels. I was witness to this murderous holocaust. May Divine Spirit help us, for it is about to happen again! No! Oh no! It cannot!

PAULSEN 184: 276

Paulsen’s mission was to reveal the truth of human origins in the lost continent of Mu, which he identified as the Garden of Eden. When Sunburst was founded, Paulsen stated it was intended as the restoration of the Garden of Eden: by the late 1970s he told his followers “he was Christ and rode in spaceships with The Builders as ‘one of the ancient rulers of Mu’” (Hoesly 2019: 73).

Paulsen interpreted The Builders and The Nephilim as powerful, highly developed extraterrestrials whose encounters with human beings are recorded in the Bible and the scriptures of other religions around the world. He drew upon authors such as James Churchward (1851–1936) who first posited the existence of Mu, and Madame Blavatsky, especially in the notion of the “root races” (Trompf 2003: 229); he claimed the first peoples of Central and South America were White, so the technological achievements of the Incas, Toltecs, and other peoples of colour were rather the cultural products of a “Nordic” race (Paulsen 1980: 328). The evidence he relied on reflected von Däniken’s *Chariots and the Gods* (1968) and its innumerable sequels, in that phenomena such as the Nazca Lines in Peru were linked to ancient astronauts and UFOs. Garry Trompf noted that, unlike Theosophical writers, Paulsen did not identify India or Tibet as the source of primordial wisdom, but rather:

certain archaeo-anthropological details on the fringes of the Pacific—including Easter Island images, and Meso-American pyramids and hieroglyphs—confirm[ed] that all faiths and civilizations derived from Mu, dispersing both east and west as fragments of a lost unity.

TROMPF 2003: 230

Paulsen's autobiography presents his visions and apprehension of this material as *sui generis* and authentic, that is, a revelation from the source and not constructed from esoteric publications or popular culture. For example, when he mentions Churchward's *The Lost Continent of Mu* (1926), is careful to say that he read it years after his visions convinced him of the reality of Mu. This preserves the uniqueness of his vision for his disciples, but can be discounted by scholars seeking contextual, socio-historical sources for the Sunburst theology and worldview.

The Brotherhood of the Sun's theology of the origin of the universe is distinctive, and exhibits elements from various esoteric systems. The original being for Paulsen is the Divine Spirit which gave rise to the Angel Man and Woman. Alongside this process, the

primordial sea of life force, called Spirit Mother and Father, had now given birth to Light ... The Great Central SuN-SoN, the first creation of light and the hub on which the forces of creation now spin.

PAULSEN 1980: 341

Paulsen taught that on many planets in universe the Angel Beings had relationships with humans were able to confer immortality if the human welcomed the evolution toward divinity offered by these beings. This process was perfected on a planet that is called "Heaven" in religious texts from various civilisations on earth. It was on Heaven that humans "evolved and manifested on the surface of the planet as the four races of fixed identity and color" (Paulsen 1980: 347). The Red, Yellow, Blue and White races, originating on Heaven, were spiritually advanced and are "called The Builders, the four races from outer space" (Paulsen 1980: 348). The Builders travelled the universe in spaceships called Mus, until a million years ago their leader La-Lu was defeated by the evil A.N. The resultant negativity meant The Builders lost power, the ranks of the enemy Nephilim swelled, and war broke out. Many worlds were destroyed, and a group of The Builders led by La-Lu and his three sons (RaMu, RaMa and Ra), located the earth around 500,000 years ago, and settled members of the four races there. The importance of the Hopi is here emphasised, as they are "the peaceful caretakers of Mother Earth, the remnants of the ancient Red Race

created by The Builders" (Paulsen 1980: 355). In 1972 Paulsen met White Bear Fredericks, a Hopi teacher who participated in Sunburst's "Sunday meditation service" (Paulsen 2016: 327); Trompf notes he was the celebrant at Paulsen's wedding to Mary (Trompf 1990b: 46). White Bear is also credited with setting Paulsen's sights on the south Pacific Ocean and inspiring him to buy ships to sail in search of the surviving traces of Mu (Trompf 2003: 233). The group bought, restored and sold old sailing vessels from 1972 to 1997, with Paulsen taking on something of the sea captain mystique of L. Ron Hubbard within Scientology, although the photographs in *Life Love God: Story of a Soul Traveler* depict him as a Thor Heyerdahl figure, a muscular adventurer exploring uncharted frontiers (Paulsen 2016: 330–331).

Chapter 36 to Chapter 42 of *Sunburst: Return of the Ancients* offer a detailed account of the ancient civilisations of the world, viewed through Paulsen's lens of actions by The Builders and their enemies The Nephilim in shaping earth. The Nephilim, who landed on earth 400,000 years ago, are identified as Ancient Near Eastern, with A.N. as the king and creator of "the Annunaki, the workers in the Nephilim ranks who bore the burden of the physical labor on earth" (Paulsen 1980: 397). The Anunnaki mythos was proposed by ancient astronaut author Zecharia Sitchin (1920–2010), who claimed they were extraterrestrials from a planet called Nibiru, and that they built the Sumerian civilisation, the first culture in the Fertile Crescent between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers (Trompf and Bernauer 2012: 109). Paulsen posits that the Anunnaki rebelled and were liberated when A.N.'s son Enki assisted the birth goddesses to create Cro-Magnon man, "a primitive worker fashioned from a genetic cross between themselves and the evolving ape-like man *Homo Erectus*" (Paulsen 1980: 398). This is the creation of the race of Adam according to Paulsen; not by God but by The Nephilim, renegades and deserters from The Builders. The destruction of Mu by The Nephilim in the central Pacific Ocean occurred 12,000 years ago, "leaving Australia and New Zealand (each on the same continental shelf) as the only remains" (Trompf 1990b: 41). Paulsen himself, as Christ, heralds the return of The Builders, who must finally defeat their enemies The Nephilim, and the restoration of the lost Paradise, Mu.

16.4 Academic Interpretations of the Brotherhood of the Sun

As has been noted, there is limited academic work on Paulsen and the Brotherhood of the Sun. The limited academic publications on the Brotherhood of the Sun can be supplemented by various media articles, websites, and some anti-cult literature. None of this material is well-researched or particularly

accurate. For example, Steve Omar and Cecelia Frances Page's *The Future Age Beyond the New Age Movement* is a gazetteer of communities and groups, and the listing for the Brotherhood of the Sun, though it contains several inaccuracies, such as claiming that Paulsen first organised communal living in Lompoc (where he grew up), is broadly positive (Omar and Page 2009: n.p.). This favourable popular account is counter-balanced by Geoffrey D. Falk's *Stripping the Gurus: Sex, Violence, Abuse and Enlightenment*, in which Norman Paulsen is situated in the lineage of Yogananda and ridiculed for his claim "to have been abducted by a UFO piloted by Builders from Jupiter" (Falk 2009: 262). Interestingly Falk claims that UFOs were a preoccupation of Yogananda's and quotes an alleged saying of the yogi reported to him by a "respected and loyal" disciple: "if America were ever at war and losing, space aliens from UFOs would intervene" (Falk 2009: 263).

From the academic point of view, the approaches of Trompf, who compares Sunburst to the cargo cults of Melanesia, and Hoesly, who emphasises the organic farming and intentional community aspects of the group, are so different that they serve to highlight the polyvalent nature of the Brotherhood, and the eclectic nature of its influences. It is therefore useful to consider the Brotherhood of the Sun as a cargo cult, as an intentional community, and also as a new religious movement within the sub-category of UFO and alien-based religions (Cowan and Bromley 2008). Trompf's claim that the Brotherhood of the Sun is a cargo cult is a bold assertion, but he is right that both phenomena involve "flying objects amount[ing] to astounding 'arrivals' in traditional societies" (Trompf 2003: 221). He linked the arrival of the alien ships to the millenarian expectations of the community, in which the restoration of the Eden of Mu is functionally equivalent to the expectations of the "cargo" by Melanesians (Trompf 2003: 231–232; Trompf 1990a). Trompf has also identified Paulsen's theology as "perhaps the most complex 'synthetism' of modern times" (Trompf 1990b: 37). This is a subjective claim that is difficult to confirm or disconfirm. However, the range of sources upon which Paulsen drew resulted in a complex, multi-faceted movement that operates across multiple classifications in the sociological sub-field of new religious movements.

Hoesly's article was published in *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* in a special issue on the theme of "New Religious Movements and Food," and he explicitly locates the Brotherhood of the Sun in "the co-evolution of health food and spirituality" and the "cosmic cookery trend" (Hoesly 2019: 62). Hoesly emphasises that while a member of the Self-Realization Fellowship Paulsen helped launch one "of the first vegetarian restaurants in California, SRF's India House Café" (Hoesly 2019: 63) and foregrounds the reminiscences of female members of Sunburst, like Patty Paulsen

and Valerie King, which focused on getting “back to Mother Earth” (Hoesly 2019: 65). For Hoesly, Sunburst is a trailblazer in the organic produce movement and merits attention for its farming methods on Tajiguas Ranch, where “naturally fed, hormone-free goats, sheep, cows and chickens” were raised and members made natural wool clothing, did blacksmithing, made pottery, and engaged in other crafts in pursuit of a “back to the land” lifestyle (Hoesly 2019: 69). Both Paulsen and other members wrote books about food and cookery. *The Sunburst Family Farm Cookbook* (1976) by Susan Duquette and Paulsen’s much later *Sacred Science* (2000) argue that organic food and natural cookery are more nutritious and spiritually sustaining than modern processed foods, in addition to the fact that growing your own food has a value well beyond purchased food (Hoesly 2019: 71). Not all residents on Sunburst Farms or employees in the organic foods business were believers in Paulsen’s vision that “the farms and ranches were holy places, sites approved by his visionary companions, the Angel Man and Woman, and The Builders” (Hoesly 2019: 72).

Both Trompf and Hoesly agree that Sunburst was threatened in the mid- to late-1970s by several factors, including the financial success of the company, and Paulsen’s erratic behaviour which was attributed to addiction to drugs. Nevertheless, Trompf claims that in 1977 Paulsen was recognised in Sunburst as being identified with Christ, with “twelve elders (with some of them taking apostles’ names), others were dubbed Elijah and John the Baptist, and the prophet became increasingly aloof from his communards” (Trompf 1990b: 52). Trompf has perceptive things to say about Paulsen as prophet and leader, noting that while a hefty autobiography is an impressive thing “from a bricklayer untrained in the literary arts” the work reveals “a pathology of self-acclamation and self-deception” (Trompf 1990b: 53). Paulsen’s autobiography, Trompf alleges, was published in 1980 in response to a steady stream of members leaving the movement in 1979. It is also clear from reading Trompf and Hoesly that Sunburst had started to accumulate weapons from 1974, when Paulsen’s preaching took on a more strident apocalyptic tone. The cumulative effect of a range of negative experiences and publicity—including the deprogramming of two members by the notorious Ted Patrick in 1976, the involvement of anti-cult groups in investigating the Brotherhood, “allegations that Paulsen abused painkillers, sexually abused minors, and evaded taxes, in addition to a threatened shoot-out with law enforcement after he was arrested for drunk driving and resisting arrest in 1958” (Hoesly 2021: 73)—was widespread defections and a greatly reduced community. In the mid-1980s the Brotherhood of the Sun became the Solar Logos Foundation, and in 2018 Sunburst owns only one farm, the location of Sunburst Sanctuary, where its “retreats, workshops, and

gift shop, like its New Frontiers store, combine spiritual and economic goals” (Hoesly 2019: 76).

16.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the Brotherhood of the Sun and its founder Norman Paulsen with an emphasis on the role played by aliens and UFOs in both the founder’s spiritual journey and the theology he developed and communicated to his followers. Trompf, who focused in his analysis on similarities between Sunburst and cargo cults, also emphasises the Theosophical aspects of Paulsen’s teachings, and there is a traceable genealogy from Madame Blavatsky’s Mahatmas to the aliens who communicated with contactees from the 1950s onwards (Cusack 2015). Hoesly’s more recent treatment is directed to recovering the distinctive contribution that the Brotherhood of the Sun made to the emergent wholefoods and organic produce subculture, and emphasises the communal life of the brethren, their vegetarian diet, handcrafted artefacts, and cruelty free farming practices (Hoesly 2019). The Brotherhood of the Sun reached a crisis point in 1981 when rebellious members “attempt[ed] to replace Paulsen [with] former Yogananda disciple Rev. C. Bernard” (Trompf 1990b: 57), and in September 1982 the group left California for Utah, Nevada and Arizona. In the 1990s, the Brotherhood returned to California, where it continues to exist under the leadership of Patty Paulsen, Norman Paulsen’s last wife.

UFO and alien-based religions are both normalised in the American context, having as they do a peculiar and intimate relationship with American popular culture (Zeller 2014), and ridiculed as unscientific, unbelievable, and the products of new religious movement leaders’ fevered imaginations. Paulsen has received little critical attention, and his autobiography points to reasons why that might be the case. Trompf quotes his eschatological vision: “Now come the famines ... as he [Jesus Christ] said they would, right on schedule. We have about 2–1/2 years left—no more ... All government agencies will begin to collapse. Money will be worth nothing; they’ll burn it in the streets, as well as in the cities. It’s going to be a most difficult situation. I hate to look at it. But you all ... who love God, must survive and go on ... I feel in this Brotherhood that I am surrounded by God’s angels” (Trompf 1990b: 50). The mixture of self-importance and the dramatic predictions point to Paulsen’s worldview as likely delusional, and his theology therefore deriving from wellsprings of paranoia. The fact that this eschatological vision failed to materialise, in addition to the other setbacks that the group faced in the 1970s and 1980s (arms stockpiling,

Paulsen's addictions and erratic conduct, the financial success of the Sunburst business—a name still synonymous with fresh orange juice the world over—and the defections and claims for financial compensation), suggest the seeds of destruction were present from the earliest days of the Brotherhood of the Sun. Still, it is a remarkable blend of proto-New Age movement, intentional community, and UFO religion that merits further investigation by scholars.

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Heaven's Gate and Charismatic Leadership

George D. Chryssides

17.1 Introduction

On 26 March 1997 it was reported that 39 people had been found dead in a large mansion on the outskirts of San Diego. This was plainly a suicide, as later evidence confirmed, having been undertaken in a ritual manner by members of a little-known new religious movement (NRM) called Heaven's Gate. Each member had consumed a poisonous mixture of phenobarbitone, vodka and apple sauce, and had lain down on their backs on a bed, underneath a purple shroud, having placed polythene bags over their heads. All were wearing black trousers and Nike trainers; those who wore spectacles had placed them carefully beside themselves, and everyone had placed packed suitcases at their bed-sides, as if about to embark on a journey. The group was little-known, although two researchers—Robert Balch and David Taylor—had covertly infiltrated the group in 1975, when it was known as Human Individual Metamorphosis (Balch 1995; Balch and Taylor 1976; 1977).

They were not under threat; unlike the Peoples Temple in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978, there were no concerned parents pursuing them, no congressmen investigating, and there was no siege situation, as there had been with the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, in 1993. The group was non-violent, although, in common with many US citizens, members had acquired a few weapons, which they appear to have locked in a cupboard, without any intention of employing them. The obvious question was how so many people could have been persuaded to end their lives in such a strange way, under the direction of the group's leader Marshall Herff Applewhite. In what follows I shall explore the question of whether the concept of charisma can help to explain what attracted Applewhite's followers to the group, and what factors were instrumental in securing their allegiance. Before embarking on such discussion, however, it may be useful to outline the history and key ideas of Heaven's Gate, particularly since the suicides occurred over twenty years ago, and younger readers may not recall the news reports of the time.

Initially the movement was headed by two leaders—Bonnie Lu Nettles (1927–1985) and Marshall Herff Applewhite (1931–1997). They first met in 1974, when Applewhite, a former music professor, visited a hospital where Nettles

was a nurse. Applewhite was the son of a Presbyterian minister, and gained a degree in philosophy in 1952; he then commenced, but did not complete, a theology course, going on to obtain a master's degree in music instead. Nettles was a Baptist by birth, but became more interested in Theosophical and New Age ideas, particularly astrology and channelling. Nettles and Applewhite's relationship was platonic rather than sexual (Applewhite appears to have had problems with his sexual identity), and the resulting friendship made them convinced that they had a mission that was connected with the fulfilment of biblical prophecy, and that they were possessed by "Next Level" (extraterrestrial) minds. They took their message on the road, driving through the USA in a hired car, which they failed to return. The Two, as they had come to be known, were arrested—Nettles had also made fraudulent purchases with someone else's credit card—and received prison sentences. Applewhite's six-month spell in custody gave him time to reflect and develop the theology that underlay what was to become Heaven's Gate. Having become reunited after Applewhite's release from custody, The Two began to organise a series of public meetings, which were advertised on posters which read:

UFO's [*sic*]

Why they are here.

Who they have come for.

When they will leave.

NOT a discussion of UFO sightings or phenomena

Telah Foundation 1977: Section 2: 5

The posters went on to explain that The Two, who would host meetings, came from the "next evolutionary level in a spacecraft," and would reveal how transition to this next level could be accomplished, and when it would take place. The Two adopted various names for their organisation; Human Individual Metamorphosis (HIM) was the name by which the press typically referred to them, and the leaders assumed the names of matching pairs, such as Guinea and Pig, Bo and Peep, and finally Ti and Do.

At its height the group had some 200 followers. However, Nettles and Applewhite decided to split the group into small cells, sending pairs of members out to various parts of the US, while their leaders withdrew from public. The pairs, consisting of two "check partners," were usually of opposite sexes, but sexual relationships were strictly prohibited, together with other extremely demanding requirements, including breaking all contact with friends and family, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and refraining from reading or watching media reports. The two leaders reappeared in February 1976, and word went

out that the partners were to reassemble near Laramie, Wyoming, at a remote camp. The members had been led to expect a “demonstration”—a sighting of a spacecraft—but instead the members were organised into small groups known as “star clusters.” At this point members were given new names, with the suffix “-ody,” and the practice of wearing uniforms resembling those of Christian monks commenced. These groups became itinerant, relying on well-wishers to provide accommodation, give donations, and offer employment, drawing on the members’ various skills. (The group was quite talented, and included computer programmers and technicians, a businessman, a mechanic, a gourmet chef, a nurse, and a nutritionist: it was certainly not a “religion of the dispossessed.”)

Two important occurrences took place in this period. The group appears to have acquired a large sum of money from a benefactor in 1978, possibly around \$300,000: the money may have come from a legacy, or it may have been from the external work which members offered. In 1985, Bonnie Nettles died: she had suffered from cancer for some time, and had to have an eye removed by way of treatment in 1982. Needless to say, this was a traumatic experience for the group, not only because of the loss of a leader, but because she had died without fulfilling the expectation leading them to the Next Level on the expected spacecraft.

The group gained public attention once again in 1992, when it resurfaced with the name of Total Overcomers Anonymous. At this juncture the leaders made a “final offer” through media advertising, advising the public that the earth’s civilisation was about to be “spaded under.” Some of the former members returned and were readmitted. The group subsequently took up residence in a large rented mansion in the suburb of Rancho Santa Fe on the outskirts of San Diego, where the suicides occurred.

One might have expected followers who were not present at the mass suicide to believe that they had experienced a lucky escape. On the contrary, Wayne Cooke (Jstody) and Chuck Humphreys (Rkkody), who had previously decided to leave the group, attempted copycat suicides in May 1997, leaving exit notes: Cooke explained that his intention had been to rejoin Ti and Do and the other classmates. Cooke succeeded in his suicide, and though Humphreys survived this attempt, he succeeded the next year. Another ex-member, Jimmy Simpson (Gbbody), who tried unsuccessfully to relocate the group, committed a similar, but not identical, suicide, using a gun rather than poison (Simpson 2012; Zeller 2014: 217). A number of other former members continue to speak favourably of Heaven’s Gate, continuing to accept its ideas, and expressing the hope that perhaps at some future time they may be able to graduate to the Level Above Human.

Inevitably, the anti-cult movement and the popular media were quick to offer theories of brainwashing, aided by the widespread portrayal of Applewhite with a hypnotic stare, facing a camera. Much has been written about brainwashing and mind control—explanations which have been firmly rejected by the majority of academic researchers (Barker 1984; Davis 2011; Goerman 2011). By contrast with the anti-cult proponents of such theories, academic writers have preferred explanations relating to charismatic leadership, commonly drawing on the ideas of Max Weber. Weber writes:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader'.

WEBER 1978: 241

I have highlighted elsewhere a number of problems about this definition of charisma (Chryssides 2012). As far as one can tell, there is no obvious inherent quality that Applewhite possessed by which he could be described as charismatic. He was not a particularly arresting speaker, a healer, or someone who worked tirelessly for the benefit of humankind. He plainly had other qualities, of course, such as perseverance, self-confidence, and some degree of persuasiveness, including the almost unique ability to persuade his 39 followers to die for the Heaven's Gate worldview.

However, one must be wary of resorting to a leader's charisma as an explanation for attracting followers. Either one ends up with an explanation which is at variance with the facts, or one which is merely tautologous. The first of these errors is committed by Margaret Singer, who compares charismatic "cult leaders" with the Pied Piper (Singer and Lalich 1995/2003:29): the Pied Piper led all of the Hamburg children away, whereas most of those who listened to Bonnie Nettles and Applewhite did not find their teachings appealing, and Heaven's Gate had a very high attrition rate in the course of its history. The second of these errors occurs when we equate charisma with a hypothetical characteristic like "personal magnetism": if the ability to attract followers is part of the definition of charisma, then we are simply explaining the leader's ability to attract a following in terms of the ability to attract followers—which of course is circular.

Regarding types of hegemonic figure, Weber makes an important contrast—well known to sociologists—between different types of authority, which he calls charismatic, traditional, and institutional. Most established religious

leaders work within an institution, and derive their authority from the organisation: they have been trained and ordained (or in some other way appointed) within the rules of its officialdom. By contrast, the majority of NRM leaders, although not all, do not have institutional authority, nor are they in a position of traditional authority, such as that which exists between parent and child. Such relationships may be established in the course of the movement's progression, but when starting out the NRM leader is self-appointed, and can only elicit compliance through his or her own persuasiveness, coupled with the cooperation of those who have decided to become followers.

As I have argued elsewhere (Chryssides 2012), it is important to acknowledge that there are different types of charismatic leader, and that in order to be "charismatic," one must satisfy the criteria that pertain to the specific hegemonic type. There are important differences between a prophet, a messiah, a shaman, a magus, a guru, and a dynamic human leader. Some of these terms—particularly guru and messiah—tend to be used loosely in the media and within the anti-cult movement, but they have fairly precise definitions, and any leader who claims to fall into one of these categories must satisfy its formal definition, at least to the satisfaction of his or her followers. Thus, someone claiming to be a prophet will claim an inaugural vision; a messiah must demonstrate divine appointment and an ability to save the world; a guru in the Indian tradition must claim a disciplic lineage; and a shaman will recognise her role through "possession sickness" and an ability to enter trance states.

It is therefore important to look at the status Nettles and Applewhite claimed for themselves. Initially they convinced themselves and their initial followers that they were the two witnesses described in the New Testament's Book of Revelation: "And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth ..." (Revelation 11:3). John the Revelator goes on to relate that, when they have finished prophesying, they will be attacked and killed by "the beast that comes up from the Abyss," but will be brought back to life after three and a half days (Revelation 11:7, 11).

The salient question is therefore what leaders who initially claimed to be "The Two" must do in order to persuade their listeners. The Bible does not state how the two witnesses are appointed, or what their precise status is: they are only mentioned in one single passage of Christian scripture.¹ Nettles and Applewhite's credentials lay in the future: they would attract opposition, be

1 Mainstream biblical commentators are more inclined to believe that the expression "two witnesses" denotes the testimony of the whole Church, since two witnesses were required under Jewish law (Deuteronomy 19:15). Alternatively, the two may be Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets. However, Applewhite does not appear to have been interested in the original meaning of the texts he cites. (See Chryssides 2011: 183–199)

killed, and be resurrected after three and a half days; they were aliens to the planet Earth, and would experience metamorphosis when their craft came to collect them. In the meantime their alien identity was reinforced by the way in which they spoke of humans as alien to themselves, together with their behaviour as sojourners, having no fixed abode, and mysteriously appearing and disappearing. Their refusal to speak of their physical past, and their explanation of how they acquired human bodies, served to reinforce their claims. (I shall discuss below how this belief was modified after Nettles' death.)

17.2 Charisma and Charismatisation

To what extent were Nettles and Applewhite "charismatic"? Rio DiAngelo, the surviving member who discovered the bodies, recounts his first meeting with Do:

As I looked up, across the campsite there were three figures approaching out from the darkness into the light of the fire. It was DO and His two helpers. DO was a tall man in his sixties with short white hair wearing a dark wool coat, dark pants and white Nike sneakers. He had a regal air of refinement and gentle calm about him and that was very noticeable ...

As soon as the others noticed that DO had arrived they put down whatever they were doing and gathered around the fire. This was all done with a quiet reverence and a high degree of respectful efficiency. Once we were all in place He began to speak calmly and sincerely. He welcomed all the new ones and talked about the task of going around the country and sharing the information in public meetings. He spoke in a way that made me feel like He would do this at all costs because it was a task given to Him by His Older Member TI (TEE) his Father. His connection with His Older Member meant everything to Him. After TI, the most important thing was His Students. He treated us like His children and we could feel His high level of unconditional love for all of us.

DIANGELO 2007:33-34

At first appearance, DiAngelo's account may suggest that he encountered an amazing leader who exuded charisma, and whose qualities he instantly recognised. However, DiAngelo had already been in the group for a month, and had heard the accolades of the other members. When DiAngelo's car breaks down on his first journey to the camp, a number of the monks arrive and get the car going, so his first impression is favourable disposition to the group, which he joins, and accepts their codified disciplinary rules. DiAngelo's account

confirms Barker's thesis that acceptance of charisma does not occur simply by a one-to-one encounter, but is a process of "charismatisation," whereby the acolyte is familiarised with the group's ideas and values, and their assessment of the leader (Barker 1993: 181–202).

Weber himself recognised that charisma is not simply an innate quality that the charismatic leader possesses, but is something that depends on the relationship between the leader and his or her followers. He wrote:

It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma ... This basis lies rather in the conception that it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority to recognize its genuineness and to act accordingly.

WEBER 1976: 242

Barker develops this idea further in her discussion of "charismatisation." The follower, she argues, learns how to endow with the leader with charisma, by adopting the values endowed to him or her by the group and, importantly, engaging in the various actions that are associated with venerating the leader. In the incident DiAngelo recalls, the campfire group drops whatever they are doing, to listen to Applewhite. Within a short time he learns the protocols associated with the leader, for example writing notes to confess offences and to seek help with problems. He must conform to the group's conventions: men had to be clean-shaven, and women were not allowed to wear jewellery; the adoption of the new personal names, and the use of the idiosyncratic vocabulary, were all part of belonging to the group and accepting Applewhite's charismatic leadership.

17.3 Extraneous Charismatising Factors: The Ambient Culture

Thus far I have focused on the two leaders, but a number of extraneous factors contributed significantly to the inception and subsequent history of Heaven's Gate. An obvious factor affecting the group's acceptance of Applewhite's leadership was the ambient culture of the 1970s. Many people, including DiAngelo, had become disenchanted with conventional Christianity, and were therefore seeking alternatives. DiAngelo reports looking for confirmation of conventional Christian teachings, and finding that Christian clergy stated that these were matters of faith, not proof (DiAngelo 2007: 6–8). With the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge, Heaven's Gate purported to offer empirical proof of its teachings: Nettles and Applewhite spoke of a "demonstration," in

which the transportation to the Next Evolutionary Level Above Human would receive empirical confirmation. The extraterrestrials with which the leaders claimed to have contact were clearly scientifically advanced: they could design and operate spaceships, in which they could transport the group to this Next Level. Belief in space travel and extraterrestrials was part of the *zeitgeist* of the 1970s. The first moon landing had taken place in 1969, and the previous year Erich von Däniken's bestselling book *Chariots of the Gods?* offered an alternative interpretation of Christian and other scriptures, claiming that extraterrestrials had already landed on earth many centuries previously, and had left evidence of their presence. The Roswell incident of 1947 had convinced many that a spaceship had crashed on to the planet Earth, and that there was a cover-up by the authorities; and in the same year airline pilot Kenneth Arnold had claimed to have seen objects that looked like saucers, flying at a seemingly impossible speed—a phenomenon of which there were numerous similar reports. In popular culture, space travel was exploited in films and television programmes, such as *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *E.T. the Extraterrestrial*, and many more. The phenomenon of UFOs—the term devised in 1952 in preference to “flying saucers”—became a popular subject of public curiosity.

Curiosity is a factor which, I believe, has aroused insufficient attention in the study of how NRMS arise. It is generally recognised in the secular advertising industry that arousing curiosity is more likely to cause consumers to buy certain products to test out their properties for themselves, rather than dogmatically presenting them with technical details. At the time of Nettles and Applewhite's mission, curiosity was rife: the Roswell incident and Arnold's “flying saucer” sightings were still in living memory; claims of alien abduction were beginning; space exploration, still in its infancy, coupled with the proliferation of science fiction, raised the question of whether the planet Earth was the only location of intelligent life, and belief in extraterrestrial visitation was rife. The failure of the scientific community to provide firm supportive evidence merely served to intensify popular curiosity. Nettles and Applewhite's initial publicity (“UFO's—Why they are here”) was a teaser: it did not itself answer the popular conundrum, but offered to do so, and the fifth headline—“NOT a discussion of UFO sightings or phenomena”—strongly implied that the leaders would give a definitive answer to this question.

17.4 Controlling Behaviour

Religious leaders tend to have disciples rather than students. Although Heaven's Gate members referred to their sessions with Applewhite as “the class,” one principal function was to secure uniformity of thought and behaviour, rather

than to encourage the kind of questioning and diversity that is encouraged in an academic environment. The leader is the one who is endowed with the privileged knowledge of what is true, and in the case of UFO-religions, he or she is the one who is in contact with the aliens, not the rank-and-file member. One controlling device is therefore to ensure sole access to the extraterrestrials—a technique also employed by Dorothy Martin (the leader of Sananda—pseud. Marian Keech) and by Raël. Applewhite would occasionally use expressions like “Correct me if I’m wrong” or “I might be mistaken,” but they seem either to have been rhetorical devices, rather than genuine requests to allow a member to assert superior knowledge, or else an indication that his extraterrestrial sources might provide him with new information. This implicit claim to have special contact with the Next Level served to reinforce his authority as one who had superior knowledge to the members of his “class” (Telah 1997: Section 4:124–5).

Numerous NRM leaders have sought to control behaviour as well as information. To prescribe followers’ diets, appearance, and sexual behaviour is to intrude on important and intimate parts of their identity, and hence serves to promote what David Bromley has called “maintenance of charismatic authority” (Bromley 2014: 112). Applewhite formulated a lengthy manual of discipline for the group, consisting of 17 steps, designed to make followers aware of their personal qualities, a list of three “major offenses,” and a total of 31 “lesser offenses.” Nettles and Applewhite also gave seemingly strange instructions to their followers, as ex-member Sawyer (2014) reports. While there were camping, one instruction was not talking: followers were required to communicate with each solely by gestures and nods of the head. This requirement was shortly relaxed, allowing followers to say yes and no, and to use keywords: for example, when cooking breakfast a member could say “eggs,” and if the check partner was otherwise occupied, he or she could say “water” or “kettle” (Sawyer 2014). Such instructions serve to reinforce the leader’s authoritative role, and become tests of allegiance for his following. Another practice was to require members to place sticks and branches in a continuous chain around the camp site’s perimeter—allegedly a method for keeping out “discarnates,” who might intend to enter and take over a member’s body. (The group had a firm belief in “Luciferians”—malevolent discarnates who were capable of entering human bodies.) At another point in the group’s trajectory Applewhite introduced “whirlwind”—a scheme whereby members changed partners on a daily basis: after morning ablution one partner would remain in the tent, while the other would silently pack his or her belongings and move off, as instructed, while a new partner moved in. Purportedly this provided a lesson in living with a variety of people, adjusting to new habits and accommodating to them, but compliance was also a form of deference to the leader’s authority.

17.5 Names and Naming

Another form of control within Heaven's Gate was the practice of members assuming new names. Every member of the group acquired a distinctive name, ending with the suffix “-ody.” Sometimes the first part was a contraction of the members given the name—thus June became Jwnody, and Alex Alxody—and sometimes the prefix was a virtue or some quality particularly associated with the character; for example Drrody was derived from “durable” and Tllody from “tall.” Different explanations are given for the suffix: some have said it was an affectionate diminutive, while others have claimed it to be a mutated compound of the two leaders' assumed names, Do and Ti (Zeller 2014: 139–140). In most cases the names were given by Do, but there were instances where members suggested their new names. There are no known instances of Do having rejected any such suggestion, but even if Do had not himself suggested the name, it was appropriated through his approval.

Although this practice of name acquisition has been noted by commentators, its relationship to charismatic leadership has not been adequately discussed. The phenomenon of gaining a spiritual name is not unique to Heaven's Gate, and it continues to be practised, for example, in present-day Buddhist organisations such as Triratna (formerly Friends of the Western Buddhist Order), and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The practice serves a number of functions. First, it is part of one's initiation, signifying the renunciation of one's former life, which is facilitated by abandoning one's previous secular name, and, second, it marks one's acceptance within the community in which such names have currency. The use of names is particularly important within the Jewish-Christian tradition: when the world's creation is completed, Adam is given the task of naming all the animals and birds, signifying his dominion over them (Genesis 1:28; 2:19–20). The one who gives the name has superiority over the one who receives it: in the Bible, both God and Jesus confer new names on key people: Abram and Sarai become Abraham and Sarah, Jacob becomes Israel, Simon becomes Peter, and Saul becomes Paul. John the Revelator writes enigmatically that the victor will be given “a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it” (Revelation 2:17). The name can function as a symbol of allegiance, or as symbolising one's new role: thus, Daniel and his friends receive names associated with Babylonian religion (Daniel 1:7); “Peter” relates to the Greek word *petros*, meaning “rock,” since Jesus appoints him as the rock on which his church will be built. Only God declines to give his name: he refuses to give it to Jacob (Genesis 32:29), and when Moses enquires what it is, he receives the enigmatic response, “I AM who I AM ... say to the Israelites ‘I AM has

sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14). One possible explanation of the taboo amongst Jews on pronouncing the divine name is that the use of the name signifies control: God controls humanity; humanity does not control God. In present-day spiritual groups, the giving of a spiritual name implies that the giver is the superior, and that the recipient is subservient, and those who receive spiritual names will often mention who gave them the name, implying that that person is their spiritual director. In Heaven's Gate, this function of the new name is reinforced by the diminutive suffixes, which is the antithesis of the practice in many religions of prefixing a name with titles that indicate superiority, such as “Venerable,” “Swami,” “Cardinal,” “Reverend,” or “Pastor.” Nettles and Applewhite's former practice of referring to themselves as Bo and Peep may sound silly, but it placed them in the role of the shepherd or pastor, implying that they had authority over their “sheep”—the rank-and-file members. The shepherd-sheep relationship is of course one that is commonly referred to within the Christian tradition. Ti and Do are the top two notes in sol-fa musical octave: Lalich suggests, that this meant that in order to reach the top note Do, one had to go through Ti (Lalich 2004a: 54). (This interpretation is somewhat puzzling, however, since Do was the intermediary through whom Ti was accessible after her death. There seems no obvious reason for apportioning the two musical notes.) Ti was known as “the Father,” and was typically referred to in the male gender, despite being a woman, reinforcing the notion that members of the Next Level did not have a determinate gender. Finally, the group's practice of referring to Nettles as the “Older Member” was a mark of authority, rather than strict accuracy. She was not the oldest member: Jacqueline Leonard (Prsody) was 72 at the time of the suicides, having joined in 1975.

17.6 “Loading the Language”

Related to the practice of adopting new names was the vocabulary adopted by the group for everyday items. Instead of referring to their residence as a house, it was known as a “craft.” The kitchen was renamed the “nutri-lab,” the bedrooms became “rest chambers,” the laundry room the “fiber lab,” and the office the “compu-lab.” Instead of “eating,” the word “consuming” was adopted, and breakfast, lunch, and dinner were referred to respectively as the first, second, and third “experiments”; recipes were called “formulas.” The psychologist R. J. Lifton, who pioneered the brainwashing hypothesis, so readily accepted by the anti-cult movement, referred to the phenomenon of adopting a distinctive vocabulary as “loading the language”—an expression taken up by Singer, who applied it to “cults.” (Lifton 1961/1989: 429–430; Singer and Lalich

1995/2003:70–81). Lifton identified this phenomenon as one of eight characteristics of “thought reform,” which he asserted was instrumental in securing conformity to the followers’ worldview. Associated with a distinctive vocabulary is what Lifton called the “thought-terminating cliché”—the use of platitudes that lack definite meaning, but which are readily used and absorbed, and which serve to align the group’s thinking, securing conformity, and allaying cognitive dissonance.

The extent to which “loading the language” served all of these functions within Heaven’s Gate might be debated. There is nothing necessarily or inherently sinister in having a distinctive vocabulary. Families often have their own idiosyncratic ways of speaking, universities have their own specialist vocabulary, as indeed do mainstream religions: someone unfamiliar with the Christian faith might well be puzzled by expressions such as “the blood of the lamb,” “the ransom sacrifice,” and “the Ancient of Days.” However, a distinctive common vocabulary can serve to bond its users together, and in the case of Heaven’s Gate it was no doubt a constant reminder of the group’s quasi-scientific mission of graduating to The Evolutionary Level Above Human.

17.7 Bounded Choice

Janja Lalich, who interviewed a number of Heaven’s Gate ex-members, suggests a theory to account for members’ allegiance, which she calls “bounded choice.” She believes it provides a superior model to account for belonging than the somewhat crude anti-cult “brainwashing” theory. She suggests that following a charismatic leader is somewhat more complex than being mesmerised by a charismatic figure; rather, membership involves four factors: (1) “charismatic commitment”; (2) a transcendent belief system; (3) systems of control; and (4) systems of influence (Lalich 2004b). Charismatic commitment involves a recognition and acceptance of the authority of a persuasive leader. The second characteristic is a distinctive worldview, featuring a cosmology and the followers’ place within it, together with an account of the human predicament and means of securing salvation from it. The leader’s worldview is a closed system, entertaining no counter-evidence. Following a charismatic leader is more than giving intellectual assent, and hence the third criterion of imposing a system of control is important for the leader to maintain allegiance. The system of control—the fourth factor—involved maintaining a group identity through its dress code, its common idiosyncratic vocabulary, and members’ deference to the leader. The system of check partners served to maintain discipline, and committing offences involved composing letters of confession to Applewhite.

In the course of the group's life, Applewhite expelled at least 19 members for infringements, thus maintaining consistency of compliance.

Lalich's bounded choice theory acknowledges the role of the movement's followers in maintaining what she calls "charismatic commitment" (14). The notions of closed systems of thought, and bounded choice are not new, however, and it may be suggested that any worldview is a closed system and those within it have restricted choices. Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *On Certainty*, drew attention to what he called "fundamentals," which acted as the basis of a "scaffolding of thoughts," and which could not be questioned without causing one's entire belief-system to collapse (Wittgenstein 1969: section 612). The sociologist Peter Winch, drawing on Wittgenstein's notion, considers the example of Azande witchcraft and oracle consultation, which, he argued, was a closed system, within which believers could organise their lives, and remain impervious to a competing scientific worldview. Likewise, those of us who prefer to rely on Western science are unlikely to be swayed by information and advice obtained through Azande oracles (Winch 1964:12). It is a common characteristic of new religious movements that they seem initially implausible, but on inspection reveal a consistent—although evolving, in the case of Heaven's Gate—system of thought. Everyone's choice is bounded: what we can realistically choose is determined by our physical characteristics, our gender, upbringing and education, our financial situation, and many others, and the fundamental presuppositions of our systems of thought are non-negotiable. If Lalich is suggesting that "bounded choice" is a distinctive feature of NRMs, then this is far from the case. However, if she is drawing attention to the fact that some NRMs are more restricting than others, then we might agree. Belonging to Heaven's Gate imposed serious restrictions on its members, and leaving a closed community presents problems about resuming conventional life—finding somewhere to live, endeavouring to reunite with family and former friends, and attempting to secure employment. Such considerations no doubt contributed to members remaining within the group.

However, leaving was not impossible. DiAngelo recounts telling Applewhite of his decision to depart. Applewhite asked him to consider his intention overnight and, when he remained determined, he and the group embraced him, offered him some money, and allowed him to depart on amicable terms (DiAngelo 2007: 103–104). Another student, Sekody, on discovering that Applewhite's plan involved suicide, found this too much to take. DiAngelo recounts the incident:

There was one student that didn't like the idea. His name was SEKODY (Seeker). He was a preacher's son. In fact, he voiced his opinion right

there, before we wrote the note. He said, “Are you talking about suicide? If so, look, I’ve had no problem with everything so far, in fact it has been the most extraordinary time of my life, and you (DO) are obviously the second coming, but suicide is something that I’m not interested in at all.” He went to pack his bag and left that night.

DIANGELO 2007: 48

17.8 Heaven’s Gate and the Bible

A further contributory factor contributing to Heaven’s Gate’s trajectory, and which deserves comment, is Applewhite’s idiosyncratic biblical exegesis. Despite the fact that UFO religions purport to be scientific, both Heaven’s Gate and the Raelian Movement are surprisingly biblical in character. As previously mentioned, Erich von Däniken’s *Chariots of the Gods?* was an attempt to interpret the Bible in terms of extraterrestrial contact. While Zeller (2010) argues that Applewhite provided an interpretation of the Bible through an extraterrestrial lens, it should not be inferred that his was a legitimate interpretation of the Bible. Other forms of special hermeneutic, such as feminist and LGBTQ, address specific sectors of humanity who are typically excluded or neglected, and their exponents provide detailed explanations of scripture and—in the case of LGBTQ scholars an entire commentary on the Jewish-Christian Bible (Guest et al. 2007). Beings from other planets scarcely fall into the category of neglected Bible readers, and Applewhite’s interpretation of scripture is scant and superficial at best. His exegesis involves interpreting a small selection of scriptural writings, principally parts of the Book of Revelation, selections from the Gospels, and very limited allusions to Paul. Unlike von Däniken, there are few references to the Old Testament. Certainly no self-respecting biblical scholar would accept this interpretation of scripture as a legitimate piece of biblical exegesis. One of Applewhite’s students, Glnody, wrote, “If you really knew the Bible, you would recognise Ti and Do for who they are” (Telah Foundation 1997: Appendix A-6), but this is really a declaration of ignorance rather than superior knowledge. In the collection of Statements by Students, in which this assertion is located, few students even cite Christian scripture, some misquote it, and the cited passages are confined mainly to the Gospels. If they really had known their Bibles, they would have been better placed to challenge Applewhite’s exegesis.

The class’s acceptance of Applewhite’s hermeneutics reflects a wider lack of biblical literacy in Western culture. Despite the fact that 82% of Americans self-identify as Christian, knowledge of the Bible is remarkably low. Recent

surveys have indicated that only 45% adults can name the four Gospels; 60% of Americans are unable to name five of the Ten Commandments; 82% believe that “God helps those who help themselves” is a biblical verse; only 60% of Americans knew that God instructed Abraham to sacrifice Isaac; and a survey of graduating high school students revealed that 50% believe that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife (See, e.g. Mohler 2017). If familiarity with such very elementary points of biblical knowledge is lacking, it is hardly surprising that the members of Heaven’s Gate were ill-equipped to engage in biblical hermeneutics. It was therefore all too easy for Applewhite to persuade his class that he offered a legitimate and definitive interpretation of the Bible.

There were little, if any, opportunities for the class to discover more mainstream interpretations of the Bible. In the unlikely event of anyone wanting to explore alternatives, opportunities were limited. Contacts with the outside world were superficial and sporadic, for example with clients for whom they offered work, medics when needed, and store check-out staff, and in the Rancho Santo Fe mansion, only designated members were permitted to leave the premises for authorised purposes. Indeed, one element that the so-called “suicide cults” had in common was isolation—Jonestown, Waco, and the various locations of the Order of the Solar Temple, were all in fairly remote locations, as was Kanungu in Uganda, where over 1000 members of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God lost their lives in the year 2000. Some of the Heaven’s Gate members spent 22 years in the group, with minimal contact with wider society, thus becoming saturated with Applewhite’s teachings, having little recourse to any alternative, more conventional worldview.

17.9 Cognitive Dissonance

My discussion has focused on factors within the group, but external events affect followers and leaders alike, and one important function of a charismatic leader is the ability to cope with disconfirmation. This phenomenon, known to sociologists as cognitive dissonance, occurs when *prima facie* conflicting evidence militates against the group’s worldview (Festinger et al. 1956: 28–32). Initially, Nettles and Applewhite proclaimed themselves to be the two witnesses of Revelation and that, as the Bible mentioned, they would encounter opposition which would result in their death, after which their opponents would witness their translation to heaven—the Next Level Above Human. Nettles’ death necessitated rethinking: she was not killed by opponents, but died of natural causes; she did not obtain any bodily resurrection; and there was no obvious empirical confirmation that she had been translated to the Next Level.

Accordingly, Applewhite modified his movement's theology, and the teaching emerged that Nettles had indeed gone to the Next Level, but remained reachable telepathically to Applewhite in her role as "the Father." (This attribution of the male gender to Nettles was not to be taken literally, because Next Level bodies were sexless.)

As Zeller argues, the movement appears to have become more dualistic at this point: dualistic not only in the sense of regarding the self as a soul inhabiting a bodily vehicle, which would be discarded as soon as the transition came about, but also dualistic in the sense of perceiving the Earth as evil, in contrast with the Next Level, to which he would lead his followers. A number of extraterrestrials had left their home planet, and were in the process of "tagging" selected individuals for transition to this Next Level. (As Zeller suggests, the notion of "tagging" may have been associated with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, whereby a certain predetermined "elect" had been chosen by God for eternal salvation.) Nettles and Applewhite themselves were not ordinary human beings, but were extraterrestrials inhabiting human bodies as vehicles. Applewhite drew on biblical imagery, where Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches to describe his relationship with his disciples: in order to participate in the transition to the Next Level, followers had to be "grafted on" to the leaders. (The metaphor of grafting is in fact Paul's—Romans 11:17–24.) Jesus had lived and died 2000 years ago in order to collect and engraft his chosen ones, and such opportunities are afforded to humanity every two millennia. Applewhite now claimed to be the returning Jesus, who had the task of drawing together the tagged individuals who would accompany him to the Next Level. The earth, together with its inhabitants, was at an end and, as Applewhite repeatedly said, was about to be "spaded under"; hence it was important to take the opportunity to escape.

The final suicides can also be seen as Applewhite's means of resolving cognitive dissonance. In 1995, the group made a final attempt to propagate its worldview: it promoted its ideas on UseNet, an Internet bulletin board (the World Wide Web was then in its infancy) in the hopes of reaching millions. In one such post Applewhite stated that he was about to return to his Father's Kingdom, and that his followers might expect violent confrontation with civil authorities, causing the "laying down of our bodies." Nettles' death had already run counter to the belief that bodily resurrection and transformation were prerequisites for entering the Next Level: Nettles had died, leaving her body behind; yet it was firmly believed that she had graduated as the Older Member to that new level. The belief that the body was not the seat of one's identity, but merely—as Applewhite put it—the "vehicle" in which one was temporarily located, entailed that one's body should be left behind in order to make the

transition. There was also the issue of Applewhite's own physical health. His autopsy revealed that he had "constrictive coronary arteriosclerosis"—clogged arteries, in lay terms—which might have induced a fatal heart attack at any time. (He had evidently told some of his followers that he was dying of liver cancer, although this was not confirmed by the autopsy.) (*Washington Post* 1997).

Although Heaven's Gate had survived the death of one of The Two, it is difficult to see how the group would have fared in the absence of both leaders, if Applewhite were to have died before any final "demonstration." One important issue relating to charismatic leadership is how one makes the transition from founder-leader to successor. There was no obvious successor to Applewhite: in many religious movements the leader has had a right-hand man or woman who has assumed responsibility for many important roles, and is ready to step into the leader's shoes, but the Heaven's Gate group gave the impression of parity among members. All of them sat in front of Do, imbibing his teachings, and none of them had any teaching role in addition to the leader. And, if Do had died in some natural way, what would any successor have taught? The group's theology would have needed massive reappraisal, and hence succession would have involved rather more than accepting a successor with hegemonic skills. In any case, Applewhite had made no suggestions about succession, and his teachings clearly implied a belief in a collective denouement for the group. The arrival of the Hale Bopp comet provided the cue for the group's final demise. The speculation that there was a second object behind it, which they believed to be a spaceship, offered the hope that transition to the Next Level was possible. Suicide would enable the members' souls to leave their bodily vehicles, and to make the transition to the craft, where they could acquire their new Next Level bodies.

Anyone watching Do's Final Exit Tape² cannot fail to observe the sheer calm and apparent rationality in which Applewhite explains what the group is about to do. He has convinced the group that they are about to make the transition to the Next Level, and he invites them calmly to participate in making the video in which each member provides a final message to those who are left behind. Put simply, Applewhite had persuaded his followers that his teachings were true. The timing of the suicides is also significant. The date of Jesus' birth is uncertain, but many historians would place it at around 4 BCE; hence the year 1997, in which the suicides occurred, would be almost exactly 2000 years after, and immediately before Good Friday, which fell on 28 March that year.

2 Accessible online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdGXDQ_8bSA, accessed 26/04/2019.

17.10 Degrees of Charisma?

Discussion of new religions tends to assume that the founder-leader is in some sense charismatic, and that his or her ability to attract followers is successful. As I have argued, an NRM's trajectory is only partly determined by the leader's personal qualities, and numerous other factors are as important, if not more so, in securing a following. Whether or not Applewhite was charismatic is very much in the eye of the beholder, but his degree of success can be measured. While it is certainly remarkable that a leader could persuade 39 members to forfeit their lives, Heaven's Gate was numerically very modest in comparison with other UFO-religions. The Raelian Movement, which was established at the same time as what became Heaven's Gate, now boasts some 99,000 supporters. The older UFO group Unarius has possibly slightly less than 1000 (although at least one estimate puts them at 500,000); more modestly, the Aetherius Society has an estimated 650 members, and the Order of the Solar Temple has been variously estimated to have had between 140 and 500 members in 1998—even after its notorious collective deaths. By comparison, Heaven's Gate's following was small. This was no doubt due to several factors. Commitment to Heaven's Gate was an all-or-nothing matter: there was no room for the part-time or home member, or for families, and making oneself available to follow Nettles and Applewhite was not easy, and was only possible for a small minority of people. Heaven's Gate was a world-renouncing religion, and celibacy and a desire to exit the world are no doubt less appealing than the Raelians' flamboyant exuberance. While we might attribute charismatic leadership to Applewhite, we should be cautious about suggesting that he was a successful religious leader. Despite the much-quoted anti-cult mantra that "anyone is vulnerable," it should be remembered that the vast majority of Applewhite's hearers did not become his disciples.

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A Retrospective on the Unarius Academy of Science

Diana Tumminia

18.1 Introduction

This chapter looks back on my Unarius research, which I compiled into *When Prophecy Never Fails* (Tumminia 2005). The Unarius Academy of Science located in El Cajon, California outside of San Diego can be called a UFO religion. It can also be classified a contactee group or even a flying-saucer cult for brevity sake. A contactee group communicates with extraterrestrials, and it uses associated symbols in its supernaturalism. The flying-saucer cult categorisation harkens to Unarius' use of the flying saucer (they call them spaceships) as an emblem, its nascent status as a religion, and its historic cohesive grouping around a charismatic leader. In its heyday (1972–1989), channeller Ruth Norman (1900–1993) aka Uriel the Archangel and her 'subchannels' received hundreds of messages from Space Brothers and other cosmic dignitaries as they wove elaborate mythologies and prophecies of intergalactic salvation. Unarius claimed that in 2001 a large contingent of Space Brothers would land their ships ushering in an era of universal peace, prosperity, and advanced scientific enlightenment. As expected by many outsiders, physically verifiable spaceships did not arrive; nonetheless, most members continued to believe in the group.

I began my research with my colleague, the late R. George Kirkpatrick, at San Diego State University (Kirkpatrick and Tumminia 1989). We plowed through their literature and attended some public events. We found Unarius to be inscrutable. Ruth Norman (Uriel) would occasionally make local news because she did generate good public interest stories wherever she popped up fully costumed with tiara, gown, sceptre, and with pronouncements about spaceship landings. Kirkpatrick thought Unarius was a mass delusion, and that their prophecy somewhat resembled that of the cargo cults of Melanesia and New Guinea. In 1989, he initiated a standard approach by coaxing the centre's director, Charles Spiegel (Antares), to allow twenty members in a night class to take a survey focused on demographics (Kirkpatrick and Tumminia 1989; Tumminia 2005). We learned the group tended to be white, to have lower-middle class/working class occupations and incomes, and to be largely apolitical. Those who answered the survey had been interested in non-conventional

spirituality (for example, Theosophy, Swedenborgism), para-psychology, and pseudo-scientific pursuits. The median age was forty. Women slightly outnumbered men. In this non-random sample 85% were single. From observational research, we learned that there were forty to sixty members significantly involved at any one time. They sustained a core group of about twenty that they called the nucleus. With hundreds of people on their mailing list, they operated a mail-order venture selling literature and videotapes.

Acutely aware of *When Prophecy Fails* (Festinger et. al. 1956), we perceived Unarius to be a modern example of Festinger et al.'s Seekers, although we were also aware of differences. The leader of the Seekers, Marian Keech (real name Dorothy Martin), predicted a doomsday flood with information sent from Planet Clarion. In contrast, Uriel prophesied that the Interplanetary Confederation of spaceships would land instituting a new age of scientific and spiritual enlightenment. Unarius added another twist. Members considered it a healing group. As we would discover by listening to testimonies and by reading their literature (Norman 1985a), followers came to Unarius to be healed of past-life and present-day problems often described as karma (for instance, self-reported mental/emotional problems, drug use, illness, or alcoholism).

Although I still collaborated with Kirkpatrick from time to time, I decided to delve much deeper into the intricacies of Unarius on my own. To my advantage, Unarius did not scatter as did the Seekers, although it did lose members at various points due to disputes and because of its longevity (Tumminia 1998; 2005). In contrast to the relatively short-term project of Festinger et al., my research would eventually consider Unarius's history (Norman 1985b, 1985c) beginning in the mid-1950s and my observations from 1989 until 2005, thus providing more information about the processes within such a group.

Other factors looked noteworthy. Unarius exhibited an elaborate mythology full of dozens upon dozens of characters, who represented leaders and members.¹ Unarius touted healing through psychodramas and group sessions in which people recalled their past lives. Furthermore, Unarius suffered repeated failed prophecies with ultimate aplomb (as did Marian Keech's followers if one reads closely enough) (Norman 1974; Tumminia 1998). In Unarius' case, the prophet repeatedly sought the public eye as in one instance in 1976 when she made a \$4,000 bet with Ladbrokes, a British bookmaker, about a spaceship landing that never materialized (Tumminia 1998). That was Unarius, a source of prophecy, healing, myth, and lots of drama. Festinger et al. (1956) focused on cognitive dissonance. I could see a lot more going on. I could see

1 My book, *When Prophecy Never Fails* (Tumminia 2005), contains a detailed account of Unarius myths.

the process by which Unarius members were constructing and enacting belief. I saw in its workings the blueprints of maintaining any belief, such as the suspension of disbelief and the embodiment of an irrefutable reality. I took the initiative of arranging interviews and of doing participant observation.

18.2 Early History and Sacred Narrative

Unarius began with Ernest Norman (1904–1971) who gave psychic readings (Tumminia 2005). When he did a reading for Ruth, they instantly fell in love on February 14, 1954. Thus, the Unarius Mission began. Ernest Norman had a spiritualist background which spilled over into received messages from extra-terrestrial intelligences, as well as many individuals who resided beyond the earthly plane such as George Adamski or Niels Bohr to name two. Called the Moderator, Ernest said he was a reincarnation of Jesus of Nazareth among other notables. He also occupies a place in the Spiritual Hierarchy as Archangel Raphael (for Radiant Absolute Pure Healing Infinite Eternal Light).

Ernest channelled the 'Science' from Higher Intelligence, eventually condensing it down into his magnum opus, *The Infinite Concept of Cosmic Creation* (1970), a collection of lessons in interdimensional physics. Interdimensional physics postulates that all is energy, including human beings and the entire universe. It presupposes a fourth-dimensional reality available for contact and study. Everything can be understood through this Science. Particularized energies travel in oscillating frequencies of wave forms. Every cell in the human brain is a *television receiver* that processes these frequencies into interpretable information based on the spiritual advancement of the soul. Humans have psychic anatomies that contain frequency harmonics with past lives. All disease and disorder can trace their origins to negative acts in past lives. Although he eschewed religion, he gave explanations of reincarnation, disincarnate entities, thought-form obsessions, and interplanetary travel using the astral body. He also expounded on the existence of spiritual planets and higher worlds.

Ernest and Ruth did psychic readings and published the works that he channelled, for example, *The Voice of Venus* (1956). Ernest kept a modest following by giving talks on the Science. People sought out his help to solve personal problems through readings and advice. Followers called themselves students of the Science. Students in turn professed the effectiveness of the Science through spoken and written testimonials.

If we can pause to consider the reality-construction process, here we can discern the taken-for-granted enactments that make the Space Brothers factual to students. The Space Brothers speak albeit through the mouth of a physical

person. This stands not as a contradiction. This is science, the Science. These transmissions as they are called come from high-frequency energy transfers from the higher worlds. This remains an indisputable fact evidenced by the vast amount of information that Unarius has accumulated in written form (Tumminia 2005). "Here it is! The knowledge of the universe right at our fingertips," Charles Spiegel (Antares) used to say to me pointing to all the books. "If only you would open your mind." This taken-for-granted reality codified into unquestionable facts, I call their sacred narrative. They call it 'living the Science'. The sacred narrative is the lifeblood that must never stand still. It flows through literature, every-day speech, reenactments, formal testimonials, and group psychodramas. This narrative presupposes the validity of Unarius myths and its brand of scientific facts. It explains what is real and what is false experience. It functions as the collective understanding that structures interpersonal interaction.

When Ernest died in 1971, Ruth came into her own creativity. She channelled the Higher Intelligence of Ioshanna (1972–1979), and then after 1980 she took on the spiritual mantle of Archangel Uriel, who lives as part of the Spiritual Hierarchy. Still she started out small only to expand her persona into a glittering demi-god with the help of a collectively constructed supernatural universe. She attracted help in form of articulate students who would keep the sacred narrative alive and growing through their contributions. After 1971, two specifically, Charles Spiegel (Antares) and then Thomas Miller (Cosmon), helped her enlarge her persona into the local space goddess (Kirkpatrick and Tumminia 1992). Ruth and her subchannels started to receive an increasing number of channelled messages from outer space and Higher Intelligence. The transcriptions of these 'transmissions' were published in the Unarius book series, *Tesla Speaks*, of which there are thirteen volumes. The seventh volume, entitled *Countdown!!! To the Space Fleet Landing* (Norman 1974), contains a revelation from outer space dated March 17, 1974. In it, Uriel learns that a "spacefleet landing shall be instituted mainly for purposes to inform the earth people of this great Intergalactic Confederation Project now being formulated" (Norman 1974: 177).² Then Ruth would come up with another exact date, September 27, 1975. The great starships would touch down atop a landing site on a Unarius purchased lot in the mountains.

Consider the addition of Charles Spiegel (Antares) and Thomas Miller (Cosmon) as subchannellers. They rose in status because they could channel transmissions from beyond in conjunction with Ruth Norman. Through my study, I observed that those students who could receive transmissions and

2 There are two spellings of space fleet in Unarius books: space fleet and spacefleet.

those who produced messages or stories that fit the sacred narrative were considered 'inspired'. One who received inspired knowledge was to be respected. Along with maintaining the group's reality, these stories added more 'facts' to be remembered and to be written down. In their worldview, the credibility of this information stood as indisputable knowledge. According to group logic, it presented no contradictions because the scientific knowledge came from Higher Intelligence.

The 1975 prediction did not manifest although Unarius made elaborate preparations (Tumminia 1998, 2005). Uriel had expected to leave with the Space Brothers, but that was not to be. Miller (Cosmon) explained the disconfirmation in unassailable Unarius logic: it was karma. Ruth was reliving a past life as Isis, goddess queen of Egypt. The Space Brothers had come for her, but a mob of people now members of Unarius had murdered her before she could board the spaceship. The reliving explanation provided a way to work out the disappointment of disconfirmation. It spoke to a known fact that man was a 'television receiver', a tenet of the Science. Students and leader began receiving 'pictures' from their past lives, and then they would have to talk out the experiences. Later they would reenact them in psychodramas. Unarius had alerted *The National Enquirer* before the event, but media were not called in for the aftermath (Norman 1985b). Rather the group chose to come together in past-life therapy classes and personal interaction, discussing their feelings within the interpretive context of 'having a reliving' of the Isis-Osiris Cycle (the 'oscillating energies' coming from the time when Ruth had incarnated as Isis and Ernest had incarnated as the god pharaoh Osiris). Although students struggled with their new revelations, little free time remained because the Unarius Mission had to proceed. They went on to other projects (Unarius Students and Norman 1976).

Here we can see their myth-making process. Since the earliest psychic readings, Unarius accumulated mythic backstories about the hidden reality of present-day events, such as Ernest having been Osiris and Ruth having been Isis. These far-reaching myths (Tumminia 2005) provided the logical explanation for any event, including prophetic disconfirmation, physical or mental problems, and interactions between students and leader. Such was their experience of their reality. To students, this was real science that persisted despite the criticisms of outsiders. Outsiders floundered in benighted thinking and errors of understanding Unarius. As I explained in the article, "How Prophecy Never Fails":

Searching the dark skies, they continued to watch for the coming of their radiant 'Vehicles of Light.' Despite disconfirmation, Uriel had become a

small-time celebrity. The influx of fresh mythopoeic material had stimulated homemade movies and past-life therapy sessions. In sum, the failed prophecy did little to damage Unarius' credibility with most of its students. This segment of Unarius history illustrates how adaptive leaders and members were in a series of disconfirmation events. They set back dates. They added to their own mythology. They could continue to meet and comfort each with their testimonials about overcoming doubt. At the core of all this activity was the presupposed perfection of the flying saucers and the imperfection of the members. All activity emerged from the cooperative interpretive procedures and practices which reconstituted the unfalsifiable reality of the Space Brothers.

TUMMINIA 1998: 164

18.3 Charismatic History and Sacred Narrative

By the 1980s, Unarius owned a building acquired in the mid-1970s. Ruth received two dispensations of higher consciousness: Uriel the Archangel, and the Cosmic Generator. Past-life therapy classes attracted more students, and Unarius immortalized its activities by filming psychodramas of the many past lives of Ruth Norman and her students. Art bloomed at the centre with art-therapy classes in which students glorified mostly Uriel and depicted spiritual realms of existence, as well as other mythic stories. One artistic type, Stephan Yanconski (Arieson), caused many a stir at the Centre. In 1983, he and some students painted an impressive mural on the parking lot wall called *Dawns the Golden Age of Aquarius*. He replaced Thomas Miller (Cosmon) as Uriel's favourite during a quarrel involving the filming of the story of Annabelle Lee, one of Uriel's past lives. Miller openly disagreed with Uriel, and so he had to leave the group.

Yanconski (Arieson) led a problematic spiritual career. He later became an apostate who Uriel denounced openly and used as an example of a 'bad student'. As a favourite student, he created a large volume of pastel drawings that were made into a beautiful book about Uriel's past lives (Arieson 1987). He stood by Uriel's side. He received significant parts in filmed psychodramas. In many ways, he contributed to the sacred narrative. Yanconski considered Uriel a great healer although he fell back into alcoholism and homosexuality from which he asked to be cured (Tumminia 2005). He left after admitting his perceived failings in class one night. Only to return in 1989 causing rounds of psychic shock when other students remembered their past lives with him and how he had undermined Uriel's cosmic mission. A little bit later, he left for good.

With Yanconski out of the picture, Charles Spiegel played an even more important part as Uriel's second-in-command. He had been with her from before her husband's death. Although he functioned as manager of the most important operations in the group, he was still from time to time relegated to third in the status hierarchy behind Miller and in turn Yanconski, both of whom eventually left the group. In 1984, Uriel declared that Spiegel had overcome his past life as Satan (and every other arch villain in the mythology, like Tyrantus of the Orion Empire within the namesake constellation in outer space). He had evolved into an advanced spiritual being worthy of the grace that had been extended to him. She raised his status as she gave him even more responsibility. This is when he had earned the spiritual name, Antares.

In most young cults, charismatic power is absolute even if leaders delegate many responsibilities. Unarius had two basic statuses: leader and student. Higher status amongst students depended upon charismatic favouritism, which was dispensed in a capricious manner. It could also be earned through meritorious service. One source of status stemmed from contributions to the myth-making via inspired writings, channeling, art, and proficient articulations of the sacred narrative. Channeling ability played a part as we see from the rise of Charles Spiegel (Antares) and Thomas Miller (Cosmon). Channeling ability provided a steady avenue for advancement. Nevertheless, one's ultimate place in the group depended upon one's relationship with Uriel.

18.4 The Late 1980s and Early 1990s

By 1986, Kirkpatrick and I were aware of Unarius, and we started to study it and to meet students and ex-students (Tumminia and Kirkpatrick 1995). Our first task was to read the mountains of literature they gave us. We could only fathom the simplest documents which meant that I had to take on the daunting task of understanding what they were writing about. A full text of one of these pamphlets is in the *Encyclopedic Sourcebook of UFO Religions* (Lewis 2003: 429–61). By becoming marginally competent in the content of their sacred narrative, I eventually could interact without bewilderment. This competence allowed me to understand why they kept 'seeing the past' in me and naming me as a hidden spy from another planet. Literature research, interviews, participation observation, keeping track of students and their biographies became my research tasks. By 1989, I engulfed myself in participant observation.

In the 1980s Unarius flourished. Its impetus slowed by 1989 as Ruth's body aged and she became more disabled. Even so, students produced steady classes

and events. The centre would fill to capacity on major occasions and celebrations. By this time, it maintained an active committed core of longtime student volunteers. They had a few satellite groups in other cities, and they also provided a weekly show on about a dozen cable-access stations in different cities. Routinely in the daytime, the centre looked like a partially deserted library with a couple of readers studying at a table. Lots of work went on in the back offices where mailings and editing for publications were done. Sewing projects emerged here and there for costumes, for psychodramas, or curtains for a studio. Occasionally, an art-therapy session blossomed. There was always something to do to assist the Mission.

Classes were one way to evoke the sacred narrative. Unarius recorded sessions. The night classes tackled lessons in the Science along with readings from inspired writings of students. Members sometimes passively and sometimes plaintively explained their visions of past lives. They went through 'cycles' of remembrance about specific clusters of collective past lives, for example, Atlantis, Lemuria, or the Orion Empire to name a few. Then and again, they reacted to current events as the Space Shuttle disaster or to television shows like *Star Trek* and movies like *Star Wars* or *Coma*. Uriel's health problems provoked confessions of harm done to her on other planets. On one occasion when Uriel was taken to the emergency room, the students discussed their 'guilt' in causing her suffering as it was all connected to their collective past lives. Now and again, they gathered for group projects, such as the making of bejeweled star-ship pins. Events might centre upon Uriel's visits to the class, which waned after 1989. Students knew then that she viewed videotaped classes and testimonials at her home. She sent messages about what she saw back to the centre. When Uriel became bedridden, messages and proclamations slowly diminished.

Unarius held Interplanetary Confederation Day, now called the Conclave of Light, celebrations every October, which meant the display of the Space Cadillac with a flying saucer on the roof, a student march with placards of the planets in the Confederation, a release of peace doves, songs, speeches, and a trip to the landing zone on their land in the foothills. When the festivities went indoors, the centre's lights were lowered. People sat quietly in chairs to hear a transmission from the Space Brothers. Once Antares relayed messages from the Planet Alta. Channelled messages were recorded and videotaped then distributed in pamphlet form.

Unarius had hit its stride, and it functioned as a stable organisation until trouble popped up. In my estimation, Uriel's absence took a toll on the group. Some students began to resent Antares. One day Antares, who had taken over all decision making, asked students to write testimonials about their lives in the Science. They were each scheduled to be filmed speaking their testimonials on

camera. This was a normal request, but a few highly regarded students broke ranks refusing to do it. They left the group saying that there should be more emphasis on Ernest Norman and less emphasis on the prophecy and Uriel. Some viewed Antares as the architect of Uriel's eclipse of Ernest Norman. Others were of the mind that Antares unrightfully exercised his authority. Some resented that he bossed them around, which they knew to reflect his past lives as a satanic villain and their karma with him. This was a time of tension for students. Antares had no sparkle in his personality to make up for the loss of key students or the spread of discontent that developed.

Antares gave up his position in 1992 to care for Uriel at home. Four students, Lianne, Rafael, Joseph, and Michael had already united to do some channeling calling themselves the Polarity of Four. Two of the polarity, Lianne and Rafael, became co-directors of the centre. Then Rafael resigned to pursue his own interests outside the group. At that time Lianne looked like she would be in the line of succession. She had the most attractive personality. Joseph, Lianne's domestic partner, came forward to be co-director, but subsequently Lianne and Joseph gave up their posts to live a life outside Unarius. These multiple departures amounted to spiritual desertion, even so other students tried to wish them well. Uriel's presence and hence her charismatic authority had been pulled back. The void left by her total absence felt palatable, an authority vacuum developed. This transition meant that students of lesser status would have to compensate for all these losses, but they were slow to rise to the occasion.

18.5 Post-Charismatic Phase

Ruth Norman died in 1993. Antares scattered her ashes at sea in a non-public ceremony. She had said she would be alive for the Space Brothers landing in 2001. That was not to be. Most of her students prepared themselves given their knowledge about her health. There was no extensive mourning although Antares did give each student a piece of her jewellery, which prompted a flood of tearful memories and many a declaration of love. Despite the loss, the Unarius Mission forged on.

When a charismatic leader dies, things cannot remain the same. This post-charismatic phase might be followed by stabilisation through new and tamer points of authority (Tumminia 2005). Antares became the head of Unarius. Those who opposed him left. Those who thought him annoying found ways to cope—until he left the planet. With his unexpected death in 1999, some students met the challenge of leadership. Unarius had had a titular board of

directors that would henceforward take care of all aspects of running the centre including managing the money and properties, as well as organizing classes, official policy, public statements, and events. The board along with others received messages from the departed Antares who told them to carry on. They had to prepare for the 2001 landing, and besides a ship from Planet Myton would arrive soon. Antares sent his blessings from the higher worlds where he now resided as a Space Brother. Unarius settled into a routine of classes and annual events as it focused on the arrival the millennial space fleet. A new cohort of less enigmatic leaders and new subchannellers found their callings. Some of that cohort still run the centre today.

18.6 Space Fleet Landing 2001

The year 2001 finally arrived. Students appeared calm in the face of the unlikely event that thirty-three spaceships would land and create their long-awaited utopia. There remained a general agreement that negative thoughts and doubts might affect the Space Brothers. Each day seemed routine except for the occasional statement that someone could feel the presence of the ships. Even though no one could see them yet, many knew they were out there. The time passed uneventfully until the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center. This tragedy sparked an explanation of why the Space Brothers had not touched down yet. Unarius' website posted that this development had been foretold; negative energies would be thrown up as the Space Brothers neared. In a handout, Unarius stated that high-frequency energy was being sent by the beings of Light to heal the negativity that had erupted. Largely because earth people were so destructive and warlike, the ships would not be landing until the negativity had cleared. The year had not ended yet, but almost no one expected the ships to arrive.

Failed prophecies are more the case than not. Within their sacred narrative, the students understood the disconfirmation through their common sense. This was not a false prophecy but rather a delay in the arrival. The cause of the delay as some reasoned stemmed the wars of Orion Empire thousands of years ago, a reference to their collective past lives. An old film about these wars shows the World Trade Center for a few seconds in some stock footage. In Unarius logic, this showed the truth about 9/11 and its connection to every student. That was proof positive, a phrase I heard often in Unarius. Their ancient negativity had thwarted the appearance of the Vehicles of Light. Outsiders might call this a weak rationalisation. Within Unarius, this was a perfect and authentic reflexive account derived from their cognitive universe.

18.7 Beyond 2001

Unarius, one of the oldest contactee groups, has endured into the twenty-first century despite its failed prophecies. It survived its unbridled charismatic period, and now it appears to be a stable working group. The Unarius Mission remains one of scientific healing and knowledge. The group has settled into a quiet routine of teaching the Science and of receiving transmissions from the Space Brothers. It is still located in the same building in El Cajon where it gives classes and psychodrama workshops. It still celebrates annually the Conclave of Light, the Norman's wedding anniversary which signifies the founding of Unarius, and Ruth Norman's birthday. The Welcome-Space-Brothers sign at the landing zone has deteriorated as the property is not used much anymore.

It keeps a moderate following, and now it offers materials in Spanish. The prophecy still lives; its fulfilment depends on people being ready for the Space Brother arrival. Unarius possesses live-streaming capability for its events, and it has 1,744 followers on Facebook. On YouTube, it keeps about a thousand subscribers to its 187 videos which include Ernest Norman's lessons in the Science, as well as old psychodramas and testimonies from current students. Online the numerous videos of Uriel preserve the images of her charismatic aura.

It appears that Unarius is gaining a larger audience. New leadership has made Unarius more accessible and relatable. In 2018, the Space Cadillac led the Mother Goose parade in El Cajon, a sign of neighbourhood acceptance. Unarius' overall reputation has moved from weird and possibly dangerous to quaint and charming. Presently, Unarius gives various workshops, including creativity workshops in which students make, for example, greetings cards or do other small art projects. Unarius sells books, mugs, t-shirts, sweatshirts, hoodies, posters, and DVDs. They hold sundry classes, including the past-life therapy class on Sundays and Wednesdays, which are live streamed. Unarius has screened their films in various cities. Two significant venues were at the San Francisco International Film Festival in 2015 and in a show at London's Horse Hospital Art Center in 2016 both arranged by filmmaker, Jodie Wille.

Not associated with the Academy, the splinter group called Unarius United³ focuses solely the teachings of Ernest Norman. Unarius United runs

3 The Unarius United website is <https://unariansunited.com/welcome-unarian/>. It is linked with Unarius Wisdom, a defunct website that is maintained by Cosmon (Thomas Miller) who claims that Ernest Norman called him his son (<http://www.unariuswisdom.com/interview-with-unarius-student-thomas-miller/>). Unarius is their official spelling, but the site and its links also use the alternate spelling, Unarian.

a website which connects with Unarius Wisdom that operates online meetings and sponsors physical meetings on the teachings, as well as other metaphysical subjects, such as reincarnation. A sample of topics are past-life therapy, life on other worlds, the science of the atom, New-Age physics, life after death, and understanding one's place within the cosmos. The online group contains about 300 members.

The Academy continues now without the excitement of a living breathing Uriel. The days of grand myth-making are over. Unarius venerates the past while also addressing the needs of new students. It carries on in its post-charismatic phase of myth maintenance. The same methods that created the myths with the exception of the physical presence of Uriel survive now to undergird its structure and to maintain reality. These particularistic methods briefly summarised include: the production of literature, enactments (past-life therapy, psychodrama, art, film-making, psychic readings, channeling, and costumes), and interpersonal talk (giving accounts that corroborate the truth of the Science). Throughout the fabrication of memories and messages play an important part. From these methods, students find evidence to substantiate that everything they think, say, and do springs from their source of scientific truth.

My research looked at the process of incorrigible beliefs in the face of disconfirmation. Unarius may seem like an extreme example, but I beg to differ. While contents of beliefs vary, the process one might argue is universal. Believers must consult their taken-for-granted worldviews for common-sense explanations to resolve the cognitive dilemmas posed by contradictory information, such as an insider's logic versus an outsider's logic. Intransigent worldviews abound not only in religions. Take, for instance, today's polarized political climate, the widespread acceptance of conspiracy theories, the advent of fake news, and the claim that reputable news is fake news. Intransigent worldviews pervade all parts of society.

Unarius calls itself the Science of Logic and Reason. Students carry on their interpretive work by articulating the intelligence of this orderly worldview. While the society-at-large may scoff at the unreality of their claims and at the chaos in their thinking, followers will maintain their beliefs despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary through their genuine efforts to live the Science.

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Starseeds

Susannah Crockford

19.1 Introduction: What Is a Starseed?

It had been no more than a week since I arrived in Sedona, Arizona to study New Age practitioners when I was first asked: have you heard about star-seeds? I had to reply, no, what is a starseed? Talking to people who described themselves as on a spiritual path, and hung around in places in Sedona like the organic vegetarian restaurant, my interlocutors told me that a starseed is someone who knows which planet they are from, or in common terms, they are an alien or extraterrestrial, but one that inhabits a human body.¹ They were also called walk-ins or even braided walk-ins. At some point the alien consciousness walked in to the human body. A braided walk-in was aware of this at the time of the walk-in as the two consciousnesses intertwined like a braid. Others remembered later in life, an event called an awakening, suddenly becoming aware of their true identity and abilities.

The reason my interlocutors gave for an alien consciousness to enter a human body was to experience physicality and mass. There was a purpose to their incarnation. Starseeds were planted to aid spiritual development of themselves and others, as part of a wider effort to help the ascension of humans and the Earth as a whole to the fifth dimension. They fit into a cosmology of hierarchically ranked planes of reality, called dimensions, that radiated out from source. Starseeds named our reality the ‘third dimension’, characterised by having physical forms and, as a consequence of this, pain and suffering. My interlocutors spoke of this esoteric, Neoplatonic schema in terms of energy. Source was the highest vibrational frequency of energy, something approximating the godhead, but more often just called the universe. Ascension was the process of raising the frequency of the vibration of the energy to resonate more closely with the highest point, thereby getting closer to the divine. The third dimension (the term they used for our reality as opposed to the incorporeal

1 This research is based partly on fieldwork undertaken from July 2012–April 2014 in Sedona, Arizona, that was funded by the European and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the UK. Further research was supported by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 714166).

planes of existence that their alien consciousness came from) has dense energy that vibrated at a level that gave an illusion of mass.

Starseeds inhabited a wider milieu of New Age spirituality as individual practitioners, of which this cosmological schema was a part. I lived in Sedona from 2012–2014 while undertaking ethnographic fieldwork, the material from which informs this chapter. It begins with a description of the general characteristics of starseeds as I observed them in the field and from following them online in the subsequent years. The next section focuses specifically on the economics of being a starseed, examining how they can earn a living from their identity. In the final section, there are three case studies presented to provide profiles of three individual starseeds and how they experienced their awakening. Sedona was associated with the New Age due to its vortexes, sites of special spiritual energy (Ivakhiv 2001). Many people came there to pursue their spiritual paths, which could take many forms including but not exclusively identifying as extraterrestrial. While there were many starseeds in Sedona, they were not a group as such. They did not work together. Some claimed that they did on a higher level, referred to as the fifth (or sometimes higher) dimension, but not in any way that could be perceived in a material sense in this dimension.

The name starseeds connotes the understanding that individuals who identified as such were seeds that came from the stars. They were seeds that had been planted and were contributing to planetary spiritual development as they continued to grow. They described a cosmology of the universe populated with other races of beings, the most commonly identified were from the distant star systems of the Pleiades, Sirius, Arcturus, Altare, and Lyra. Originating from far flung corners of the galaxy, starseeds came to Earth during periods of rising spiritual awareness. They were on a mission to help and serve humanity and planet Earth through contributing to this rising of awareness. Some had special abilities as part of their mission, such as channelling, healing, or being psychic. They were willingly incarnated on Earth at a particular time with a plan made prior to birth on how they would help Earth at that critical juncture in its history. They had lived hundreds of lifetimes in the past, on different planets, and in different dimensions.

When starseeds incarnated in a new lifetime, they sought to become spiritual teachers, shamans, or prophets. In New Age parlance such spiritual teachers often named themselves lightworkers, because they consciously tried to create more light in this dimension, another way of saying they wanted to raise the vibration of the energy. They preferred to live at leylines and sacred power spots. Sedona's reputed location at an intersection of leylines meant that it attracted starseeds. Its vortexes were said to vibrate energy that called in people who felt attuned to more spiritual frequencies. People living in Sedona also claimed to

often have UFO sightings. It was close to other famous sites in the American Southwest associated with extraterrestrial sightings, such as Area 51 in Nevada, and Roswell in New Mexico (Denzler 2003: 10–12). The explanation for this in Sedona was that since it was a power spot, extraterrestrials responded to that too.

Starseed beliefs drew inspiration from both New Age spirituality and stories of extraterrestrials in American culture. The term originated with the works of Brad Steiger, in particular *Gods of Aquarius* (1976), who also used star people as a synonym (York 2004: xxviii). For Steiger, the starseeds were Nephilim-descendants, progeny of ET ancestors—or starsowers—and early hominids (Flaherty 2010: 90). The memories of their extraordinary genesis were encoded in their DNA and released as the New Age dawns. This combined with elements of New Age spirituality, such as the coming era of spiritual change and transformation for the better, and of American cultural narratives concerning extraterrestrials, particularly the idea of ETs mixing with early forms of human. Starseeds were benevolent unlike many of the stories of ET contact in America (Lepselter 2016). Lepselter described frightening stories of contact with ETs involving abduction, missing time, and mutilated cattle, the classic tropes of UFO lore. Starseeds not only rejected the idea of harmful contact with ETs, but went further to claim that they were the ETs, living in human bodies and helping with spiritual development.

Although starseeds claimed they chose their mission and their human body prior to incarnation, the process of being born into the third dimension was described as traumatic. With the exception of those who called themselves braided walk-ins, they forgot their origins and purpose. Then at some point during their life, they experienced an awakening. Sometimes this occurred with drug use, but it could also occur spontaneously, apropos of nothing. It was also described as a process, rather than a one-off event. There were successive awakenings, the initial one followed by continuing realisations that came to constitute a path. A common image for the process was the kundalini symbol of two snakes rising up from the root to the crown chakra opening each as they rise.² It was sometimes called a kundalini awakening. It began

2 Kundalini in New Age spirituality is a term analogous to energy. Specifically, the kundalini rises from the root chakra at the base of the spine to the crown chakra above the head, culminating in spiritual enlightenment. It takes the form of two coiled snakes gradually or rapidly unravelling. Kundalini yoga aims to engage this process through movement and breathing exercises. The term Kundalini is derived from the name of a Hindu goddess, a consort of Shiva, who could appear as a vital force coiled at the base of the spine. Olav Hammer traces how this concept, along with that of the chakras, is a reformulation of Tantric doctrine by theosophical writers in the late 19th century, specifically Charles Leadbeater, that has been

a process of becoming spiritually aware or awake, the previous state likened to being asleep. This contrast of asleep/awake was also reflected in the use of the terminology of 'consciousness'. Those not on a spiritual path had a lower level of consciousness, often referred to as less conscious, as if they were in a state equivalent to a form of physical unconsciousness. It was not spoken of as learning something new about themselves but rather remembering what they truly were. After awakening came a period of learning, sometimes called "the quickening," during which the newly awake starseed gathered as much information as possible mostly from YouTube channels and websites run by others invested in the idea of starseeds. Earlier generations of starseeds found inspiration in alien contactee literature, such as the works of Steiger, Whitley Strieber, Betty and Barney Hill and others, that was published by popular presses prior to the emergence of the internet (Roth 2005: 89). Then they were reborn, living as a starseed, fully awake and aware of their mission in this dimension.

That mission was helping and facilitating the ascension. Also called the shift or the new paradigm, the ascension was the spiritual transformation of the planet: the New Age. This dimension, the third dimension, was characterised by density, mass, and suffering because it was separated from source. Ascension meant reuniting with source, becoming one with the universe again, moving from a state of separation to oneness. In the idiom of New Age spirituality, it was raising the vibration of the frequency of the energy to the highest level. Ascending up through the dimensions required help from beings already inhabiting those higher dimensions, the starseeds. They offered a utopian view of what the world would become once the ascension had occurred, a place without suffering, a state of pure energy or consciousness. Mass was an illusion of the vibration of the frequency in the third dimension. Humans only suffered because they believed that they had mass. Liberating oneself from such beliefs was an integral part of ascension, and there were certain ascension symptoms that indicated success. There was even a group on Facebook, the Ascension Symptoms Support Group, with over 23,000 members, in which members shared and discussed their symptoms and how they were feeling, and through which they could connect to other starseeds around the world. In Sedona I heard many different versions of what the symptoms were—*sleeping too much, strange buzzing sounds, recurrence of double numbers, you always felt like you did not fit in*—and also ironic references to "ascension syndrome." Ascension was a process but it was also referred to as a programme, part of a

combined with scientific concepts of 'energy' by late 20th century New Age authors, see Hammer 2004: 183–190.

holographic reality. It was something that had happened before, fixed into the structure of our reality, a code, like DNA.

Starseed discourse was replete with metaphors of science and technology. Realising new things about this or other dimensions was called a download. Receiving lots of downloads in succession was called data streaming. Energy was given the adjective 'photonic'. Negative ions needed to be brought down to construct a city of light. DNA was an important symbol, connecting us to the stars, the codes, the frequencies and vibrations. Thinking of any of these words in terms of their scientific definitions is unlikely to bring much illumination as to how they were used. They were deployed as religious symbols, a way of constructing a cosmology using words taken from science and technology that were revived with divination, faith, and belief (Zeller 2011: 666–667).

Starseeds had a sense of predestination, like Christian providence. What happened was exactly what was supposed to happen. However it was at the same time a choice. The mission was selected by the soul or soul group prior to incarnation: "We chose to come here" was something I often heard from star-seeds. This choice was not necessarily a joyful one, many had a sense of tiredness, that they had done this before many times and were ready to be finished. Reincarnation was a part of New Age spirituality, with many who were not starseeds identifying numerous past lives, especially in well-known colourful periods of history like the pharaonic period of Egypt or the Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan (Bender 2007). Those who could recount multiple, even thousands, of prior lifetimes called themselves old souls. Remembering other lives was part of understanding the overall mission, and what needed to be done in this lifetime.

Starseeds incarnated in groups, called variously soul pods, soul groups, star family, star tribe, or cluster groups, with interconnected destinies. These group souls consisted not only of closely connected others but also past, present, and future selves which could then inhabit different bodies on earth. There was a fracturing of the self across physical bodies. There was also a sense of exceptionalism. Starseeds were the strongest ones, the ones who could bear being born into this dense reality while simultaneously maintaining an awareness of higher dimensions. Some claimed to have special abilities that elevated them above the ordinary. They constituted an elite or even an Elect. Some identified as indigos and crystallines, a classification which has broadened beyond a positive inversion of children with ADHD, autism, and other neurodiversity (Singer 2015: 19). Spiritual author Doreen Virtue (2005) identified indigos and crystallines (sometimes just referred to as 'crystals') as generations of star-seeds. The indigos came first, paved the way, and had a harder time because they were the first to break the mould. The crystals followed, born from the

1990s onward, as the new generation of change makers. There was a newer generation, the Rainbows, identified by Virtue as continuing the mission.

Starseeds formed composite selves. As well as their past and future selves, they were also sometimes in contact with other entities, called guides or angels. These were beings in other dimensions or other timelines that could assist them. This cosmology of beings and entities also had alternative languages, extraterrestrial or angelic, in which they spoke. All beings existed in both physical and spiritual forms, those who perceived only the physical were living in an illusion, caused by the state of separation from the spiritual. This was the state peculiar to modern humans in industrial societies. Starseeds gave more credit to ancient and indigenous peoples, who were attributed with understanding about dimensions, different entities on different planes, and so on. It was only modern western people who had forgotten. All beings were multidimensional beings, however in different places and times they were given different names, such as elementals or elves. These are different names for the same things in mythology. All beings simultaneously inhabited many dimensions however each being chose into which dimension they currently placed their awareness, and therefore their energy. The higher the level of consciousness the more levels a being could consciously manifest in simultaneously. Channelling was an interesting example of this. Channellers were hosts for different entities that spoke through them (Brown 1999; Klin-Oron 2014). By focusing their awareness on different dimensions they were able to allow different parts of their composite self to speak through them, or different entities entirely. Multidimensionality also made bilocation possible. Starseeds would talk of working on or living in ships orbiting the Earth at the same time as they slept or they were having an ordinary conversation with me in the third dimension.

Their positivity was counterbalanced by a thick strain of conspiracism. Theories about machinations of the illuminati and the New World Order were common. Starseeds were often working against Reptilians. This idea about lizard-like reptile beings characterised by aggression and greed came from spiritual and conspiracist author David Icke from the 1990s onwards (Robertson 2016: 139–144). Starseeds were the good aliens opposing the bad aliens. As one put it to me, Star Wars was real. It was a battle of good against evil. The evil beings in the universe like the Reptilians and the new world order (NWO) provided a theodicy, a reason for why the new age had not happened yet and what was hindering the planet's spiritual development.

While the ascension beliefs of starseeds had utopian qualities, there was also a significant strand of millenarianism. While awaiting the ascension and working for its activation, humanity was currently enduring dark times that were a sign of imminent rebirth. There was a mystical and esoteric quality to

this. Ascension was not only a future state to work towards but possible now for highly developed individuals through being completely in the moment, in the present, a oneness with everything, a sense of transcending time and space so they dissolved entirely. It was a personal, inner journey, that started with the individual, and expanded out to the rest of the planet, combining to make a larger energy field. This meant that the way starseeds helped others was through their own personal spiritual development. They increased light and love for all by working on themselves.

Being a starseed was a religious practice founded on radical individualism. The universe is you, you are the universe, no one else in charge. The individual must take full responsibility for everything that happened. But this meant not working with anyone else. Cooperation always happened on another plane, not in the third dimension. While on this plane, what they had to focus on was themselves, their spiritual practice, undermining any sense of cohesion or group identity as starseeds. They often seemed more in competition than working together for a common purpose. It also meant finding a way to support themselves beyond their immediate community of fellow believers.

19.2 The Economics of Starseeds

Competition between starseeds arose partly from being solo practitioners in a marketplace of spiritual practice. New Age spirituality had no authorising structures in which to support specialists, instead practitioners competed for clients and followers on an individual basis (Redden 2005). Starseeds were faced with the question that was common to all religious specialists: how did they support themselves? Churches had congregations that they tithed to support their specialists. Without a community of this kind to pool resources, there was a difficulty of balancing the spiritual path with economic realities. Starseeds exhibited a dislike of what they called “normal jobs,” which they felt were not consonant with their spiritual path. They did not want to be part of a system that required them to just do a job solely for the money. That was empty and meaningless for them, and their refusal to do so was part of how they defined the common starseed characteristic of not fitting in amongst other people.

A combination of income sources was common, making them participants in the growing economic sector of subcontractors and freelancers known as the gig economy. Piecemeal employment on short term contracts for larger employers or self-employed, without benefits from the state or guarantees of long-term employment was the norm. Older starseeds tended to have some

form of state support, such as military or work-related pensions, and younger starseeds often had some form of familial support. It was often a precarious economic existence, with difficulties in maintaining monthly costs and places of residence. Amongst the starseeds I knew in Sedona, homelessness and transient living were common.

The importance of the internet cannot be overstated. It was often how people learned about starseeds. The quickening phase of development was often described as obsessive internet searching through pages and videos about what a starseed was and seeing how that connected with what they were experiencing. It was also how starseeds tended to support themselves through posting videos about their downloads and experiences, selling products germane to starseeds, and for the more successful ones posting adverts for other companies' products. Instagram was a popular platform for sharing photos, memes, and jokes about being a starseed, shared under specific hashtags such as #StarseedsOfInstagram #LightworkersOfInstagram #StarseedWisdom or #StarseedAwakening. They also saw YouTube as an open, accessible, and democratic platform that anybody could share on and anybody could watch. Despite this view, some starseeds had multiple YouTube channels in case one got shut down in censorship by the platform owner, Google, something that was rumoured to happen more than it seemed to occur in actuality.

Social media and video sharing platforms were seen as allowing the ascension to happen, the fact that this technology was available was part of why it was happening. The ascension was, in part, a technologically driven spiritual awakening. Starseeds had an online constituency of followers. The people they were reliant on for purchases, views, and clicks were worldwide, not linked to their immediate community in Sedona or wherever they were based. This meant they did not have to get on with other starseeds personally. They were not linked to other people in real life, they were linked digitally to starseeds and other lightworkers around the world, a facet that supported notions of multidimensionality and composite selves.

There were in-person interactions as well in the form of conferences, seminars, and coaching sessions. I attended a Starseed Alliance International conference in the community room in the Sedona Public library. Around thirty people were in attendance including the presenters.³ There were nine presenters, most of whom were based in Sedona, whom I had already met. Most people raised their hands when asked who came from out of town. It was also being videoed and live streamed to viewers around the world, including

3 The trailers for this conference are still available on the Starseed Alliance International internet site (2013).

Belgium and China. It was standard at other similar conferences I attended in Sedona to expand the audience through video conferencing technology. Vending at conferences was another source of revenue. Starseeds would be among those selling their products during break times at the many different types of spirituality-related conferences in Sedona and further afield. There was a large ET-related conference every year called Contact in the Desert, held in Indian Wells, California. Several starseeds I knew in Sedona would regularly get vendor passes to this large conference that hosted talks by internationally famous speakers on the spirituality conference circuit like David Wilcock, Jacques Vallée, Whitley Strieber, and Giorgio A. Tsoukalas (the host of The History Channel's *Ancient Aliens*). They would set up a table and sell their products such as jewellery, clothing, crystals, books, CDs, and so on.

Coaching sessions could be in person or online. Life coaching was a practice much wider than starseeds that offered advice and guidance to individuals outside of accredited institutions. The same online platforms were used by life coaches and career coaches, as well as starseeds. The difference was that starseeds offered coaching specific to those who felt they were going through an awakening. The format was similar for all types of coaches, which I have studied through both participant observation and interviews (Crockford 2017: 197–228). A free webinar was offered as an introduction. Then participants were encouraged to pay for a one-to-one session, something nominal like \$50, but nothing much was accomplished in this session beyond the client identifying their own problems and the coach offering their full product as the solution to these problems. Then the coach would ask for a much higher figure, often something numerologically significant like \$555 or \$997, for a series of coaching sessions, access to a members-only online platform, and a support group of fellow participants in the sessions with whom to share tips and advice. A few better off, long term clients supported coaches, who then also attracted a range of occasional or one-off clients. Very successful coaches could host retreats, especially in beautiful touristic locations like the Bahamas, Hawaii, or Sedona. In-person coaching involved sitting down talking one-to-one, like a form of therapy, but this was limited to people within easy travel distance. Coaches often explicitly contrasted what they did with therapy, emphasising the limitations of traditional psychotherapy.

Most starseeds combined a number of different revenue streams in order to support themselves, and would adopt different forms of income generation depending on what they found most profitable, or at least minimally supportive, at any given point in time. To make clearer how the heterogeneity of this field coalesces through personal interpretations, I now present three case studies of individual starseeds.

19.3 Case Studies

19.3.1 *Amateo Ra*

19.3.1.1 Background

During our interview in January 2013, Amateo Ra told me that his name was his “given name” because “I gave it to myself.” He clarified that it was not his birth name, which was Brendan Kaplan. It was during a ceremony in Palenque, Mexico, a major Mayan archaeological site that has become a popular location for New Age pilgrims, that he was given the name Amateo Ra by a shamanic Mayan elder that he channelled. The being tapped him on the head with his magical stick and said that this was what his name was supposed to be right now. He broke down the etymology as ‘Ama’ deriving from “the feminine for the mother,” and ‘Teo’ from “the masculine for the father” without specifying a language. He gave its essential meaning as “the love of oneness.” The ‘Ra’ came from the Egyptian sun god of the same name. Amateo believed he had spent many previous lifetimes in Egypt. He had the eye of Ra tattooed on his back (it was in fact the eye of Horus) and an ankh tattooed on his hand, to symbolise the Egyptian energy he connected with. He gave this connection a genetic association, saying that his “original lineage” was Hebrew, through his father’s side, and he believed that “the Hebrew genetics spent a lot of time in Egypt.” It was his understanding that past lives incarnated within the “same DNA lineage”. This connection stretched out into the past on Earth and then out into the galaxy because for him the Egyptian God of Ra represented Sirius, the star system from where he felt he originated.

Amateo was twenty-six in 2013. In his physical form he was originally from Florida, after he qualified as a court stenographer he moved to Portland, Oregon. He came to Sedona to visit and “felt like I was plugged in to God.” He was a presenter at an 11.11.11 conference,⁴ which was his debut as a starseed and channeller. The visit made such an impression on him that he resolved to return and move there. When we spoke, he had been in Sedona for six months. When he first arrived he was homeless and did not have a regular place to stay. He was camping in the desert and living out of his backpack. He considered this part of “walking the walk.” Rather than working in an ordinary job to afford accommodation, he put his comfort aside to live as a starseed. He left Sedona

4 11 November 2011 was considered a special date in New Age spirituality because of the recurrence of the number 11. 11:11 was given numerological significance (Robertson 2016: 83). The date was marked in Sedona with ceremonies and conferences intended to raise the vibration of the energy that was already heightened by the date.

in 2014 and from there moved to Ojai in California, then Tulum in Mexico, and at the time of writing, in Encinitas in Southern California.

19.3.1.2 Awakening

Amateo had had a sense of being awake his whole life, since he was young. It was only in adulthood that it “kicked into gear.” He started studying different energy teachings, esoteric studies, self-developmental work, and from these began to develop his own understanding of what was most resonant for him personally. His awakening came through the use of psychedelic drugs, initially with cannabis, and then N,N-Dimethyltryptamine (DMT). Through smoking cannabis he considered himself on an “agnostic study of consciousness” yet it was through experimenting with DMT that he met his future self. His future self told him that he needed to make changes in his life because there was something not only coming, but that had already come to pass. He needed to reorient himself to that. Since then he had had many awakenings; he described it as successive, to the extent that every day was like an awakening for him. Through the use of ayahuasca, he opened his channelling abilities. Amateo channelled his higher self, which was him on a galactic level, that had a Sirian energy. It was called Ratava, which he later realised was the word avatar backwards, and also connected with the Egyptian god of Ra. He termed it an evolution when his self from Sirius, existing in a singular moment of reality, moved in to his present body. Now he was in the third dimension to instruct himself and everyone else. He came into being through fusing his physical body and an entity from Sirius.

Amateo went on a journey from court stenographer to channeller. As a stenographer, or court reporter, he would take down testimony on a stenotype machine during court proceedings. He described how something strange started to happen during making transcripts. He would take around two hundred pages of testimony every day, and then he would sit down at night, feeling like his head was blown open from that much information. He identified this as his crown chakra opening. He described lying down and seeing energy patterns and words in different languages, and they would form geometrical patterns, which he identified as ‘sacred geometry’. He felt them running through his body as beams that were transmitting this information out of his body. This spurred his awakening, even before he experimented with DMT. He felt that something was going on in his neurochemistry, that was “shaking me up pretty hard.” Then he realised that that was channelling.

Around this time, Amateo attended the retreat in Palenque held by Solara An-Ra, a British channeller from London, who calls herself a Pleiadean emissary to Gaia (Solara An-Ra 2019). Solara put him on the spot, and said,

“channel.” He described himself as gasping and then spontaneously channeling. That was the beginning of being able to control his ability. At the time, he was also listening to a lot of Bashar, an entity from the constellation of Orion in the future channelled by Darryl Anka. He began practising trance channelling, which is channelling an entity while in a trance as opposed to conscious channelling where the host remains aware of what goes on. He started a small group where he would channel meditations every week at an arts studio in Portland, Oregon. This was about four years before coming to Sedona. He began to develop an understanding that he had a Sirian energy coming through and that was speaking through him. And at first he said he really doubted it, asking who are you? Are you really from Sirius? He questioned it because he felt insecure. When he started to develop more comfort and entered into more dialogue with the entity he saw it as real, and he realised that he had an agreement to channel this being as part of his mission in the third dimension during this lifetime.

19.3.1.3 Work

As well as being a starseed and channeller, Amateo marketed himself online (2019) as a “vision architect, blogger and biz coach” and “serial entrepreneur.” Amateo described his work to me as combining technology, business, and spirituality, with the purpose of bringing these aspects of modern world together. He made money through doing workshops, personal sessions, and receiving donations. After quitting his job as a stenographer, he received unemployment benefits for a period, which he acknowledged helped a lot in setting himself up independently. He identified “generosity” as crucial in how he maintained himself. In working with others on collaborative projects, he sometimes found it challenging to maintain his own work that benefitted himself financially. He also claimed to be “not above anything,” affirming that he would get a “normal job, and keep ticking away.” However, his real passions were writing and making art, and he felt that was what he really wanted to do. He felt confident that his various creative efforts would support him, even if it took some time to work out the specifics. He equated his efforts at financial self-sufficiency to the universe creating all of its architecture of planets and galaxies, and that if one planet can support seven billion people, it could also support him. However, he also expressed frustration that his mobile phone was currently disconnected, and it would require \$250 to turn it back on, which he did not have.

At the time I interviewed him in Sedona, Amateo was running a project called the Ascension Academy, with his co-facilitator Kyle Buckley. It was just the two of them, neither had much experience but both felt strongly called to do the work. They had reached the point where they needed more financial support for the business. They were supported by donations, and were

also trying to open up sponsorship opportunities for local businesses in the community, and were looking for help from anyone with media or marketing experience. Amateo described the Ascension Academy as an inclusive and collaborative platform, with ways to give back energetically. The idea was to use an open source model in spirituality. They did one-on-one work, teleseminars, coaching, and live workshops. I attended one of their live workshops, it was held for free in a conference room at the Hampton Inn in Sedona. The first half was Amateo and Kyle explaining their esoteric interpretations of ascension, and the second half was Amateo channelling his future self from Sirius. People asked him questions about ascension or their personal spiritual journeys and he answered them as the channelled entity. The aim was to become a global hub of information, providing channelled material that he called “the news of now.” The Ascension Academy lapsed when Amateo left Sedona for Ojai, and Kyle went to India as part of her spiritual journey.

Amateo maintained a YouTube channel where he posted videos of his channelled information and other musings.⁵ He also maintained a social media presence on Facebook and Twitter, where he regularly posted about his projects. In Ojai he began another open source platform for fusing technology and spirituality, called Creator Course. However, the friend who was his business partner in this endeavour admitted to embezzling the company and falsifying financial reports, as Amateo announced on Facebook in January 2015. The company’s website is now disabled. He later resolved his ongoing financial problems through investing in cryptocurrency, going on to organise a cryptocurrency online conference called the “Ethos and Crypto Virtual Summit” in March 2018 to advise others on how to invest. His most recent project as of 2019 was Avant Terra, a coaching and consultancy company that he ran with his girlfriend. Amateo saw his efforts as working towards building a sustainable society, in which clean energy replaces fossil fuels, cryptocurrency replaces fiat money, and ‘smart cities’ and eco-villages replace urban sprawl. His vision for the future was based on the fusion of technology and spirituality that had guided his journey since his awakening.

19.3.2 *Randell Standswithbear*

19.3.2.1 Background

Randell Standswithbear was a Native American-presenting starseed and musician. The name ‘Standswithbear’ was not his legal name but came from a “four-hour sweat” in Bear Canyon, New Mexico, with “an elder” of an unspecified

5 Internet site, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCgRjqZKdjPfgsJeIBeAVMw>, accessed 02/04/2019.

tribe, followed by a ceremony. Calling himself a member of the Bear clan, and a “keeper of the earth,” he told a story of having a Cherokee grandmother. Peppering his speech with references to “the Native way” and words that could have been from an indigenous language, he made the claim frequently of being Cherokee and a “fourth generation shaman in my family” as well as a Starseed Ambassador.

Randell spoke of a link between “the ancestors” and what he called “Star Family.” The natives understood that our home was in the stars, he claimed, similar to the link between Native Americans and ETs explored in Paul Myhre’s chapter in this volume. It is more problematic claiming Cherokee ancestry in the way Randell did than it was for Amateo Ra to claim a connection to the long past pharaonic civilisations of Egypt. Indigenous studies scholar Kim Tallbear (2013: 134–135) discussed the frequency of Americans identifying as white simultaneously claiming Native American identity based on ancestry or genetic testing, without understanding it as a political designation deriving strength from tribal-nation sovereignty and governance rights. Anthropologist Circe Sturm (2011: 58–59) argued that Cherokees in particular are a target for “race shifters” because of the perceived openness to becoming Cherokee as opposed to, for example, Navajo. There is a difference between calling oneself Cherokee or talking about a Cherokee grandmother, and being an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee nation. Randell did not claim to be a part of the Cherokee nation, but part of the Bear clan. The Bear clan was founded in 1970s by Sun Bear, a metis member of the Ojibwe-Chippewa nation, as a way of welcoming non-Natives into a form of Native ritual and ceremony (Wallis 2003: 204–205). The Bear clan was controversial among Native American activists, many of whom rejected the idea of initiating non-Natives or innovating ceremonies.

The elaboration of Randell’s ancestry went beyond claims to being Cherokee. He said that he had had over 5,000 incarnations, which he could recall instantaneously with precision. This long spiritual heritage caused him to affect a sense of tiredness, saying that he was a “little tired of this rock, just want to go home.” He had incarnated in this present time as part of a great change but for him and many others it was not really a change, it was a repetition because he had done this on many worlds and many planets, at many times, and in many existences. He called himself an old soul because of this past life complexity. He also called himself an indigo. The indigos were the warrior tribe, according to Randell, that shifted the consciousness and direction of humanity. He likened indigos to the plough that was coming through, and the crystals as the seeds that grow in the ground the indigos broke.

Referring to his upbringing on this plane of existence, Randell said, “I was raised redneck construction cowboy Catholic.” Originally from Honolulu,

Hawaii, he moved to Arizona and attended high school in Flagstaff. Previously he worked as a DJ in the adult entertainment industry. During the 1980s he was a lead singer in a rock band in Phoenix. Now in his fifties, he lived in Sedona with his partner, Susan, who went by the spiritual moniker, Lightstar.

19.3.2.2 Awakening

Randell claimed that there were over 800 million starseeds. He told a story of his awakening, which occurred in a dream he experienced when nine years old. In his dream, extraterrestrials took him on board a spaceship. The ship's commander, Ikon, showed him the inhabitants of Earth, which he called the Terrans, and the starseeds that were also on Earth, displayed as yellow and red dots, respectively, on the screen of the spaceship's console. The commander gave Randell a message: you have work to do here, you are here for a great purpose, and one day you will understand what that is. Ikon then showed the ship's capability to zoom in on any being, Terran or starseed, on Earth because each had their own set frequency, and he was able to dial into those frequencies. This meant that the commander could find Randell anywhere on the planet, and he assured the young boy that he had never really been alone.

That was Randell's awakening. He awakened to his multiple realities, a feeling he likened to looking in the mirror at himself and realising: I am aware of you, that is not me. He described looking at his own parents with the same sense of dissociation, and wondering if he was adopted. This was a question that he acknowledged drove his mother "crazy" when he asked her. The trip aboard the starship was only a part of the process, like Amateo he described a succession of experiences. When he was three years old, he recounted, a babysitter beat him severely and he almost died. The babysitter was sent to prison for many years. The effect on him as a boy was devastating: "the extroverted child became the introvert." He retreated into himself, into what he called "the sacred world," where he found his guides, teachers, mentors, star family, and angelic beings. They taught him everything he knew about starseeds and the universe in general throughout his life. It was as if he found an alternate family that he experienced in another dimension when his earthly caretakers failed him.

19.3.2.3 Work

I often saw Randell playing music at events around Sedona, such as conferences, festivals, and the services of the local branch of Unity Church. He played Native American flute, chanted, often to a jazzy backing track, sometimes adding percussion, drums, and vocals. Calling his style "Native edge," it combined rock and Native and New Age music. His main vocation as a musician provided

Randell with a steady income, and he branched out into sound healing, through claiming that his music healed. He was both a “musical alchemist” and a “master healer” by his own account (Standswithbear 2019a). When he was not playing his music at events, he was a frequent vendor at conferences and other spirituality-themed events in Sedona, selling his CDs and self-published book, *Now is the Time*. Via his website, he also had an app that played his music available, and links to his Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Soundcloud sites.

As a trance channel for entities he identified as the Divine Brotherhood and Masters, Randell offered a range of services including psychic and channelling sessions. His master guide was a Tibetan called Mai Ling. He also offered sessions for starseed activations, alignments, and healing sessions, through which he offered help to his “brother and sister” starseeds to find their mission in this dimension. There were three levels: ensign, lieutenant, commander, and the highest, in a further nod to Star Trek, was called captain's chair, a three-in-one package of everything offered in the previous three levels (Standswithbear 2019b). The healing sessions he offered in Tibetan, Atlantean, and Lemurian modalities, three civilisations highly elaborated in New Age mythology in which he recalled past lives.

Randell was the co-founder of Starseed Alliance International (2019b), along with his partner Susan. Under the aegis of this organisation, he organised the conference at the public library in Sedona, acting as host and also performing his music and giving a talk alongside the other invited speakers. During his speech, he noted the importance of the support of Susan's father, Richard Goldwag, a holistic practitioner specialising in chelation therapy. The idea was to bring starseeds together so that they would see they were not alone in this world. He wanted the starseeds to know that they were “family,” and also for the event to be a launching pad for those who they believed were the movers and shakers of the new world. Since that conference in 2013, Randell has continued living in Sedona and performing regularly as a musician. His latest conference was in April 2019, where he performed music at an event called the Cosmic Awakening Conference, held at the Sedona Creative Life Center, alongside speakers including David Wilcock and others.

19.3.3 *Krista Raisa*

19.3.3.1 Background

Krista Raisa moved to Sedona in 2012, when she was twenty-six. She was a Lyran-Pleiadian-Procyonian starseed, who channelled a group of beings called the Orion Council. She saw herself as working for the Orion Council, transmitting their messages for the benefit of humanity. The Council was a group of amphibious beings some of whom were located in a ship near our sun and

others on Betelgeuse, a star in the Orion constellation. Also identifying as a “galactic faery,” she felt she was part-ET part-woodland sprite contained in a human body. Often working with her partner and “spiritual husband,” Ra Arcturus, she received messages translating an angelic language he produced. She identified a past life as a nurse during World War II who was also a walk-in, but admitted she did not know many of her past lives. She thought she had had one in India, but also that many of her past lives had been prematurely dispatched by others.

Identifying her human body as Finnish-American and biracial, with a Finnish father and an Afro-American/Native American mother, she grew up in New Jersey. She then moved to Finland as a teenager, staying for ten years, where she went to college, calling this what was expected of her. There seemed to be a purpose lacking in simply getting an ordinary job. Whenever she tried to fit in with ordinary people she felt that she failed miserably. Deciding instead to only do “what brought me joy,” she explored UFO meetings, angel therapy, and tarot cards. She attended spiritual painting, mediumship and psychic ability classes. Her mother had Seth books (the entity channelled by Jane Roberts) and a Ouija board from the 1970s. She also read books by other channellers. She saw a recurrence of the number 23:23 but was unsure why this was significant at first. Finding herself without aim or purpose in Finland, she returned to America. There she went to Hawaii, and worked on a farm, still searching for a purpose. Krista described the kind of seeking typical of the New Age, picking and choosing from a range of practices and trying to find which suited her.

19.3.3.2 Awakening

Krista experienced awakening in the parking lot of a Whole Foods Market. She had returned to New York City and was spending time with her mother. She felt like something in her pineal gland popped open. She described breathing heavily and feeling a weird pressure in her head. Her mother took her to the car and told her to relax. She said, “it’s ok honey, you’re channelling.” Her mother was excited by this, and got a recorder, telling her to lie down, because she was channelling. Krista said hello, and then asked who they were. It was quick and spontaneous, “like it was in my DNA programming” in her own words, again using the language of science to denote something more like religious destiny or fate. The Orion Council started speaking through her.

The legitimacy of her experience came, for Krista, from its unexpectedness. Since she was interested in angels, and did not watch *The X-Files* or *Star Trek*, it was surprising to her to suddenly begin talking about spaceships. Yet she loved and accepted being a channel for the Orion Council, who she felt were loving and benevolent, trying to serve and guide humanity. She did not feel that she

was personally from Orion. The Council had told her that she was Lyran seeded Pleiadean, but that she had trained on Betelgeuse. The Orion Council had several personalities, including mother, training officer, scientist, and mathematician. It was another example of a composite self, through which Krista could express different aspects of herself.

19.3.3.3 Work

During the starseed conference at the Sedona public library, I saw Krista channel the Orion Council. First she asked a friend of hers, Rion, to come and hold space and keep the energy clear. Holding space was a common phrase in New Age contexts that often meant sitting silently with someone during a practice as a way of supporting them. Agreeing he leapt up and put some dark sunglasses on and stretched around, picking up a chair, and then sitting at the front beside Krista with his hands together. When Krista channelled her voice sounded different, as if speaking in an affected accent without a specific origin. Her eyes were closed, she sat in the seat, hands in lap or gesticulating lightly, a shake of the hand, a flutter of the fingers. Her partner, Arcturus Ra, sat on her other side in a seat with his legs crossed. Speaking in terms of ninth dimensional activations and DNA strands, through Krista the Council gave a message of purpose and love, that we were here to experience and so were they, and we could help each other through the ascension. Then at the end Rion explained why he needed to sit there and hold space. Krista said it was important to be safe. Psychic work had its rules too. She described herself as a trance channel, she was there when the Orion Council spoke, but “a little bit to the left.”

Krista had parlayed her channelling abilities into a career as a YouTuber. Her channel on the platform had over 1.2 million views since she joined in 2010. The videos ranged from advice specific to starseeds about ascension symptoms to general advice on loving parents after divorce or starting an online business. One video I watched had Krista and Ra dressed in Star Trek uniforms, saying they were from the Orion Council and the topic was trust. It was basically psychological and relationship counselling with aliens. Videos often began with advertisements for her products, for example a six-module course on how to work online as a psychic, or the set of Orion Council oracle cards she designed. Krista sold products on Instagram and Etsy, as well her own website (Raisa 2019) with a page for the shop. The other main focus of her work was personal sessions she provided online and in person, where she provided channelled messages and psychic advice directly to clients. Some of the insights from working one-on-one with clients would provide the foundation for further YouTube videos. Krista sold her nine self-published books, including four co-authored with the Orion Council, she also sold online courses, live teaching,

ormus,⁶ personal readings, and oracle cards. Her social media platforms provided the foundation of her business that supported her financially, absent of any other forms of economic support.

19.4 Conclusion

Starseeds form part of the American extraterrestrial and New Age milieu. Far from being a hostile invader, the alien becomes a positive self-identification and site of religious innovation. Significantly, the rhetoric of science is used to elaborate religious themes, particularly DNA as a symbol for a sense of predestination that grants special powers and alternate identities. These identities are constructed through the elaboration of narratives of past lives and multidimensional composite selves. Through reincarnation, starseeds find a way of identifying as something other, which accounts for pre-existing psychological experiences of alienation. In some cases this can separate them from their earthly family, as with Randell, but for others such as Krista it becomes a new form of connecting with kin. Yet in their work, they remain individual practitioners, not forming collectivities beyond loose online support networks, and financially they are left to their own recourse to support their efforts to live without a 'normal' job by starting various forms of online business. Identifying as a starseed therefore combines elements of not only New Age and ET cultural lore, but also scientific language and the economic structures of late capitalism.

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6 A substance made from lye, salt, and seawater that was given spiritual and mystical properties in New Age spirituality.

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PART 5

*New UFO Religions Emerging
from the Global Context*



Spirits of the Space Age: The Valley of the Dawn as a UFO Religion

Kelly E. Hayes

“Tupi or not Tupi: That is the question.” Or, the tale of an indigenous chieftain who once was a Catholic saint, an Egyptian pharaoh, an African deity, a spaceship pilot, and the reincarnated spirit of a planetary master.



20.1 Introduction

In his 1928 *Cannibalist Manifesto* (*Manifesto Antropófago*), the modernist poet Oswald de Andrade (1890–1954) posed a tongue-in-cheek query of his fellow Brazilians, “Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question?”¹ Playing on the stories of cannibalism among the indigenous Tupi as well as the constitutive role of the cannibal in the European civilizing project, Andrade’s manifesto described Brazil’s greatest strength as its ability to cannibalize other cultures and, from the partially digested pieces, to create something different and wholly Brazilian. Simultaneously an indictment of Brazilian elites’ colonized mentality and a surrealist provocation, the *Cannibalist Manifesto* expressed a sensibility typically associated with the Brazilian modernist movement in art and literature. But Andrade’s metaphor also describes the country’s equally predacious religious imagination, which has produced a number of eclectic, imaginative, and singularly Brazilian religions, from Santo Daime, whose adherents observe the Eucharist by consuming a hallucinogenic brew of indigenous origin, to Umbanda with its pantheon of African, indigenous, and European spirits, to

¹ Written in English in the original, this iconic line is “simultaneously a celebration of the Tupi, who practiced certain forms of ritual cannibalism ... and a metaphorical instance of cannibalism: it eats Shakespeare” (Wikipedia 2019).

a broad panorama of esoteric and New Age groups promising self-realization and cosmic transformation.

Few of these exemplify the phantasmagoric qualities of Brazil's cannibalizing capacity more than the Social Works of the Christian Spiritualist Order (*Obras Sociais da Ordem Espiritualista Cristã*) or OSOEC, known more popularly as the Valley of the Dawn (*Vale do Amanhecer*). Among themselves, adherents also refer to the movement as the Order or the Doctrine. Many first-time visitors to the Order's Mother Temple outside of Brasília report a feeling of sensory overload induced by the profusion of symbolic references, lavish vestments, theatrical rituals, and colourful architecture on display. The inventiveness of the group's material culture is matched only by what one observer called its "mind-bogglingly abstruse cosmological system," (Dawson 2007: 52) which, another commented, "would make any Alexandrian theological-philosophical system seem simple" (Carvalho 1999:8–9). Complexity notwithstanding, the Valley of the Dawn has become one of Brazil's largest alternative religions, with affiliated temples in every Brazilian state as well as the United States, England, Portugal, and other international locales.

Neiva Chaves Zelaya (1925–1985), an itinerant truck driver, clairvoyant, and spiritual visionary known as Tia Neiva (Aunt Neiva), founded the movement in the early 1960s.² Over the course of more than twenty years, Tia Neiva, assisted by family members and followers, created an imaginative world of stunning complexity. Many of the people involved in the materialization of this world, like Tia Neiva herself, were *candangos*, laborers and rural folk who had come to the newly designated federal district in the late 1950s to work in Brasília, the modernist capital city then under construction.

Alongside Tia Neiva, the most important contributor to the Valley of the Dawn's success was Mário Sassi (1921–1994), an early convert who left his former life to become Neiva's companion, the interpreter of her visions, and the intellectual architect of the movement's theology. Working together, the charismatic visionary and the intellectual cannibalized various religious movements present in Brazil in the second half of the twentieth century, reconfiguring them within a cosmological framework grounded in Spiritism, theosophical metaphysics, and extraterrestrial philosophies—the kind of esoteric blend that Christopher Partridge has termed Western occulture (Partridge 2004) and

2 In 2019, OSOEC's official website claimed over 700 registered, affiliated temples around the world. See <https://valedoamanhecer.org/>, accessed 22/05/2019. OSOEC's roots go back to an earlier community that Tia Neiva founded, the Spiritualist Union of White Arrow (UESB), which lasted from 1959–1964.



FIGURE 20.1 The Valley Of The Dawn

PHOTO CREDIT: MÁRCIA ALVES. USED BY PERMISSION

Catherine Albanese, referring to the context of the United States, called “metaphysical religiosity” (Albanese 2007).

This chapter considers the UFO elements within the Valley of the Dawn as they were shaped by the local social environment and by an international occult-cultural milieu. More specifically, I examine the idea of benevolent extraterrestrials and their technologically advanced spacecraft as key elements in a hermeneutic project by which Tia Neiva and Mário Sassi reinterpreted familiar figures from Brazil’s landscape of popular religions and recast them as protagonists in a great Space Age drama. Within this mythological frame, UFO beliefs function as a kind of metaphysical device signalling the Valley of the Dawn’s status as a modern religion for the Space Age: comfortable with the language of science and technology, oriented towards self-improvement, and suited to a modern era in which the Earth and its human occupants no longer occupy the centre of the universe but have been displaced to its margins.

In order to lay the groundwork for this argument, I offer a brief overview of the Valley of the Dawn’s essential teachings and its origin narrative, a sweeping account of the community’s roots in remote time and space. I then discuss the circumstances of its founding and the extraordinarily generative partnership between Tia Neiva and Mário Sassi, who were affectionately known by followers as the Clairvoyant and the Intellectual. Having laid this foundation,

I turn to the Valley of the Dawn's UFO beliefs as these were articulated in Sassi's writings, pointing out resonances between Sassi's ideas and familiar ufological themes. Emphasizing the hermeneutic function of UFO beliefs, I concentrate on two of the entities of light central to the Doctrine's cosmology and day-to-day operations: Father White Arrow, Tia Neiva's principle spirit mentor and the "Supreme Leader of the Phalanx of the Dawn"; and Tiãozinho, one of Tia Neiva's most beloved spirit guides.

According to the Doctrine, these figures, each deeply rooted in Brazilian culture in different ways, possess alternative, Space Age guises as esoteric masters and representatives of a highly advanced race of extraterrestrials responsible for guiding human evolution and shepherding us through the dawn of a New Age. By working with these "planetary masters" to execute the divine plan, Valley of the Dawn members believe that they are engaged in a great work of individual and collective spiritual redemption that will redeem the errors of the past and, as a result, ensure their salvation and eventual return to Capella (*Capela*), the "Mother Planet."³

Unlike UFO religions such as the Raelian movement or Heaven's Gate, the extraterrestrial component is not the most prominent storyline at the Valley of the Dawn, but rather is one narrative strand within a more complex, multi-layered epic organized around key episodes in the group's shared mythological past. For most of the Valley of the Dawn members with whom I've spent time, the Doctrine's pragmatic focus on healing and personal transformation was the initial—and remains the primary—draw, not its UFO elements. The idea of extraterrestrial masters and their technologically advanced spacecraft most likely entered Valley of the Dawn doctrine through the interpretive and theological work of Mário Sassi. As other scholars have observed, UFO beliefs often serve to reconcile a movement's esoteric, spiritist, theosophical, and Christian elements with scientific rationality, space technology, and modern cosmology (Gruenschloss 2003: 18; Partridge 2005).

20.2 Father White Arrow and the Jaguars

From a history of religions perspective, the Valley of the Dawn is one of a larger group of religions in which the masters of Theosophy—enlightened beings freed from the wheel of reincarnation who guide the spiritual progress of

3 A reference to the star Capella, also known as Alpha Aurigae, visible from Earth as the brightest star in the constellation of Auriga. It is referred to almost exclusively as a planet in Valley of the Dawn doctrine.

humanity—are reinterpreted as cosmic entities from outer space. In the case of the Valley of the Dawn, the masters are believed to inhabit Capella, a distant star that, Mário Sassi proclaimed, “has presided over the destiny of the Earth from the beginning” (Sassi 1974: 32). Like the Ascended Masters described by Christopher Partridge, the evolved beings of Capella, “introduce new scientific ideas into the history of human thought, they warn of potentially harmful developments and catastrophes, and ... make a periodical effort to bring more enlightenment to mankind” (Partridge 2005: 175). Rather than originating on Earth and ascending, the Capellans are, more properly speaking, “descended masters,” (2005: 206) beings from outer space who periodically come to Earth to guide humanity’s spiritual development. “In the near future,” Sassi observes, “they will come again as physical beings, astronauts, space beings, adjusted to new relational norms, new methods of helping their brothers on Earth” (Sassi 1974: 18). As such, the Capellans clearly resemble the “Space Brothers” described by George Adamski (1891–1965) and central to other UFO groups like the Aetherius Society, Mark-Age, and Unarius, although Sassi does not use this terminology.

Valley of the Dawn doctrine teaches that some masters from Capella, like Father White Arrow, have experienced numerous earthly incarnations, most often as spiritual and political leaders, holy figures, and saints. Father White Arrow’s roster of past lives, for example, is said to include incarnations as the Egyptian boy-king Tuthankhamon, the Gospel author John, Saint Francis of Assisi, and, in his final experience on Earth, an indigenous Andean chieftain during the era of Spanish colonization. Notwithstanding these many incarnations, Valley of the Dawn imagery depicts Father White Arrow almost exclusively in his final incarnation as the “Great Jaguar,” the leader of a band of Andean Indians who, through the power of his words and Christ-like example, saved his people from slaughter at the hands of Spanish conquistadores.

A larger-than-life statue portraying Father White Arrow as this regal chieftain is a focal point of the Order’s Mother Temple near Brasília and an object of great reverence and pilgrimage for Valley of the Dawn members. Seated in a hieratic pose with hands securing his eponymous arrow, Father White Arrow gazes impassively over the temple, his head crowned with a huge, white-feathered headdress in the style of a Plains Indian.

This imagery links Father White Arrow more closely to a class of popular Brazilian spirit entities called *caboclos* than to the indigenous peoples who actually inhabited the Andes. Typically represented as the spirits of unacculturated Indians, *caboclos* are central figures in Umbanda, a diffuse and highly eclectic movement that integrates elements of popular Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian traditions, Kardecist Spiritism, and ideas drawn from esoteric



FIGURE 20.2 Father White Arrow

PHOTO CREDIT: MÁRCIA ALVES. USED BY PERMISSION

and New Age literature.⁴ Umbanda caboclos tend to embody the trope of the noble savage: in tune with nature, uncivilized, wild—the undomesticated Indian who possesses the wisdom excluded from the civilized self (Hale 2009: 102; 105). Visually, caboclos are represented dressed in elaborate feathered headdresses and other stereotypical markers of indigeneity, imagery derived largely from nineteenth century Brazilian nativist literature.⁵ Father White Arrow's iconography makes him instantly recognisable as a classic caboclo figure, a meaning that is not lost on Valley of the Dawn adherents and may contribute to the religion's appeal.⁶

4 Outside of Umbanda, the term caboclo also is used to refer to people of mixed indigenous and African (or European) origin, acculturated Indians, and peasants of the rural backlands. In this context it often has a pejorative connotation.

5 Nineteenth century Indianist writers like José de Alencar and Gonçalves Dias, as well as popular depictions of North American Indians, seem to be the primary inspiration for the figure of the caboclo in Umbanda. On the influence of romantic writers on caboclo imagery, see Carneiro (1964: 143); Ortiz (1978: 72–73); Brown (1994: 65–67). On the imagery and performance of caboclos in the Valley of the Dawn, see Oliveira (2013).

6 In the course of her doctoral research on the Valley of the Dawn, Emily Pierini found that many of her informants were attracted by the Doctrine's ability to integrate spirit entities, beliefs, and practices of other religions within its own emanationist metaphysics. This enabled

In fact, most of the spirit entities that Tia Neiva claimed to receive throughout her lifetime were figures familiar within the wider universe of Brazilian popular religions. Carmem Lúcia, Tia Neiva's oldest daughter, wrote in her memoir that one of the first spirit mentors Neiva perceived in visions was the caboclo Chief Tupinambá (*Cacique Tupinambá*), who later revealed himself to be Father White Arrow. Also important in Neiva's early development as a medium, and regarded today as important spirit mentors within the Valley of the Dawn, were Father John of Enoch (*Pai João de Enoque*) and Mother Tildes (*Mãe Tildes*), spirits of elderly black slaves known as *pretos velhos*. Beloved for their wisdom, humility, and grandparently mien, *pretos velhos* also are central figures in Umbanda. Mother Yara (*Mãe Yara*), described as the companion and twin soul (*alma gêmea*) of Father White Arrow, was another constant, guiding presence throughout Neiva's career as a medium. In Valley of the Dawn iconography, Mother Yara is depicted as a form of the Afro-Brazilian *orixá* Yemanjá, the goddess of the sea whose own imagery sometimes is syncretized with that of the Virgin Mary.

According to the Doctrine, Father White Arrow, after completing his evolutionary trajectory on Earth, commissioned Tia Neiva to carry on his mission of fostering human evolution. Adherents of the Valley of the Dawn consider themselves members of Father White Arrow's tribe, reunited by Tia Neiva for a final incarnation on Earth before the dawning of a New Age and a new planetary cycle. They believe that they have shared a glorious past over multiple lifetimes as emperors, sacerdots, queens, warriors, and magicians, reaching all the way back to a group of highly advanced beings sent to Earth from Capella. In homage to one of their shared incarnations as a band of Indians led by Father White Arrow in his last earthly incarnation, they refer to themselves collectively as Jaguars.

While the Jaguars catalysed great advances in human civilization and culture during the course of their sojourns across time and space, they eventually strayed from their mission and wrought great suffering. This has generated a karmic legacy, or "transcendental heritage," that fuels the cycle of reincarnation, ensuring their continual rebirth in the terrestrial world until the karmic load of the past can be fully discharged. The advent of Jesus marked a turning point in the Jaguars' collective history, making possible a form of karmic redemption referred to as the "Christic system" or "School of the Way." Since "giving their oath to Master Jesus two thousand years ago" as Mário Sassi wrote, the Jaguars have striven to exemplify Jesus's teachings of unconditional

them to integrate aspects of their identities or previous religious experiences in a way that felt holistic (Pierini 2013: 186–189).

love, humility, and forgiveness (Sassi 1995: 25). In this way Valley of the Dawn members believe that they—and potentially all human beings—can atone for past errors, be restored to the path of God and, eventually, return to the Mother Planet.

One of the ways the movement seeks to emulate Jesus is through “doctrinal conduct”: treating others with love, humility, tolerance, and forgiveness. Another is by freely offering rituals of spiritual healing to all who seek them. At their most basic level, these spiritual works, which are performed by trained members, are intended to “manipulate energy,” that is, clear negative influences and restore spiritual equilibrium. This energetic transformation is believed to operate on a frequency invisible to the naked eye via a spiritual current that is itself channelled from its invisible source through a descending forcefield of entities of light known collectively as the Indian Space Current (*Corrente Indiana de Espaço*). Headed by Father White Arrow, this eclectic group includes pretos velhos, caboclos, and orixás as well as spirits imaged as gypsies, medical doctors, knights, and others who are “above Good and Evil, according to terrestrial conceptions,” as Sassi put it (1995: 27). In the last five hundred years, many members of the Indian Space Current shared incarnations in Brazil, according to the Doctrine, enhancing the country’s reputation as a centre of spiritual vitality.

The Valley of the Dawn understands its principle mission to be the amelioration of human suffering, which has intensified as the Earth completes the present transition to a new era known as the Third Millennium. As members like to say, the Order is a “universal emergency room” for a planet on the verge of a profound change, “offering anguished and suffering Man an explanation of himself and a script for his immediate life” (Sassi 2004: 3). When everything is aligned and the *corrente* or current is flowing, Valley of the Dawn members believe that they can plug into an immense spiritual power plant whose voltage they draw on for healing, transformation, and karmic redemption.

20.3 The Clairvoyant and the Intellectual

Along with thousands of other Brazilians lured by the promise of economic opportunity and a better life, Tia Neiva moved to Brasília in the late 1950s as a young widow with four small children. Like these other *candangos* (migrants), she had left the familiar behind to participate in the state’s ambitious project for its new capital city. The late 1950s was a time of great optimism and tremendous social and economic change in Brazil, driven partly by a series of state-sponsored modernization projects that had transformed the country from an



FIGURE 20.3

Tia Neiva

PHOTO CREDIT: ARQUIVO DO
VALE DO AMANHECER. USED
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agrarian economy to an industrial power. But no project embodied the nation's optimistic vision of its future more than Brasília itself. The culmination of a long-standing desire to move the capital to the interior and the centrepiece of President Juscelino Kubitschek's (1956–1961) promise to advance the nation "fifty years in five," Brasília was intended to catapult Brazil from the third to the first world.⁷

Building the new capital city in the sparsely populated central Brazilian interior required the mobilization of forces on a scale that did change the direction of the nation, resulting in massive migrations of people, resources, and capital, but also reshaping the national imaginary around an ideal of the modern future marked by progress, order, and greater social equity. Brasília was intended to both model and produce a new *civitas*, as James Holston detailed in the *Modernist City*, his ethnographic analysis of the twentieth century's only planned capital city (Holston 1989). And yet, despite the optimistic

⁷ As Kubitschek's 1955 campaign promise put it (Holston 1989: 84). The idea of moving the capital to the interior dated back to the middle of 18th century. Since then it had been championed by various statesmen as a means to populate and develop the country's interior and the Republican constitution of 1891 had set aside an area of 14,400 square kilometers in Central Plateau for this purpose (1989: 17).

future Brasília seemed to herald, the social stratification and differential access to citizenship rights that it was intended to abolish quickly were implanted anew. Among other things, the workers who actually constructed the city were denied residential rights within it and relegated to working-class satellite cities that mushroomed in its shadows (Holston 1989).

Tia Neiva was one of those workers. She and her family initially lived in an improvised tent on the edge of a river before Neiva secured more permanent housing in Núcleo Bandeirante, just outside the footprint of the planned capital. Not long after her arrival, however, Neiva began to suffer from visual and auditory disturbances that affected her ability to work. Terrified, she sought help from a medical doctor and a Catholic priest, but the “visions of illuminated beings, visions of deformed beings, disequilibrium, conflicts,” continued to plague her (Damião 2007: 7). When a sympathetic neighbour diagnosed her condition as *obsessão*, or the influence of perturbing spirits, Neiva, young children in tow, began to visit different spiritist centres (*centros espíritas*) and Umbanda communities throughout central Brazil in the hopes of restoring her spiritual equilibrium.

Eventually, she met and developed a close relationship with a spiritist medium named Mother Neném, who helped Neiva “develop” her own abilities as a spirit medium. The two women jointly founded their own *centro espírita* in 1959 and named it Spiritualist Union White Arrow or UESB (*União Espiritualista Seta Branca*) in honour of Neiva’s primary spirit mentor, Father White Arrow. However, differences between the two mediums, exacerbated by their impoverished living conditions, strained the relationship and in 1964 they parted ways. Neiva, affectionately referred to by her followers as Tia or Aunt, then established her own centre of “*trabalhos espirituais*,” or spiritual works, in a rural area outside the capital of Brasília, calling it Social Works of the Spiritualist Christian Order (*Obras Sociais da Ordem Espiritualista Cristã*) or OSOEC.

This was where, less than a year later, she met Mário Sassi for the first time. It was an encounter that changed both of their lives. Convinced after three years of frequent visits that Tia Neiva was a “superbeing” who “represents the Spirit of Truth and whose fundamental mission is to prepare us for the future,” Sassi left his family, career, and middle-class life to join her in 1968 (Sassi 1974: 19).⁸ The couple married several years later. In 1969, OSOEC relocated to a

8 The reference to the “Spirit of Truth” alludes to a passage in the biblical Gospel of John where Jesus promises his disciples that God will send them an advocate in the form of the Spirit of Truth to comfort and be with them. Although the world will not recognize this advocate, Jesus’s disciples will know him for he “abides with you and will be in you.” John 14:16–17 NRSV.



FIGURE 20.4 Mário Sassi

PHOTO CREDIT: ARQUIVO DO VALE DO AMANHECER

former farm in the federal district near the town of Planaltina that Tia Neiva named the Valley of the Dawn. Sassi devoted the rest of his life to interpreting Tia Neiva's visionary experiences and building a coherent metaphysical foundation for an emerging religion whose beliefs and practices were still being revealed.

It was an endeavour for which he was well suited. A spiritual seeker and intellectual dilettante, Sassi worked closely with Tia Neiva as the official “interpreter of the Doctrine” until her death in 1985, editing her writings and biographical materials, clarifying the movement’s beliefs in official publications, helping coordinate and lead its corpus of rituals, and instructing initiates. He also served as OSOEC’s “secretary general” and official spokesperson. All of this work, Sassi told a researcher in the mid-1970s, was “a collaboration with Tia Neiva who, inspired by the entities of the Superior Astral world (*Astral Superior*), transmitted the messages” that Sassi interpreted, elaborated, and divulged (Galinkin 2008: 59).

While it is difficult to know where Tia Neiva’s contributions leave off and where her interpreter’s begin, I think Sassi largely was responsible for introducing an occultural framework into their collaboration. Unlike Tia Neiva, whose formal education had ended before secondary school, Sassi was bookish and intellectually inclined. Tia Neiva wrote in a stream of consciousness style that jumps from topic to topic and whose lack of continuity she camouflaged with an abundance of motherly compassion. Sassi’s writing, on the other hand, is professorial, full of scientific (or, more accurately, pseudo-scientific) terminology and dense explanations of the technical details involved in arcane processes like astral travel, as well as references to ectoplasm, animal magnetism, chakras, the perispirit, and other subjects common to theosophical and New Age literature. Reading his works chronologically, it is clear that Sassi worked hard to organize his raw material and clarify and streamline his explanations over time, appealing to scientific studies or esoteric literature by Allan Kardec, Chico Xavier, and others. Tia Neiva, at least in her writings, displayed no such concern with the scientific legitimacy or intellectual coherence of the ideas she was expressing.

In interviews I conducted with two of Sassi’s surviving children in 2017, each separately recalled their father as a voracious reader of science fiction and esoteric literature of various kinds, some of which he read in the original English. An aeronautics enthusiast and builder of model airplanes, Sassi was especially interested in extraterrestrials and flying saucers (*discos voadores*), a topic that had captured the public imagination in Brazil beginning in the late 1950s, fed by depictions of space travel, extraterrestrial life, and flying saucer sightings that circulated in various forms of popular media. Brazil even had its own nationally famous alien abductee, Antônio Vilas-Boas, who claimed that he had been taken aboard an alien spacecraft in October 1957 and sexually assaulted by a female alien (Santos 2016). Sassi’s enthusiasm for such stories also inspired his children who were “quite enchanted with his ideas about extraterrestrials,” as his son told me.

Notwithstanding his convictions about Tia Neiva's prophetic status, Sassi's relationship with her also seems to have provided an outlet for his intellectual ambitions and a means of reconciling his interests in occult spirituality and science.⁹ The task was a challenging one: Tia Neiva's visions occurred with an astonishing frequency and often were fragmented or disjointed in time and space. Some were indelibly vivid. Others were frustratingly nebulous, like the wisps of a dream that dissolve in the first rays of dawn leaving only vague sense impressions. Many were enigmatic or downright bizarre. In order to understand these sensory phenomena and organize them into a logically coherent system, Sassi constructed what I will call an "occultural hermeneutic" by which he interpreted Neiva's experiences and situated them within a larger occult framework derived largely from his reading of spiritist and theosophical literature. My use of the concept of an occultural hermeneutic adapts Benjamin Zeller's notion of an "extraterrestrial Biblical hermeneutic" employed by the founders of Heaven's Gate in the development of the group's understanding of the universe and human nature (Zeller 2014).

Christopher Partridge, who first coined the term occulture, described it as a "spectrum of beliefs and practices sourced by Eastern spirituality, Paganism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, alternative science and medicine, popular psychology, and a range of beliefs emanating out of a general interest in the paranormal" that typically is rejected by the guardians of religious and scientific orthodoxies and constantly is feeding and being fed by popular culture (Partridge 2005: 2; 2004: 65). Like an underground spring from whose waters diverse alternative religions bubble up, occulture is continuously flowing and changing. It is not primarily a secret or esoteric phenomenon itself, Partridge points out, but is public and sometimes even mainstream (2011: 121). A common occultural theme is what he called the "sacralization of the extraterrestrial" or the systematic interpretation of aliens as technologically and spiritually advanced beings who intervene in human life for good or ill (Partridge 2005: 167, 174).

In the next section, I examine this theme in the cosmology of the Valley of the Dawn that Mário Sassi laid out in various writings. One of Sassi's most sustained discussions of the role of extraterrestrials as divine emissaries occurs in his 1974 book 2000: *The Conjunction of Two Planes* (henceforth *Conjunction*). Published more than a decade after the events it purports to relate, *Conjunction*

9 According to historian and Valley member Marcelo Reis, who has written extensively about Tia Neiva's life and the development of the Valley of the Dawn, Sassi "never devoted himself to one specific branch of knowledge in which he could develop his intellectual aptitudes. He seems to have focused and channeled his education and intellectual capacity in favor of Tia Neiva's ideal" (Reis 2010: 195).

combines descriptions of Tia Neiva's alleged encounters with various highly evolved extraterrestrial beings, along with a general account of the mission that they have entrusted to her, buttressed by Sassi's explanatory commentary.

In a preface, Sassi describes himself as an "instrument" whose writing is "guided" by the extraterrestrial masters who work through Neiva, but the book also reflects the Space Age fascination with space exploration, the possibility of intelligent life on other planets, and the promise of technology that inspired so many popular cultural productions of the postwar era, from comic book superheroes to television shows, radio programs, and magazines. Almost certainly, Sassi's interests had exposed him to a global network of ufological writers like George Adamski and Erich von Däniken, whose works were translated into Portuguese and circulated in Brazil beginning in the late 1950s.¹⁰ However, the occultural influence on which I will focus was the emergent "extraterrestrial spirituality" that began to develop within Brazilian spiritist literature in the late 1930s, itself strongly influenced by the theosophical movement, which had a presence in Brazil as early as 1902 (Santos 2016: 95).¹¹ Although originating with Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–91), key theosophical ideas like the Masters of Wisdom and the evolution of humanity through different root races were more clearly articulated and expanded upon by later theosophical writers like Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934), whose *The Other Side of Death* was the first theosophical work published in Brazil (Pinto 1993 [1969]).

Sassi's interpretive and theological work in *Conjunction* is organized around a storyline articulated in two texts by well-known Brazilian spiritist writers Edgard Armond (1894–1982) and Francisco Cândido (Chico) Xavier (1910–2002).¹² Adapting the theosophical figure of the Master of Wisdom, Xavier and Armond both claimed that technologically advanced extraterrestrials from the planet Capella were responsible for humanity's progression, over the course of successive evolutionary cycles, from a primitive to a more advanced state. From colonies scattered across the globe, these extraterrestrial

10 Adamski's *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was published in Brazil as *Discos Voadores* in 1957 and von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?* was translated and published in Brazil in 1969.

11 Given the conceptual and historical affinities between Spiritism and Theosophy, it should not be a surprise that the earliest Brazilian lodges associated with the Theosophical Society formed initially within spiritist groups. Spiritist newspapers, conferences, radio programs, and other media were an important vector through which theosophical ideas were disseminated in Brazil. According to João Batista Brito Pinto (1912–1998), president of the Sociedade Teosófica no Brasil during the 1980s, the first theosophical lodge in Brazil was established in Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul in 1902. It was organized by members of the spiritist Center "Love of God" (*Amor a Deus*) and housed there. See Pinto (1993 [1969]).

12 Additionally, Tia Neiva may have been introduced to the story of Capella as a result of her involvement with spiritist groups. For more on this, see Hayes (2020).

missionaries established technologically sophisticated civilizations in Egypt, India, Mesoamerica, and the mythical Atlantis, among other locales. Over time however, their descendants succumbed to the lower forces of the material world and became corrupted by their love of hedonistic pleasures and the quest for power, necessitating the dispatch of new missionaries or other interventions to re-orient humanity on the path towards spiritual and scientific advancement. As described by Xavier and Armond, human history unfolds in the classic gnostic trajectory, alternating between periods of advancement and decline, as the Earth itself transitions through successive planetary phases.

20.4 Capella: The Mother Planet

While Tia Neiva's paranormal experiences most often involved the disembodied spirits of caboclos, pretos velhos, and other familiar entities from the world of popular Brazilian religions, Sassi reports that in 1959 she began to have contact with entities of a very different kind: inhabitants of Capella, a distant star that, according to Sassi, is located on the other side of the Sun (1974: 79).¹³ Just like Xavier's *A Caminho da Luz* (On the Way to the Light), allegedly transmitted by Xavier's spirit guide Emmanuel and published in 1939 and Armond's *Os Exilados de Capela* (The Exiles of Capella), published in 1949, Sassi described Capella as the home of an advanced race of beings charged with executing "God's plans for the Earth."

In notable contrast to the other spirits with whom Tia Neiva had habitual contact and whom she considered personal mentors and guides, the Capellans, Sassi observes, "are people like us, spirits occupying physical bodies" who inhabit a physical world similar to the Earth (1974: 31).¹⁴ "They are "molecular," he continues, but with a different "composition" than humans and as a result "their appearance did not have the diaphanous quality of the spirits, and their emanation produced an uncomfortable effect on [Neiva's] body" (1974: 31; 12).

13 The actual star Alpha Aurigae is not located behind the Sun. However, George King, the founder of the Aetherius Society, also spoke of a nameless planet located behind the Sun that played a role in the mythological history of humanity (Rothstein 2003: 149). In describing Capella's location as behind the Sun, Sassi may have been trying to synthesize the Brazilian spiritist literature with other esoteric sources.

14 The physical nature of the Capellans makes them closer to Blavatsky's original concept of the Masters than the later Ascended Masters that developed among more theosophically-oriented UFO groups, as Benjamin Zeller pointed out to me (personal communication May 2019).

According to Sassi, the Capellans mostly communicate by projection, “in a way similar to the transmission of television images” because they cannot tolerate the density of the Earth’s atmosphere (1974: 61). However, they do occasionally come to Earth in special vehicles, giving rise to the numerous tales of flying saucers that have become popular lore around the world. In another book, Sassi offers a more fanciful take, describing the Capellans as having “all the charm of the traditional blond and beautiful figures, belts full of mysterious buttons, typical of science fiction literature” (n.d.: 131). Most of the Capellans who communicate with Tia Neiva—Johnson Plata, Stuart, and Edris, for example—have names whose clipped consonants make them sound English to a Brazilian ear. These names underline their foreignness and further remove them from the familiar environment of Neiva’s customary spirit mentors. They may have been inspired by Sassi’s habit of reading esoteric and science fiction literature in English, although it is impossible to know with certainty.

Like attentive doctors or teachers, the Capellans have accompanied human beings throughout the centuries according to Sassi, “suffering with us, inventing new teaching methods, refining their contacts and continually searching for ways of guiding us” (1974: 79). Their advocacy intensifies during periods of transition: in the current planetary cycle of the last 2,000 years, Sassi notes, they’ve expended tremendous resources trying to reorient humanity as we rush on blindly, with little sense of where we will end up (1974: 17). Now, on the cusp of the Third Millennium and fearful that the suffering produced by the incipient transition between planetary phases will compromise the fragile progress that they have achieved on Earth, they have initiated contact with Tia Neiva.

According to Sassi, Tia Neiva’s superior and extraordinarily rare faculty of mediumship made her the perfect instrument to facilitate the Capellans’ mission of shepherding humanity “through the difficult and catastrophic passage” into the Third Millennium (1974: 7). Tia Neiva, he explains, possessed the faculty of “simultaneous consciousness,” or “conscious transport” which allowed her to be present within, while being fully conscious of, different dimensions. This enabled her to act independently in each dimension—physical, spiritual, and etheric or astral—traveling backward in time or forward into the future, or moving within and between dimensions, all while maintaining her normal existence in the terrestrial world. Thus, while her physical self continued to operate in the material dimension, Tia Neiva’s “etheric body” could travel to Capella where she was schooled in the details of her mission and its prehistory (Sassi 1974: 8).¹⁵

15 Tia Neiva’s extraterrestrial experiences occurred in 1959, two years after George Adamski’s *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was published in Brazil as *Discos Voadores*. However,

In *Conjunction*, Sassi describes how Johnson Plata and his extraterrestrial companions take Tia Neiva for interstellar rides in their spaceship, showing her Capella and detailing the various challenges they've faced trying to facilitate human evolution over the last many millennia. Much of what Neiva learns in the course of these voyages echoes the mythological history laid out in Xavier's *A Caminho da Luz* and Armond's *Os Exilados de Capela*.¹⁶ Sassi presents this history in bits and pieces in the form of extended dialogues between Neiva and her Capellan interlocutors. One of the many subjects of these dialogues is the critical role of Father White Arrow in the epic story of human evolution. This narrative thread unfolds over the course of several conversations between Tia Neiva and different Capellans, doubling back on itself in ways that suggest the difficulties Sassi faced reconciling Father White Arrow and other aspects of Tia Neiva's visionary experiences that spoke to a local Brazilian environment with the occultural notion of extraterrestrial masters that was circulating in esoteric milieus both inside and outside of Brazil.

20.5 Father White Arrow, the Great Orixá Jaguar and Spaceship Pilot

In *Conjunction*, Sassi describes how Tia Neiva was flying over the Andes in the Capellans' etheric spaceship when a Capellan named Amanto¹⁷ told her the story of the "Great Orixá Jaguar." One of seven orixás, or "masters more highly evolved than those on Capella," who direct God's civilizing plans on Earth, this superhuman entity would later be known as Father White Arrow. According to Amanto's story, some 30,000 years ago the Great Orixá Jaguar incarnated as the leader of the Tumuchy, a clan of "800 specially chosen spirits who were great scientists, principally physicists and chemists," as well as artists and weavers (Sassi 1974: 47). Using their advanced scientific knowledge, the Tumuchy built spaceships, known as *chalanas*, which enabled them to transport themselves to any point on Earth, and constructed great pyramids around the world in order to communicate with Capella and other celestial bodies. These pyramids

the description of her voyages to Capella fits the model of solitary astral travel that J. Gordon Melton characterized as typical of pre-Adamski contactees, as does the fact that the Capellans are described as originating within our solar system. In Melton's survey, post-Adamski contactees said their alien visitors came from remote planets beyond our solar system. See Melton 1995: 5–7.

16 In both Xavier's and Armond's accounts, the group from Capella is described as rebels who have been banished to Earth as a form of punishment, a plot twist missing from Sassi's version.

17 Valley members say that Amanto is the same spirit entity who manifested himself to Chico Xavier as Emmanuel, further underlining the importance of Xavier on the Valley's doctrine.

also served as massive power plants generating psychic and interstellar energies (50). "This, Neiva," Amanto confided,

explains questions about the knowledge of astronomy, calendars, cults, the treatment of materials and similarities in temples, pyramids, sphinxes, statues, ceramics, ceremonies, which our current science endeavours to explain in terms of human migrations and purely physical contacts (47).

Because of the primitive and dangerous conditions of the Earth, however, the Tumuchy encountered difficulties in their civilizing task. They eventually retreated to Easter Island, which they transformed into the "scientific headquarters of the planet and the centre of interplanetary communication" where "great spaceships coming from Capella arrived and departed" (48). The Tumuchy did not abandon the continent altogether, Amanto went on, but maintained "points of irradiation" in seven centres around the Earth where they "constructed fabulous monuments" that were "intended for the reception of forces from the Mother Planet and other bodies of the Solar System" (48).

Finally, the Great Orixá Jaguar and leader of the Tumuchy, exhausted by the physical demands of the terrestrial environment and having completed his mission, disappeared from the Earth. His people "continued on for some time, but without the impetus of their leader, they eventually left the island and dissolved." Later, in successive incarnations, they "carried notable civilizing traits, which served to prepare the great cradle of the Third Millennium" (49). The memory of the Tumuchy and their descendants was transformed into legends and myths of immortal gods who brought civilization to humans.

In a subsequent dialogue, Amanto returned to this topic and narrated the events that led to the emergence of the Tumuchy. It all began, he informed Tia Neiva, with the arrival of the first alien settlers on Earth, "transcendental spirits" who

were filled with God and Eternity. Their constitutions were of pure light and, as such, they differed little from the Divine Light. Their individuality was known only to God and the Great Masters. From this seraphic situation, they began to inhabit dense bodies and to operate these bodies they had to resort to the creation of intermediary bodies, giving existence to the soul. The experience was terrible and seductive at the same time.... Their reason for coming was to do their part and return to the Mother Planet. At the beginning they were perfectly conscious of this (55–56).

But little by little, the pull of materiality increased and they “ceased to be pure spirits inhabiting physical bodies and became physical bodies that had souls” (56). They began to distance themselves from their masters and the original plans.

Finally, the masters had to act. “How this happened will be difficult for you to understand,” Amanto advised Tia Neiva. “It was a huge ship called the Incandescent Star (*Estrela Candente*), which traversed the Earth’s skies, performing the divine sentence.” In yet another dialogue, Tia Neiva is told that the pilot of the Incandescent Star was none other than Father White Arrow, dispatched by the masters to crash his spaceship into the missionaries’ seven settlements around the globe, burying them deep within the Earth (43). After a period of stagnation, the evolutionary project was restarted under the direction of the orixás. “In the case of the Americas,” Amanto instructed Tia Neiva, “the great Orixá was Father White Arrow” (57).

One of the striking things about these dialogues is how they insert the figure of Father White Arrow into a narrative whose basic elements are shared among many theosophically-oriented UFO religions: the alien origin of humanity, its evolution, and subsequent decline; the gnostic struggle between the spiritual and the material; the idealisation of science and the identification of advanced technology with spiritual advancement; the reinterpretation of ancient pyramids and other monuments as part of a vast extraterrestrial communication/transportation system; the common origins of the world’s religions; and the beneficent concern of the masters who intervene periodically from afar. Re-imagined through an occultural hermeneutic, Father White Arrow is transformed from a classic caboclo figure into a scientifically and spiritually advanced cosmic master and, in one of the story’s more memorable details, the pilot of a spaceship charged with executing “the divine sentence.”

Also of note is that Father White Arrow is described as an orixá, despite the fact that he appeared to Tia Neiva as a caboclo and is depicted as such in Valley of the Dawn iconography. Sassi, via the character of Amanto, explains that this “Afro-Brazilian word is very apt because it means exactly ‘intermediate divinity between the believers and the supreme divinity’” (43). The tendency to conceptualize the orixás as a class of highly evolved entities of light who inhabit the highest echelons of the spirit world was (and is) present in Umbanda, especially its more esoteric forms. But Sassi, re-reading these African-derived deities through an occultural hermeneutic, takes it a step further. Transformed into rarefied cosmic masters, the orixás are purified of any connection to Afro-Brazilian religions or Africa itself and positioned as powerful intermediaries who are even “more evolved than the masters of Capella.” In the great

spiritual hierarchy envisioned by Mário Sassi and Tia Neiva, the only cosmic entity above the orixás (e.g., Father White Arrow) is God.

Father White Arrow's close proximity to the godhead also is conveyed by another name given to him at the Valley of the Dawn: Simiromba. In the "initiatc language" of the Doctrine, Simiromba refers to Father White Arrow's spiritual essence, which is defined as a "divine ray of God the all-powerful Father" (Souza 2000: entry on Simiromba). In the Doctrine's version of the theosophical concept of seven rays, Father White Arrow is conceived as the seventh ray of Jesus Christ. In one of his later works, Sassi describes Father White Arrow in even more esoteric terms as a universal master whose various names include Kuthumi, a reference to one of Helena P. Blavatsky's Masters of Wisdom (also spelled Koot Hoomi or К.Н.) (Sassi 1985: preface).

20.6 Tiãozinho/Stuart, the "Simple Brazilian Citizen" Who Also Was a Cosmic Engineer

Father White Arrow was not the only of Tia Neiva's Brazilian spirit guides to be reconfigured as a cosmic master. One of her oldest and most beloved mentors, Tiãozinho, was subject to a similar transformation. The spirit of a man named Sebastião Quirino de Vasconcelos, "a simple Brazilian citizen from Mato Grosso, the son of a prosperous cattle rancher," Tiãozinho died tragically sometime around 1916 according to Tia Neiva. The story goes that he perished alongside his young wife Justininha when the *chalana* or ferry that they were riding wrecked and they drowned (Sassi 1974: 26).

As one of Tia Neiva's most steadfast spirit guides, Tiãozinho accompanied her from the early days and was known for his "versatility and ability to solve intricate situations." (26) His unpretentious manner and folksy way of speaking "puts everyone at ease," according to Sassi, and gives Tiãozinho an important role in the Doctrine's present mission of preparing humanity for the Third Millennium (26). A scene in *Conjunction* describes the moment when Neiva discovered that the familiar, "happy spirit from Mato Grosso" that she recognized as Tiãozinho was, at the same time, the highly evolved Capellan she had come to know as Stuart:

Neiva's surprise could not have been more pleasant. Tião, the friendly and constant spirit, who had rescued her in many difficult hours, the simple and always cheerful Brazilian, was there with his imposing stature, his affable smile and his devoted friendship. Tiãozinho, a Capellan! She cried with joy.



FIGURE 20.5
Tiãozinho and Justininha
PHOTO CREDIT: JOAQUIM VILELA.
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In Sassi's telling, Tia Neiva immediately felt much more at home in her meetings with the extraterrestrial Capellans knowing that her familiar guide Tiãozinho was present with her, albeit in a form different from that he usually took.

Sassi explains that this kind of multiplicity is due to the spirits' capacity to exist simultaneously on different planes: "As Stuart, he is a citizen of Capella, performs technical duties in one of his worlds, and, probably, must be very busy. As Tiãozinho, he serves as a Spiritual Guide of the Valley of the Dawn" where he is in "great demand" (31).

Tiãozinho/Stuart's duality is brilliantly captured in a large painting that hangs in the movement's Mother Temple. Rendered in the style of a classical portrait, the painting depicts a moustachioed cowboy in a dark green shirt, hat in hand, facing the viewer in a frontal pose. He is encircled by a bright aura of yellow flames that flicker around him, seeming to burst forth from the painting's dark background. Around his waist is a wide, studded leather belt. On closer examination, the studs on the belt form dials reminiscent of the instrument panel of a vehicle, a subtle reference to the spaceship that Stuart piloted in several of Tia Neiva's visits to Capella described in *Conjunction*.¹⁸

18 Altirez dos Santos offered a similar reading of Tiãozinho/Stuart in Santos (2016) and Santos (2018).



FIGURE 20.6 Tiãozinho
PHOTO CREDIT: MÁRCIA ALVES. USED BY PERMISSION

According to the Doctrine, while Tia Neiva was establishing her mission at the Valley of the Dawn, Stuart was pursuing his own advancement in the astral world. “In the first seven years that he worked with us,” Sassi writes, “he graduated as a ‘Sidereal Engineer,’ becoming “a specialist in the spiritual world dealing with planetary problems. He possesses a *chalana*, the name our group gives to certain spacecraft, and he is the commander of a mother ship, which we call *estufa*” (26). Beyond these details, Sassi continues,

We know little of his functions. We are only told that Sidereal Engineering is concerned with problems of astronomical calculations and activities related to the physical aspects [of celestial bodies], which makes us wonder if he doesn't have ‘other personalities’ besides these (31).

Worthy of note here is the detail that even as Sebastião Quirino de Vasconcelos's life on Earth ended prematurely and tragically, the spirit known as Tiãozinho/Stuart continued to live on in another dimension, studying, working, graduating, and becoming part of an elite hierarchy of cosmic masters. Interestingly, the *chalana* whose shipwreck ends Tiãozinho's material life becomes, in the astral world, the spaceship that Stuart pilots between dimensions.

Tiãozinho/Stuart's dual personality points to more than just the capacity of the spirits to exist simultaneously on different planes, as Sassi would have it. It also suggests how the spirits speak to and about Brazil and its people. Unlike an entity like Father White Arrow, Tiãozinho is said to be the spirit of a man who lived in the twentieth century and the details of his life as a rural rancher resonate with many members of the Valley of the Dawn. Indeed, Tiãozinho's status as a “simple Brazilian citizen” and his folksy ways make him a stand-in for the *candangos*, the generation of migrants who, like Tia Neiva herself, came to work in the construction of Brasília, only to be excluded from the realization of its utopian promise (Santos 2016). As Brazilian scholar Altierrez dos Santos proposed, Tia Neiva spoke to those *candangos* in powerful stories and familiar imagery about where they came from and where they could go. She taught them that the past, with its karmic debts, could be transformed into a more equitable, orderly, and technologically advanced future and that the simple rural folk of the land, like Tiãozinho, could become space engineers and live among the stars. They could, in other words, become modern—if not in this life then in the afterlife (Santos 2018).

20.7 Conclusion

The modernizing project embodied in the construction of Brasília profoundly shaped the Valley of the Dawn's utopian imaginary and supplied Tia Neiva with many of her followers. While Tia Neiva's visionary experiences were the *raison-d'être* of the Valley of the Dawn's existence, her collaboration with Mário Sassi provided a doctrinal foundation for the movement that was important for its internal organization and expansion.¹⁹ Charged with interpreting the diverse paranormal experiences that Tia Neiva reported, Mário Sassi constructed an occultural hermeneutic that incorporated many of the ufological and theological themes common to a globalized occultural milieu.

However, something more than the translation of an older conceptual system into the terms of newer one is at work here. The Capellans symbolize modernity and technological progress, but they also embody a deep uncertainty about the social effects of such progress and the need for a "spiritualized science" that measures advancement not solely in terms of technology but also in terms of the welfare of human beings and their access to the resources necessary for lives of dignity.

In offering its followers a cosmology more congruent with the Space Age—conversant with science and technology, couched in the language of empirical rationality, and promising self-knowledge, healing, and individual transformation—the Valley of the Dawn also offers a different way of being modern.²⁰ Unlike the Brazilian state's vision of modernity, a project symbolized most concisely in its master plan for its capital city, the Valley of the Dawn affirms that human progress is not measured solely by advancements in technology and the rationalized forms of bureaucracy or in utopian ideals of egalitarianism via social engineering but also, more importantly, by moral evolution and "doctrinal conduct." The irony of Brasília is that the past had no place in its planners' vision of the New Era and in this refusal to recognize the weight of history, they ended up reproducing the very same inequalities of the past (Holston 1989). Instead, the Valley of the Dawn proposes that by confronting the past and transforming it through moral and ritual action, the Jaguars

19 For more on their partnership and its role within the Doctrine's gender ideology, see Hayes (2018).

20 One of the earliest to read the Valley of the Dawn and Brasília as mimetically related was James Holston. In 1999, he proposed that both the secular city and its sacred counterpart are "homologous embodiments" of a paradigm of modernity, each offering a different understanding of the modern. What makes the Valley of the Dawn powerful for its members, he wrote "is that it assumes as its mission a modernizing project similar in structure and origin, but not necessarily in function or performance, to the one that the state also attempts with Brasília" (Holston 1999: 624).

can liberate themselves from its continued grip in the present and achieve the future they desire.

Moreover, the Doctrine's message of salvation, as Altierrez dos Santos observed, is not exclusive to the living but also includes the dead. For the living, redemption is figured as continued spiritual, technological, and moral progress guided by benevolent extraterrestrials. For those who, like Tiãozinho and Justininha, have departed the earthly plane, redemption is continued evolution in the astral world (Santos 2018: 43). While Tiãozinho's terrestrial life was cut cruelly short by a twist of fate, as Stuart he went on to become an engineer of the astral world, whose advanced knowledge and technical expertise are applied to "planetary problems." The Jaguars, Santos wrote, see themselves on the same spiritual trajectory as Tiãozinho and Justininha: that at the end of their biological lives, their spiritual lives will continue to advance until such a time as they are reunited on the Mother Planet Capella (Santos 2016: 60).

Facilitating the Jaguars' work of redemption on the terrestrial plane are the entities of the Indian Space Current, who manifest themselves to the mediums of the Valley of the Dawn as pretos velhos, caboclos, and other familiar spirits from the world of Brazilian popular religions. Reimagined via Sassi's occultural hermeneutic, these entities are described as the *roupagens* or clothing temporarily donned by the Capellan masters in order to be recognized by humans. "The spirits of the Indian Space Current," he wrote,

present themselves in the *roupagens* that facilitate the best result in their work through mediums. For this, they use the 'worksuits' of the pretos velhos or the 'feathered plumes' of the caboclos. Even so, these spirits dispense with the habitual 'personalism' of these figures and never interfere in the free will of incarnated spirits [e.g., humans].

2004: 27

Echoing Sassi's words, a veteran member told me that for a highly evolved Capellan "to manifest here, he has to take on another *roupagen*, like a preto velho, to work. Because our constitution, our material world is very dense and their constitution is different, more subtle."²¹ What may look like familiar denizens of the Brazilian spirit world are, in reality, "voyagers from the stars," explained another veteran member I interviewed, "creatures who come from another intergalactic system and inhabit dimensions that we cannot even fathom."²² Working with the Jaguars to transform the weight of the past into

21 Interview with Mestre Fróes, Vale do Amanhecer, 22 June 2015.

22 Interview with Joaquim Vilela, Vale do Amanhecer, 8 July 2015. This quote also appeared in Hayes (2020).

the promise of the future, the Capellans are spirits of and for the Space Age, at once familiar and alien, old and new.

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The Aetherius Society: A Ritual Perspective

Mikael Rothstein

21.1 Introduction

UFO-religions are first and foremost religions. The fact that they focus the attention on UFOs, or rather are primarily inspired by notions of UFOs, does not make them unique. Religions vary greatly, and it should come as no surprise that many new religions emerging from the 1940s and onward entertain notions of extraterrestrial visitation, divine space beings, and concerned gods who seek inter-planetary solutions. Religions always build on things of relevance to those involved, and—as is well known—popular notions of UFOs have, more than any recent mythology, subsumed an array of modern concepts, and created more or less religious interpretations of some of the most important topics of today's world; science in general, space travel, advanced technology, biotech, reproductive technology, the threat of nuclear war, fear of the alien “other,” the perils of pollution and climate changes, environmentalism in general and more. In most cases more conventional religions would (more or less) on a principal level share such concerns, and (more or less) relate to the same issues. So, precisely because UFO-religions are *religions*, they should, from a scientific point of view, be studied along the same lines as any religion (Rothstein 2001), and the question of ritual—one of the constituting phenomena of religion—immediately becomes essential. This is true not least in the case of the Aetherius Society, one of the best consolidated UFO-religions where new and highly specialized rituals, as well as ritual types of greater familiarity, are employed. This chapter examines both the driving forces of the group, and the general impression of its “religious world” (Paden 1994).

21.2 Background

The Aetherius Society has been previously studied, and on a few occasions the group's rituals have come into focus (Rothstein 2003: 152–153; 2016: 338–340, Saliba 1999: 13, Smith 2003), but there is more to be said. The organization's worldview calls for immediate and decisive action in response to a perceived global threat, which makes the question of ritual essential to the

understanding of the Aetherius Society altogether, as it is by ritual means that all problems, according to the organisation, are solved. Space beings, known as Cosmic Masters, with whom George King (1919–1997), the founder and exalted model of the organisation is believed to have communicated, invited him to join their fight against an impending apocalypse and save humanity from disaster and self destruction through the employment of powerful healing rituals. Those who have joined forces with King and his extraterrestrial associates, consequently, have embarked on a mission to literally transform our world and shape the future of mankind through their religious practices. In that capacity they are “builders of the New Age.” A small 12-pages educational booklet called *Become a builder of the New Age* presents their perspective like this:

This short booklet contains a series of profound Cosmic Transmissions given by The Master Jesus and The Master Aetherius, through the yogic mediumship of Dr. King. They explain how the much prophesied New Age of peace and enlightenment will only come about if people work hard enough to make it happen. It also includes a beautiful prayer for spiritual strength to enable us to be of greater service to the world.¹

“Work” in this context largely means ritual participation, and “hard work,” i.e. dedicated and ongoing ritual action, is required. What to do, more precisely, is to serve as funnels for the space beings’ salvific “energies,” and become ritual facilitators of the benevolent extraterrestrials’ millennial ambitions. Indeed, the problems at hand are not human and terrestrial alone. The aggressive mentality and spiritual immaturity of mankind also pose a severe threat to other civilisations in our solar system, as the consequences of nuclear war and environmental destruction on Earth will affect them as well. Therefore, according to George King, highly evolved beings from Mars, Venus, Saturn etc. have come to the rescue in their marvellous space crafts, not simply to save *us*, but also to preserve themselves. And apparently they know what they are dealing with, as they have been visiting Earth for the past 18 million years.² The eschatology and millennialism of the Aetherius Society, for that reason, is cast in a distinctly ufological and extraterrestrial framework which at the same time unites humans with, and divides them from, the extraterrestrials. Humans

1 Aetherius Society, “Become a builder of the New Age,” at <https://www.aetherius.org.nz/shop/builder-of-the-new-age/>, accessed 22/05/2019.

2 That is according to the Master Aetherius channelled by George King on May 31, 1958, cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T8GYpcPXtog>, 30:41. Incidentally, according to George King, if in a hurry, it only takes a Venus space craft 2.5 seconds to reach Earth, cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SW_I-kSGck, 11:53.

and extraterrestrials are interdependent in the sense that they belong to the same universe and influence one-another, but at the same time they are very different given the extraterrestrials' spiritual, cultural, moral, intellectual and technological superiority. In short our example seems to confirm the general theory that UFO-based ontologies rose as a response to Cold War fears, and people's longing for a third party intervention. Highly evolved, wise, beautiful and peace loving aliens from our neighbouring planets suited the function perfectly. Indeed, the foundational messages upon which the Aetherius Society builds were received by George King as the Soviet-US conflict was at its cold-est, i.e. during the first ten years of his career as a medium (1954–1964).

From a historical point of view, and in terms of organisation, the Aetherius Society has emerged as one among many Theosophical off-shoots, but the particularities of George King's belief system and ritual program make it worthwhile to perceive of the group as a religion in its own right, rather than simply a modulation of Theosophy. Granted, in some ways George King's belief system simply takes Theosophy to the next level: For instance, The Cosmic Masters of the Aetherius Society, believed to reside on far away planets and travel through space, are clearly reworked versions of the Mahatmas of traditional Theosophy, entities who are also believed to live in their own realm isolated from ordinary people, but traditionally in the earthly valleys of Tibet rather than on other planets (Rothstein 2013; Smith 2003; Wallis 1974). Also the pronounced notion that humans mature spiritually through an ongoing cosmic evolution, is taken from basic Theosophical tenets (Smith 2003; Stupple 1984). Seen from another angle, however, the Aetherius Society offers a rather non-Theosophical approach: the religious ambition of the group does not restrict itself to the kind of intellectual speculations typical to traditional Theosophy, but primarily rest on a remarkably unvarying dogma emphasizing the urgent need for ritual entrepreneurship—quite a non-Theosophical inclination, as rituals are of no or only very peripheral relevance to traditional Theosophy. On the contrary the most striking feature of George King's project, it seems, is a strong accentuation of activist, efficient, transformative rituals which are passed on from the extraterrestrials to their emissary, George King, who has made them available to his acolytes. A possible root for this specific orientation may lie in yet another Theosophical off-shoot, the I AM Activity of Guy W. Ballard (1878–1939), which, in the 1930s adopted a more ritualistic stance (Rudbøg 2013: 163–166). Indeed the Aetherius Society and the I AM Activity have a number of common religious denominators, and it is highly likely that George King was somehow inspired by the work of Guy W. Ballard, his older peer. It also seems obvious that George King, who was engaged in esoteric circles even before he founded the Aetherius Society (Smith 2003: 84f.), was stimulated by the ritualism of

the—similarly (and disregarding its name) Theosophically linked—Liberal Catholic Church and Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934), the most visible expression being the similarities of the Catholic-style ritual garments worn by the bishops of the Liberal Catholic Church and the clergy of the Aetherius Society during services. They are remarkably alike.³

Similarly, a superficial look at the organisation's belief system may give the impression of a Christian congregation. An adapted version of Theosophy certainly permeates George King's ideas, but reinterpreted Christian lore also provides important building blocks. For instance, according to Jesus, who ranks prominently among the Cosmic Masters (Rothstein 2009), in a trace transmission received by George King, his mission to earth 2000 years ago was to avert a catastrophe (presumably a meteor crash, a disruption of the planet from within or something similar) that humans had brought unto themselves as a consequence of their miserable behaviour and karmic conditions. This catastrophe would have set back the development of humanity by thousands of years, something the Masters from Venus and elsewhere in the solar system could not allow to happen. And so the noble Venusian was sent to save humanity. His plans in that regard were developed long before he arrived to Earth, including the decision that he would suffer unbearable torments and die on a cross. However, contrary to what is believed in traditional Christian churches, Jesus never offered "forgiveness" for human sins. "Forgiveness," according to the Aetherius Society, remains an absurdity given the laws of karma. Rather, Jesus saved humans from the immediate consequences of their karma, which means that the karmic score shall have to be settled somehow, somewhere at some later point. It does not evaporate. According to the Aetherius Society-reverend Michael Scholey:

The cross is the symbol of the resurrection of the spirit of Man through karmic experience back to the godhead. It is a symbol of light. It is incorrect to call it a symbol of the crucifixion, it symbolizes a glorious ascension into light. The Master Jesus actually engineered his crucifixion, although it looks like he was trapped by certain wily people into the crucifixion, but in fact he engineered it.

3 A picture of initiates and ecclesiastical personnel in the Aetherius Temple in Los Angeles is posted on the organisation's website (several others are also available): <https://www.aetherius.org/membership-initiations/more-information-about-membership/>, accessed 22/05/2019.

Those who were opposing the Master Jesus, the reverend explains, thought they were acting independently, but in fact they were manipulated by the Master himself to be part of the plan. In effect they were acting in a play Master Jesus “had fashioned even before he came to this Earth.” And he continues:

So when he was crucified and rose again after the third day, this was his resurrection to show Man that death was not something that could hold Man. This was his supreme triumph. Such a fantastic thing, that he would deliberately go through this horrible death just so save us. We should always thank him for this supreme sacrifice. We murdered him but he still loves us and he is still with us.⁴

The theological layout is rather similar to what we find in various Christian traditions, including logical blurs and lack of explanations, but the deconstruction of “forgiveness” and the introduction of karma makes the Aetherius Society’s version something basically different. The notion that Jesus was sent from, and returned to, another world populated with divine beings, is not fundamentally different from what is imagined among Christians, but obviously a college of cosmic Masters on Venus is different from a more fuzzy heavenly environment populated by, apart from Jesus himself, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, a host of angels and a number of saints.

What is important in this connection, though, is that the reinterpretation of the Biblical Jesus-myth provides the basis for the Aetherius Society’s ritual program: What the Master Jesus initiated during his great ritual sacrifice, is being carried forward by other ritual means by his disciples through the leadership of George King. Obviously King is dead, but his importance (like that of Jesus in the Christian religions) has not waned after his death. Rather to the contrary. George King is venerated as the most important person in history, and as a religious figure he ranks second to none (Rothstein 2003). Hence, the ritual system he set in motion is still fully operational—with one exception; no new “Terrestrial Mental Channel” has been appointed after his death.

But karma is not the only problem. The Aetherius Society also taps into a third set of popular mythology and embraces quite straightforwardly contemporary largely Western conspiracy theories. According to David G. Robertson “there are a number of ways we can consider the relationship between religious and conspiracist discourses: conspiracism *as* religion, conspiracies *about* religions, and conspiracies *in* religion” (Robertson 2017: 6). In this case the last option is at work, as members of the Aetherius Society are taught that a sinister

4 Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hx4P0imb7ds>, accessed 22/05/2019.

network of dark forces—the Silence Group—are at play on Earth. A brief extract from a longer transmission delivered by the Cosmic Master known as ‘Mars Sector 6’ on September 15, 1956 to George King reads:

The Silence Group—what is it? I will tell you beyond doubt. It is run by the great financial organizations—organizations that move countries—organizations which cause conflict between one country and another, so that war may result. So that their profit may be great indeed. Organizations which have sworn to rule Terra with an iron hand. They cannot do it openly. How can they do it? There is only one way. That is by playing one faction off against another and causing internal strife between the two. The Silence Group does exist. It is like some insidious monster in your midst, working day and night.

Luckily something has been done about this; “a great shift and rise in consciousness, the Great Change precipitated by the Cosmic Initiation of the Mother Earth in 1964,” which makes the dark forces “scramble more than ever to hold on to their power, through money, politics, wars and fear” (Aetherius Society Los Angeles 2014). The “Cosmic Initiation” of 1964 is described like this:

In The Aetherius Society July 8th is regarded as the holiest day of the year. On this day in 1964, the Mother Earth—the living Goddess beneath our feet—received her primary initiation, which is the most important initiation she has received since her inception as a planet. Colossal spiritual energies of an extremely high frequency were radiated by the Gods from space, not to those living on the Earth, but to the Earth as an intelligence. In fact humankind had to be screened off from these energies, because we would not have been able to withstand their tremendous spiritual power.

Aetherius Society 2019a

Furthermore,

She [the goddess Earth] will not be allowed, by karmic law, to hold up her progress indefinitely—and the gradual release of her energies has already begun. When, after the coming of the Next Master, those advanced souls who remain on Earth enjoy the wondrous glory of the power she releases, this will be the dawning of a new age in the highest sense of the term. Humankind and planet will live in harmony with one another—and in full and open cooperation with the Gods from space.

Aetherius Society 2019a

The “Gods from Space” obviously were the Cosmic Masters from other planets, and when “the Next Master” appears in an unknown future, he will be of the same kind:

There will come a time when a Cosmic Master will come to Earth and walk openly among humankind for all to see. We do not know exactly when, or who the intelligence will be, but we have been told clearly that this will happen. The Master Jesus, the Lord Buddha, Sri Krishna, and certain other great spiritual figures who came to Earth from other planets, underwent the tremendous limitation of being born into an Earth body and living among us, with only a fraction of their true mental, psychic and spiritual abilities. As a result, many have doubted, and continue to doubt, whether or not these Cosmic Avatars are genuine. However, their teachings alone should be enough to prove the calibre of these wonderful intelligences to any thinking person.

The vision for the millennial future is not very specific, but it seems clear that a new foundation for a perfected world will be laid:

When the Next Master comes to Earth, the situation will be very different. He will come with all his powers, as a cosmic being, and will prove his credentials so that there can be no doubt whatsoever about who he really is—even to the most cynical of cynics or sceptical of sceptics. Following his arrival to this planet, those who persist in following a path of violence, greed etc. will cease to reincarnate here, and will instead be born onto a less advanced planet. Those who remain on Earth will then be free to build a new world of peace and enlightenment, unencumbered by the warmongers and materialists who have held the rest of humankind up for millennia.

Aetherius Society 2019b

The rituals performed individually or collectively in the Aetherius Society pave the way for this development. The arrival of the next Master, and the millennial conditions believed to follow this event, are in effect the climax in a process already being stimulated by the believers’ ongoing ritual efforts. In order to appreciate small as well as larger rituals performed by George King’s followers, this context must always be considered.

21.3 The Rituals of the Aetherius Society

A number of different rituals are important to the members of the Aetherius Society. Some are integrated into their everyday lives; others are more spectacular and designated for special occasions. The basic distinction between “doctrinal” and “imagistic” ritual modes suggested by Harvey Whitehouse are useful to describe certain characteristics of both: The first category, rituals in “doctrinal mode,” are conducted routinely and are well known to everybody in society; Sunday service in a Christian Church, Friday prayers in a Mosque, or the daily *pūja* offerings in a Hindu temple. Such rituals are designed to express and confirm basic dogmatic positions and organisational structures. The daily prayers and invocations recommended by George King, and the regular services held in Aetherius Society divisions, are of this kind. Rituals of the “imagistic” type, on the contrary, are only employed when needed which means relatively seldom, and always triggered by or associated with a specific event or situation; rare initiations, calendrical occurrences, responses to sudden crisis etc. Such rituals reflect extraordinary expectations or mark important milestones (Whitehouse 2000). A number of more spectacular healing rituals and groundbreaking initiations conducted by members of the organisation (and originally George King himself), are of that kind. Members of the Aetherius Society will find themselves walking on a steady, daily ritual path, but always with the expectation of occasional greater ritual events, with prodigious spiritual consequences, waiting ahead. In both cases, the notion of the extraterrestrials’ *presence* is stressed, as is the idea that they are here to *help* humankind. To members of the Aetherius Society it is really no big deal that our solar system is inhabited throughout, or that beings from other planets are able to visit us. This in itself remains their point of ideological and activist departure. The real marvel is that the extraterrestrials have come to help us during a time of dire straits, and that the Aetherius Society’s members, thanks to George King’s astonishing mediumistic capacity, are able to appreciate it and join forces with “the Gods from space” (King with Lawrence 1996). The rituals of the Aetherius Society are conducted on behalf of the entire humanity and of planet Earth itself, although people outside of the narrow circle of believers are completely unaware. Neither do the average inhabitant of our planet know that he or she owes his or her life to the Cosmic Masters and George King and his associates, who have averted a nuclear end to everything, which mankind would otherwise have brought upon itself.

In order to discuss the functioning of the Aetherius Society’s rituals, and thus the religious ideology of the group, I have divided them into five classes,

including what I have termed imagined rituals, i.e. rituals that only exist in religious narratives and not in reality. In every case much more could be said. In this presentation, unfortunately, only small, incomplete samples can be included.

21.3.1 *The Ritual Point of Departure: George King's Channeling Sessions*

According to the Aetherius Society in 1954 George King was approached by the Master Aetherius, who's disembodied voice was suddenly heard: "Prepare yourself! You are to become the voice of Interplanetary Parliament." Thus King was soon to be initiated as 'Primary Terrestrial Mental Channel' the medium through whom literally hundreds of communications, or 'transmissions' as they are known, have been given by higher beings from this world and beyond. "These transmissions contain some of the most outstanding spiritual teachings available on Earth today. Some of these were given in trance, others telepathically." And the hagiography goes on:

A few days later, he was visited by a world-renowned yoga Master whom he knew to be alive and active in India at that time. This Master appeared to him in physical form, but was able to enter and leave by passing right through a locked door that he did not open—in other words, by using some advanced yogic technique which would seem like magic to the uninitiated. During the meeting, Dr King was given detailed instructions in certain spiritual practices.

Aetherius Society 2019c

From George King's mediumistic sessions, 'transmissions,' according to his followers, grew not only a belief system, but also a number of rituals defined and explained by the benevolent intruders who told King how to serve to their satisfaction. It is adamant for the Aetherius Society to emphasize the importance of the 'transmissions' and to testify to their uniqueness. What they describe is in fact a kind of ritual. King, sitting in a chair or perhaps in a yogic posture on the floor, with a black mask covering his eyes, would move beyond all intellectual, emotional and cognitive barriers, and reach a very rare state of consciousness:

The type of trance employed by Dr King was a positive form of trance described as "yogic samadhic trance" which involves the raising of the mystical power of kundalini to a high chakra. This is an extremely advanced and rare form of mediumship, and although in every way positive and highly spiritual, is a tremendous strain upon the medium and also carries with it various dangers, as raising the kundalini always does—and

as such is not something to be attempted by anyone but the most exceptional of mediums. It requires a remarkable intensity of concentration, and also, especially if done in public, which Dr King did on various occasions, an extraordinary degree of yogic detachment. Dr King even adopted a positive trance state on at least one occasion on live television.

Aetherius Society 2019d⁵

Video recordings show King changing his demeanour and altering his voice as the alien being takes over his body.⁶ Sessions of that kind are certainly ritualized, and thus a ritual, allegedly made possible due to the intervention of Masters from Venus and other planets, but only available to George King, is the direct precondition for a broader range of rituals, developed by King under inspiration by the Masters, and used by his followers (see below). An *emic* perspective, of course, will simply credit George King himself for developing notions as well as rituals, including what I have termed ‘imagined rituals’, i.e. rituals imbedded in sacred narratives with no existence apart from that.

21.3.2 *Imagined Rituals: Rituals Performed in Sacred Narratives*

Rituals also appear as important elements in a number of the Aetherius Society’s myths and legends. These rituals, as seen from the outside, only exist as elements in sacred narrative, but to the members of the Aetherius Society, of course, they are historical facts of immense importance. One such ritual embedded in narrative is believed to have taken place on board a space craft commanded by a Cosmic Master known as Mars Sector 8, in 1959. The story, which has the character of a foundational myth, tells of George King’s mother, Mary, who had been taken aboard this vessel. Following instructions she was carrying a copy of the Aetherius text *The Twelve Blessings*, a book published the year before containing a revelation received by her son through trance mediumship from the Master Jesus. According to Mary King, Jesus took the book, held it in both hands, and solemnly offered it to an entity “Mightier than the Mightiest, Greater than all Greatness” who “didst choose our beloved brother of Earth—George, to be a leader among men of Earth, in this their New Age” (The Aetherius Society 1974: 11). Master Jesus now arranged the book in a box, while wonderful “cosmic music” was heard, then turned towards Mary, who was deeply moved by the situation, and, so the story goes, raised his voice and—using an archaic King James Version kind of language characteristic

5 The tv-broadcast can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSW_I-kSGck.

6 See references in footnote 10.

to the Aetherius Society whenever religious importance or ritual efficacy is stressed—said:

Blessed is he, who reading this Book doth understand.
 But exalted is he, even among Angels,
 Who reading this Book, doth take it to his heart
 And follow its precepts.
 Tell my Son, that this Book is now and forever—Holy

The Aetherius Society 1974: 12

The story adds considerably to our understanding of why the recitation of, and meditation on, the Twelve Blessings (to which we shall return below) is understood to be so important. The blessings are not simply given to George King by the Master Jesus, which in itself makes them very significant. Master Jesus also proclaimed a copy of the physical volume, in which they are printed, “Holy.” Furthermore, the same book was offered by the Master Jesus to the highest entity in the universe, and obviously (although not stated explicitly) accepted. Both events—the two ritual sequences performed by the Master Jesus—underpins the blessing ritual used by devotees by stressing that the blessings have been approved and highly recommended by spiritual authorities of the highest possible ranks. More precisely, it is the *myth* about these rituals that supports the daily blessing rituals performed by King’s followers, my point being that *notions* of rituals (which allegedly took place on board an inter-planetary space craft) may serve the same purposes as *de facto* rituals, and indeed be ideologically incorporated into actual social action.

This pattern, the intersection of myth and ritual, is by no means surprising. Throughout the history of religions, rituals are motivated and legitimized on mythological grounds. What people do, links them directly with the intentions and actions of the divinities in their sacred narratives (more on this below). As we have already seen, the notion of Cosmic Masters performing an initiation of planet Earth itself in 1964 is another example of a large scale ritual which has its existence only in myth. In that case, however, no direct connection can be made to specific rituals subsequently performed regularly by George King’s adherents, but the (mythological) incident certainly establishes the foundation for the overall ritual efforts of the Aetherius Society; to cleanse the Earth and humans from karma.

21.3.3 *Rituals Performed on Sacred Sites*

The religious topography of the Aetherius Society is of deep importance. Earth is believed to be in a state of deep spiritual and physical crisis, and a massive

influx of cosmic, healing energy is needed to save the planet and its inhabitants. To the members of the Aetherius Society 'cosmic energy' is a tangible force with the capacity to fundamentally change earthly conditions. It is emitted from invisible spacecrafts orbiting Earth, and George King, supported by his followers, has made it possible for the healing energy to flow into the planet. George King has served as the funnel for the cosmic energies and, during Operation Starlight (1958–1961), he has, in collaboration with an equal number of Cosmic Masters, ritually 'charged' 19 mountains and larger hills throughout the world (mostly in England, though) which now serve as holy receptors of the salvific energy (Abrahamson 1994). The goddess-planet has itself been turned into a kind of receptacle, and the members of the Aetherius Society are the caretakers of its functions. Hence a planetary initiation of cosmic proportions, including George King's mountaineering explorations, provide the foundation for the Aetherius Society's millennial vision. People embark on pilgrimages in his footsteps, and meditations and other rituals are performed on the sacred sites. Most remarkably Operation Prayer Power—which primary purpose is for 'Prayer Energy' to be invoked and stored for later release where help or harmony is required—was inaugurated on the mountain Holdston Down in 1973. The text accompanying a photograph from the event reads:

Spiritual energies invoked through recitation of Holy Mantra are directed towards a Team skilled in the science of dynamic Prayer, who convey the Energies into a specially-designed Battery capable of holding thousands of hours of this Prayer Energy for long periods of time. The stored Energy can later be released through a Spiritual Energy Radiator to any part of the world to relieve suffering caused by disasters, such as earthquakes, famine or war.

ABRAHAMSON 1994: 94

Charging sessions also take place at the Aetherius Society's facilities, but the holy mountains are believed to provide a particularly good venue for the process. This difference creates an implicit hierarchy where rituals conducted *in situ*, on the holy mountains, assume—with a reference to Harvey Whitehouse's distinction—imagistic qualities, while the more frequently held rituals in the Aetherius Society's temple rooms remain rather doctrinal. Originally charging-rituals were held on especially designated mountains, but subsequently they were redesigned in order to function elsewhere:

At these charging sessions participants invoke spiritual energy through visualization and mantra and direct this towards one of three people

standing in front of a “spiritual power battery.” That person in turn mentally directs the energy into the battery while reciting blessings and prayers from The Twelve Blessings. After each prayer, another of the three people takes their position directly in front of the battery.

Aetherius Society 2019e

At times when conditions require it, ‘Prayer Power’ is released and directed towards this or that zone of conflict or area struck by war or unrest, and problems are eased. Many such incidents are mentioned by George King’s disciples who will, also in these matters, follow their leaders minute instructions (King and Lawrence 1996: 106–114). While alive George King would himself head all operations. He had been instructed how to perform the rituals in front of the Prayer Power device, and his followers would support him during his ritual measures where he would, among other things, wave his arms in particular patterns, call upon spiritual forces, and utter prayers.

21.3.4 *Rituals Performed in Temples and Prayer Rooms*

Charging the ‘Prayer Power Battery,’ effectively a small box, and releasing its content is an extremely important aspect of the Aetherius Society’s ritual scheme. The practice, which includes loud recitations of the Twelve Blessings, spectacular ritual garments, and a solemn attitude among those participating, is believed to change the world fundamentally. Participants clad in orange gowns, one at a time, approach the contraption and utters prayers while forming a kind of Hindu or Buddhist *mudra* with their hands. It is always stressed that participants must cultivate a deep feeling of sincerity, and that a sentiment of deep belief must permeate each of them. In order to confirm this state of affairs, participants will often perform in ways the outsider would find exaggerated or awkward, using archaic words, assuming imposing postures and displaying inflated emotions. Those awaiting their turn will jointly recite Buddhist mantras, *om mane padme hum*, etc. The religious trust held by believers in this small box, which allegedly stores the ‘spiritual energy,’ is absolute, and people relate how they undisputedly sense the energies flow. Hence, a contraption the size of a shoebox serves as evidence for everything claimed by George King. It is, however, necessary to mature spiritually before any such experiences can be expected. In scholarly terms, the individual is socialized and educated to appreciate the premises for the ritual before he or she is allowed to join as a participant. Apart from the administration (accumulation and release) of ‘Prayer Power,’ a number of other rituals also contribute to the realization of the Aetherius Society’s millennial vision. Only one more element of the ritual matrix can be addressed here. Again the correlation between the

holy mountains, the ideal of the religious leader, a physical item, and the practice of the devotees is quite clear.

The Aetherius Society has in several ways emulated the format of Christian rituals. Services performed in front of the congregation include an altar, religious imagery (pictures of George King, a Hindu AUM-motif, various New Age-style symbols etc.), a cross shaped figure, sacred prayer and a cleric wearing special clothes and ornamentations. A simple analysis would suggest that a deliberate aesthetic strategy has been adopted to legitimize the organisation in the face of the majority religions, but this is hardly the case. Rather, as already mentioned, a tradition going back to the Liberal Catholic Church seems to be at work, including notions of clerical vestments channelling energetic flows. Obviously Leadbeater and his associates quite purposely imitated the Catholic Church's ritual structure and style, but as far as George King is concerned, his ritual design seems to refer to the esoteric Liberal Catholicism only. No justification through identification with the Roman Catholic Church is attempted what so ever, while the Theosophically pertinent ritual dynamics of the Liberal Catholic Church are of permanent relevance: The superficial likeness should not distract us. What transpires during rituals is quite specific to the Aetherius Society only. The cross, the centrepiece of the ritual chamber, is, for instance, inlaid with stone samples from the above-mentioned 19 hold mountains, and refers only to strictly Aetherius Society-notions. The cross is "an intense Spiritual Energy Radiator" which George King describes in the following words:

No matter how often this is used, or how much Energy either radiates from it naturally or is drawn from it by means of mystical ritual, the Power in the Cross will never be exhausted. Every stone has an unbreakable link with its source, and the more Energy drawn through every stone, the more that stone—acting as a natural receiver—will draw from its source.

I have given you a Cross here which is not only unique in its design and that which it supports, but which is a powerful radiator of the truly magnificent blend of Spiritual Energies originally put into the Holy Mountains by The Cosmic Masters.

I now declare the design of this Cross to be a present to mankind in celebration of my 62nd birthday.

ABRAHAMSON 1994: 121

The cross is not a symbol, nor a simile. It is a ritual device specifically shaped to enforce Georges King's religious goals. The rituals performed in front of the cross, consequently, are believed to create concrete changes in the world as the

power of the sacred item is unleashed. Also notice that George King is the creator of the cross, and that rituals relating to the object, for that reason, will also relate to him. George King is the object of intense religious devotion, and the rituals pertaining to the cross in the Aetherius Society's sacred chambers can be interpreted as an expansion of the devotion to the religious leader, which has not seemed to wane since his death (Rothstein 2003).

21.3.5 *Rituals Performed in Privacy*

When the ritual utterance of the Twelve Blessings is conducted in privacy—a good example of Whitehouse's doctrinal rituals—the individual acts alone, and the process is seen as a method to enhance his or her spiritual development. But the practice will also transform the world as such. Given that all members—more or less on a daily basis—will recite the blessings, all members of the Aetherius Society are in fact joined in their efforts to create a better world by means of ritual action. As stated in a video-instruction where the millennial expectations are stressed: “That is what this practice is all about ... this is going to change the world more than anything else in a lasting, enduring and correct way.”⁷ The blessings can be said aloud or remain an inner voice. After a few minutes of contemplation, visualization and breathing control, the recitation commences. Hands must be raised so they are parallel with the top the shoulders with palms facing forwards, and fingers kept together. The first blessing reads: “Blessed are they who work for peace,” a brief sentence which, in the printed version of the text, is followed by a few pages of theological elaboration. All lessons are introduced with a brief precursor by the Master Saint Goo-Ling, but otherwise are spoken by the Master Jesus, who addresses his audience as his “adorable children.” Blessing no. 2. focus on “The Wise Ones,” no. 3. “They Who Love” etc. including extraterrestrial entities, the Galaxy, also a divine being itself, and even “The Absolute,” the ultimate godhead. It is emphasized, that efficacy has to do with engagement: “Try to put as much passion into each word as you possibly can. You don't have to be loud but you do have to really mean each word.... In order for any prayer to work you have to really mean it. The more you mean it, the more it will work” (Aetherius Society 2019f). This feature is probably most pronounced when people conduct the ritual collectively and may have an interest in displaying their engagement publicly; to the outsider, however, their behaviour may seem rather theatrical.

21.3.6 *The Future as a Ritual Design*

As pointed to by Garry Trompf, “members of new religious movements typically share a heightened sense of cosmic significance by believing their activities

7 See the video, ca. 7:00, available at Aetherius Society 2019f.

are crucial for human history [...], even its very culmination [...]" (Trompf 2012: 63). Indeed. In fact, the elitist self-perception of new religious coteries is one of the constituting features of such movements. Therefore it is not at all surprising that their religious activities are designed to display efficiency and constructive enthusiasm: As we have already seen (and as I have pointed to previously, cf. Rothstein 2003b: 152–153), the millennial expectations of the Aetherius Society entirely depend on the ritual actions of George King's devotees, who see themselves as instrumental in the process of shaping a new, perfect world. No glorious future will materialize on its own. It has to be forged, either by means of rituals given by the benevolent extraterrestrials or developed by George King himself, and the members of his organisation—'the Builders of the New Age'—are the tools of the process. The ritual system does not simply express devotion, gratitude or awe. The multitude of strictly codified actions are believed to change the world and literally shape the future. There are, of course, elements of ritual recollections of past mythical events, but the majority of ritual procedures are implicitly projecting the future in order to ensure a certain structure in the world, an ideal cosmic condition. On the one hand the Aetherius Society awaits the coming of the next avatar known as a Lord of Karma, who will spearhead a spiritual revolution and ensure a new Golden Age, but at the same time people are urged to pave the way for that very entity, as if the inevitable needs a helping hand (Abrahamson 1994: 75–77). This is probably the most striking feature of the ritual system George King developed: The ritualism of the Aetherius Society is shaped to help the karmic fate of humanity to take the right direction. Certain things pertaining to the future of mankind lie, so to say, in the cards, but many other things will be determined according to the workings of the Aetherius Society, who will always assume the responsibility—and the honour—for having evaded a nuclear disaster that posed an imminent danger to the very existence of people of Earth.

21.4 Conclusions

The Aetherius Society has placed its gods in space ships which, by and large, is an innovation. In order to make their religion work, however, George King and his disciples have devised a number of rituals that disregarding their special ufological context, are serving exactly the same purposes as rituals throughout the history of religions. This, of course, confirms what was stated in the beginning of the present chapter that UFO-religions first and foremost are *religions*. What we should note with regard to the orthopraxis of the Aetherius Society, rather, is the fact that it, in the eyes of the faithful, is an expression of the salvific alien intervention into human affairs. In attending rituals in the Aetherius

Society, people align with the benevolent visitors and inscribe themselves into the ranks of a spiritual task force of the human elite. This may well be the most significant mechanism associated with George Kings' religious legacy. Ritual participation allows members of the Aetherius Society to be vital contributors to the building of an entirely new world.

Today the general notion of UFOs etc. has moved on, and the Aetherius Society appears rather *altmodisch*, even if some measures are taken to keep track of more recent developments in the broader UFO-related New Age context. The current leadership remains faithful to the founder, who himself—it is believed—was elevated by the space people to the rank of Cosmic Master. No new leader has been appointed, and in all likelihood no successor will be introduced. The organisation is carrying King's legacy, which is believed to be perfect. Consequently no new revelations or messages are received nor expected, and the theology and ritual strategies developed by George King in order to process what he learned from the space people, are unswervingly continued. King's charisma, apropos Max Weber's classical approach to understanding the social dynamics following the death of a religious leader (Weber 1922), has been routinized into virtually any media with one exception; another living human being. A conservative mentality seems to prevail. Also, a nuts and bolts-conception of the spacecrafts still applies, and nobody in the Aetherius Society would contest the thoroughly anthropomorphic image of their occupants left by George King. Neither have the Cosmic Master changed their places of origin, disregarding everything we now know about our solar system. They come from close by planets, even if they—in a characteristic cryptoscientific expression—do not “exist at the same frequency of vibration that we do here”⁸ and therefore will be invisible to the human eye until humans have evolved spiritually to another level of perception and understanding (Aetherius Society 2019g). George King's insights are believed to superiorly supersede those of modern science. King's knowledge is, in fact, believed to build on the ultimate science as it has been handed over to him by the Cosmic Masters. The adaptation to modern astronomy and physics, which otherwise tend to shape or at least influence present day ufology, is simply absent. The Aetherius Society remains steadfast, loyal and true to the tenets of the theological ufology of the 1950s, and keep acting accordingly.

The ritual strategies and intentions of the Aetherius Society rest upon an eschatological turned millennial worldview. Not long ago the world of humans on planet Earth was in imminent danger due to the invasion of evil, cosmic

8 This particular case refers to the Master Jesus from Venus.

forces, but the situation was—largely unknown to the earth-people facing the perils—averted by Space Brothers who have left their elevated state of being, entered the karmic process of those less spiritually developed, and devoted themselves to the salvation of mankind. This general perspective of extraterrestrial assistance during a severe crisis, is not isolated to the Aetherius Society (cf. Cusack 2015). A number of UFO-contactees active during the same period as George King entertained similar notions, for instance George Van Tassel (1910–1978) (Van Tassel 1952), and Buck Nelson (1895–1982) (Nelson 1956: 28), while others, such as Charles Boyd Gentzel (1922–1981) and Pauline Sharpe (Nada-Yolanda) (1925–2005) of Mark-Age (Nada-Yolanda 2002 [?]), held softer eschatological visions, awaiting the return of Space Commander Jesus who will, according to their expectations, cleanse the spiritually polluted earth. Decades later apocalyptic visions still inspired ufological theologies, as in the case with Sheldan Nidle (b. 1946) and the Ground Crew who appeared (on the internet) in 1996 (Helland 2000), and even today the motif seems to live on. Also, similar notions are reflected in many films and novels of Western popular culture during the 1950s when the Aetherius Society had its formative phase, with all probability due to the cultural climate created by the Cold War. As I have pointed to elsewhere (Rothstein 2000: 89), George King's apocalyptic fears and millennial hopes were probably boosted by the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, as his (mythological) rendering of planet Maldek's sad fate was published the year after. The people of Maldek, King explains, self-destructed in a nuclear holocaust, and the people of Earth were, and to some extent still are, sliding down the same catastrophic slope. Luckily the Cosmic Masters, George King, and his followers are here to save us from ourselves (Rothstein 2003: 145–149). The classic contactees were not religious leaders *per se*, but rather embodiments of the emerging, and indeed diversified and confusing UFO-mythology which, thanks to their efforts, was inserted into a larger pattern of eschatological or millennial notions and thus made tangible (Rothstein 2003a: 63–64). George King, however, made the whole thing a question of ritual intervention on the part of benevolent extraterrestrials and ritual participation on the part of good willed humans. This link between humans and 'the Gods from Space,' to paraphrase George King's own terminology, has less to do with worship or veneration, and more to do with joint efforts and cooperation. It seems likely that the sensation of working together with the extraordinary extraterrestrials in order to make an ideal world come about, is the believers' most important incentive. There is always more to be learned, more to understand, but above all members of the Aetherius Society are devoted to ritual action. They consider themselves, quite literally, builders of a new world.

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Rael and the Raelians

Régis Dericquebourg

22.1 Introduction

The French contactee Claude Vorhilon, also known as Rael, previously Raël, founded in the 1970s a movement which became one of the most successful contemporary UFO religions, one that has now assumed a place among other minority religious groups in the world. (Rael claims the group gathers 130,000 members in 121 countries). This movement, known as the Raelian Movement or Raelism, is well-known because of its leader's controversial opinions, such as those on sexual freedom, which follow the stream of the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s. The group also attracted attention because of its project to clone a human being. In this chapter, I present the career of Rael, describe the spiritual beliefs and the social ideas of the Raelians, provide an overview on the organization, and finally, from a sociological point of view, situate this movement among types of religious organizations, and ask what type of religious leader is Rael.

22.2 The Founder: Claude Vorhilon Alias Rael, the Contactee

Claude Vorhilon was born on 30 September 1946 in Vichy (Auvergne) from a woman of modest socio-economic background and an unknown father. Rael believes that the latter was a Jewish refugee passing through the small town of Ambert (Puy-de Dôme, Auvergne). To avoid the moral reprobation concerning a birth outside wedlock, his mother affirmed that Claude was the son of a female friend, and that she had been granted custody of the child. Notwithstanding this arrangement, the young Claude was brought up by his grandmother and his aunt. His schooling was chaotic because he was undisciplined, eventually being expelled from several colleges. Despite his lack of discipline, Claude Vorhilon credits his schooling as the place where he began to like poetry. When he was 15 years old, Vorhilon put an end to his scholarship, and went to Paris with his guitar to become a professional singer. He was a street singer for three years and sang in the famed Cabaret de la Rive Gauche. He took the pseudonym of Claude Cellier in honour of the skier and

auto-racing champion Tony Sailer. In fact, at this time Rael wanted to become an auto-racing driver. To bring himself closer to the world of auto racing and driving, he became an automobile journalist, allowing him to try driving different cars. He created his own car review publication, but unexpectedly an extraordinary event upset his ambitions, and even his life.

In his book *Le livre qui dit la vérité* (Rael 1998: 15–18) Claude Vorilhon relates that on 13 December 1973 during a walk at the Puy de Lassolas, a hilled volcanic area near Clermont Ferrand where he lived, he saw a flying saucer which landed near him. He next met a 1.20-meter-tall “humanoid” with slanted eyes, long black hair, and a small black beard. “He was dressed with a single-piece cosmonaut suit, and if his head seemed to be in the open air, it was surrounded by an odd halo” (Rael 1998: 14). This strange creature explained to him in French—“for he spoke all the languages in the world” (Rael 1998: 14)—that it used to come to this planet and that it came this time to speak to Claude Vorilhon, whom it knew. The space being indicated that Vorilhon had led him to the Puy by the means of telepathy. Particularly, it told him that it must speak to him about the Bible, a copy of which Vorilhon had purchased under its telepathic influence a few days before.

At this point, they both entered the space vessel, where the being provided a long revelation on the mysteries of life and the Bible. To Claude Vorilhon’s understandable question, ‘why me?’, the creature answered: “We needed someone who lives in a nation where new ideas are well-accepted and where the living people are allowed to express their mind. France is the land where the democracy is born.” (The creature’s history is somewhat erroneous.) He continued, “we need a person who is a freethinker but not anti-religious.” The being explained that in having a Jewish father and a Catholic mother, Vorilhon was the link between two very important peoples in the history of the world. Further, it indicated that as he was not a scientist, he would not complicate things, and would simply explain them (Rael 1998: 16–17). For six days, the being engaged in one-hour conversations with Vorilhon. The creature revealed that it was an ‘Eloha’ charged with the mission “to watch the conditions in which the Humans are now, and to look upon them. They are the future, we are the past” (Rael 1998: 18). Then the Elohim named Claude Vorilhon ‘Rael,’ which they explained means “Son of the Light,” and also an expression used by Free-Masons and Christians to surname themselves (Peyrefitte 1971; Luke 1–8; 1 Thess. 5:1–6, 5:9–11). I use this pseudonym in the following of this chapter.

Rael affirms that he took notes of the Eloha’s speech and in 1974 he published it in a book entitled *Le livre qui dit la vérité* (“The Book which Says the Truth”). This publication provoked the curiosity of a certain public and Rael was interviewed about his experience and about his book in several television

broadcasts. He also delivered a speech to 3000 listeners at the famous Parisian concert hall Pleyel.

In 1975, Rael created an association to support the spreading of his revealed message, which he named the MADECH, an acronym of "*Mouvement pour l'accueil des Elohim, créateurs de l'humanité*" ("Movement for the Docking of the Elohim, Creators of Humanity.") He left it on 13 May 1976 in order to give the organization autonomy. He then created and named twelve 'Guides' within the congregation of the MADECH, his first circle of disciples. After that, Rael retired to a farm in the Perigord to write a second book. There he met the Elohim a second time. During this meeting, Rael indicated that the Elohim collected his DNA from his arm using a laser, a spot on his arm serving as proof of this claim (Rael 1998: 152).

Rael carried on spreading his message and organizing his movement, yet he faced mockery and critics in the French media, which was influenced by French anti-cultist groups. Thus, Rael departed for Montreal in October 1976. There he established a first headquarter in Canada (at Longueuil, Quebec), where he delivered a speech to an audience of 1,300 persons. He found that he was better welcomed in Quebec than in France. On 22 March 1977, the Raelians declared a constitutive charter of the movement in Canada. The same year, the International Raelian Movement was legally declared and founded in Geneva (Switzerland). By 1978, Rael had more followers in Canada than in France (Cherblanc 2005: 76) and in 1981, the Canadian Raelian Movement was founded as an association with scientific, religious and philanthropic purposes. The group amended their statutes in 1981 as a solely religious association. This meant a change of orientation of the Raelian Movement, which proclaimed itself non-religious at its beginning. That change drew attention from the anti-cultist organizations (see below).

Rael lived in Quebec from 1992 to 2004. He left this country after a clash with a journalist on a TV program. Then he lived in the United States (2005–2006) and Switzerland (2007–2008), and at the time of this writing has lived in Japan since 2009. He stayed briefly in Africa and South America. It seems that Rael left France, Canada and Switzerland after hostile media campaigns against his movement, influenced by the anti-cultist organizations in French speaking countries where the media are sensitive to the anti-cultist organizations campaigns (particularly in France where the media reflected the governmental fight against the minority religious groups) (Palmer 2011: 26,109; Dericquebourg 1996: 10–11). Since the beginning of his leadership, Rael faced the usual accusations against the minority religious groups (Melton and Introvigne 1996) and also more specific critics such as accusations of paedophilia, debauchery (Cherblanc 2005: 136), Satanism (perhaps a confusion between the Elohim and

devils in his opponents' minds?), occultism (Cherblanc 2005: 132) and authoritarianism. Facing some of those allegations in France and Canada, Rael filed lawsuits against the authors of the accusing materials, and generally won the resulting cases. (For example, see Appeal Court of Reims, Rael *versus* Assan, 1994; Regional Court of Paris, Rael *versus* Abgrall, 1996; Appeal Court of Paris, Rael *versus* Kouchner, 2007, public insult; Small-Claims Court of Quebec; Rael *versus* *Journal de Montréal* 2009). Because his views on the 'geniocracy,' governance only by the most intelligent, he was accused also of being nondemocratic. Additionally, anti-cultists have affirmed that the Raelian Movement is not a religion, and accuse it of proclaiming to be religious only for benefiting from the tax exemptions on religions (Cherblanc 2005: 159). Concerning paedophilia, the Raelians replied by founding the NOPEDO association, which primarily denounces the paedophilia in the Catholic Church (see below).

22.3 Main Aspects of Raelian Beliefs

The Raelian credo is given in Rael's three books: *Le livre qui dit la vérité* ("The Book which Tells the Truth") (included in Rael 1998) and *Les extraterrestres m'ont emmené sur leur planète* ("The E.T. took me to their Planet") (also included in Rael 1998), both of which relate his supposed talk with the Elohim, and *Accueillir les extraterrestres* ("Welcome to the E.T.") (Rael 1979).

From an historical viewpoint, Rael is part of a lineage of authors who defend the thesis of the plurality of the inhabited worlds in which one finds Lucrece (94–54 BC), Lucien de Samosathe (120–192), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Kepler (1571–1630), Fontenelle (1657–1757), Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), Voltaire (1694–1778), Charles Cros (1842–1888), Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893), Georges Adamski (1891–1965), George Orwell (1903–1950), Erich von Däniken (1935–) and journalists who popularised the idea of the existence of extraterrestrials such as the French Jean Claude Bourret (1941–) who published seven books on this topic from 1974 to 2018 and Walter Sullivan (1918–1996) (Renard 1988: 31).

Raelism appears to many, and presents itself as, an atheist religion, since it links humans to their creators but does not proclaim the existence of God (Rael 1979: 104). Rael affirms that he recognizes prophets such as Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, and others, and that he waits for their return alongside the Elohim. He also asserts his faith in sacred writings like the Koran, but mainly the Bible (Old and New Testament). Indeed, like Erich von Däniken (Renard 1998: 29), Rael legitimizes his beliefs with biblical references. However, he has sought to remove from the sacred writings not only their mysticism but

also the human laws grafted onto them by men who wished to legitimize their domination (Rael 1979: 105). Hence, we cannot classify the Raelian doctrine as unbiblical or even a postbiblical doctrine. It takes place in the Dänikenist stream which proposes a materialist rewriting of the Bible.

Rael proposes an original cosmology in which we find several related ideas. Firstly, he replaces God by the Elohim. As noted above, Rael denies the existence of God. Nevertheless, to resolve the question of the creation, the meaning of life and the destiny of the humankind, Rael attributes to the Elohim the role of God for our planet (at least). Indeed, the Elohim are the creators of the humanity and they will provide eternal salvation to those who are worthy after the apocalypse. Secondly, he relates religion to science. Jean-Bruno Renard, a scholar-specialist of UFO groups, has argued that Rael invented a syncretism between science and religion (Renard 1988: 14). In his books Rael presents his doctrine as "the religion of the Science" (Rael 1998: 60, 190). This recalls the similar affirmation of L. Ron Hubbard, science fiction author and founder of the Church of Scientology (Hubbard 1954: 279). For Canadian scholar of new religious movements Susan J. Palmer, since Rael proclaims that "science is religion," and also because Rael follows earlier thinkers such as Rousseau and Voltaire in accusing the Catholic Church of obscurantism and instead declaring that only science is able to lead to the salvation, the Raelians are "the True Children of the Enlightenment" (Palmer 2004: 13),

For Raelians, the unusual phenomena of the bible are interpreted through appeals to extraterrestrial advanced technologies (Rael 1998: 60). Thus, the wheel seen by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1: 1–15) is a flying saucer (Rael 1998: 46). According to him, the verse declaring that, "The Spirit lifted me up between Earth and Heaven and brought me in the vision of God to Jerusalem," (Ezekiel 8:3) means that Ezekiel was taken away in a flying machine (Rael 1998: 49). The "big fish" mentioned by Jonah (Jonah 2:1), often translated in English as a "whale," is a submarine (Rael 1998: 54). The healings reported in the New Testament were performed by Jesus through 'heavy rays,' according to a method that was taught to him by the Elohim (Rael 1998: 64). According to Rael, the seven-branch candlestick, or *menorah*, synonymous with Judaism, symbolizes the seven signal lights at the Elohim headquarters. These lights were used to stay in contact with their other bases, and with the interplanetary space ship orbiting the earth (Rael 1998: 60). The trumpets of Jericho in fact transmitted ultrasounds. Samson's hair was comprised of antennas that enabled his brain to have a telepathic communication with the Elohim. To demonstrate this latter point, he quotes 1 Samuel, 3:9–10 (Rael 1998: 38). Telepathy, Rael explained, is also mentioned in Psalm 139:4 in these words, "For there is not a word on my tongue, but O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether." (Rael 1998: 60). Likewise,

the fact that God uses advanced telecommunication technology is mentioned in another psalm, "He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly" (Psalm 147: 15; Rael 1998: 60). Thirdly, Rael is a creationist. In his book *Le Livre qui dit la Vérité* (The Book Which Tells the Truth), Rael considers the thesis of Darwinian biological evolution a myth (Rael 1998: 83; Rael 1979: 66). He affirms that life on earth, the animal species and especially human beings, are not the consequences of the hazards of natural selection and evolution. They are the result of creation in a laboratory by beings who mastered perfectly the genetics and biology of the cells (Renard 1988: 82–83). These creator beings are the 'Elohim' of the Bible, named also the Creators, and for Rael they replace God. Like the Gods and Goddess of the ancient Greek religion, and also the Nephilim ("giants") in the Bible (Genesis, 6:4), they were seduced by human wives, who bore children that became the heroes of the ancient times. Fourthly, the Raelian theology provides an apocalyptic perspective. According to Rael, the end of the world is at hand. He looks to the famed Biblical verse, "Truly I say to you, this generation will not come to an end till all these things are complete," (Matthew 24: 34) used by such groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses to calculate the date of the return of Christ. But while the Witnesses refers to a generation which was still alive in 1914 at the time of their founding, Rael refers to the generation that lived up to 1946, the date of the atomic bombing on Japan. Fifthly, Rael's theology is dualistic (manicheist). In the Raelian doctrine, like in many religions, Satan exists. Rael refers to the Book of Job to prove it: "Now there was a day when the sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them" (Job 1: 6). Satan, Rael teaches, is an Elohim who did not accept the creation of other intelligent beings near his planet because this posed a threat. Based on Job (1: 9, 11,12; 11: 6), Rael relates a fight between Job and Satan. This latter ruined Job because he adored the Elohim, but Job did not give up on love to the Elohim and thus the Elohim restored Job's wealth and let Satan alive and poor (Rael 1998: 55–56). In the Raelian doctrine, Satan is not the cause of the evil and Rael does not ask to his followers to prevent his influence on life.

Besides those ideas, we find three beliefs which are often linked within theologies: messianism, millenarianism, manicheism and utopianism. Indeed, the Raelian doctrine includes a messianic aspect. Rael teaches that there is a lineage of messiahs sent by God (see above) to remind humanity of his existence and to give his commandments to obtain the salvation. Rael affirms he was chosen by the Elohim coming from the sky to receive a revelation and to spread it all around the world and to create a community in which he, Rael, would serve as the Father and the mediator between the creators and the humans. He would also be in charge to reveal the universal link which ties them

together (Rael 1979: 104). For Rael, Christ has a special importance among the previous messiahs. The Elohim spawned him so as to ensure that he would inherit, by means of heredity, telepathic abilities (Rael 1998: 62). Jesus was then charged with the mission to "spread over the world the truth of the Biblical Writings. They could be the proof when the era of science will explain all the phenomena to the whole humanity." (Rael 1998: 62) That 'era of science' has now arrived, and it precedes the Judgment Day. According to Raelian teachings, Christ, like Rael, was brought before the Elohim so as to reveal to him his true identity, and to present him to his Father, and reveal his mission. Furthermore, Christ was also initiated into various scientific techniques (Rael 1998: 63). For example, from the Elohim he learned a form of "mass hypnotic telepathy" (Rael 1998: 64) used to convince the crowds. Then in a near future, great prophets such as Moses, Jesus, Buddha and Muhammad, all of whom are being kept alive by Elohim science, will return to the Earth with the Elohim (Rael 1979: 12).

Further, according to Rael, 84,000 human beings, having previously been chosen because they had achieved social, moral and scientific progress, are now living on the planet of Elohim. These human beings now living on the planet of the Elohim will be returned to be regenerated on the Earth. This teaching looks somewhat like the idea of the anointed in some millenarian movements, such as the 144,000 in the Jehovah's Witnesses. As part of the Raelian millennial teachings, there will be a Judgement Day in which the sum of each individual's good deeds and the sums of their evil deeds will be examined, having been recorded in a huge computer which looks upon each human throughout his or her life. On Judgement Day a council of Elohim will consider the balance between good and bad actions as recorded. If the sum of the good deeds is superior to the sum of the evil deeds, the human will obtain everlasting life among the Prophets on the planet of the Elohim (Rael 1979: 13). Conversely for those who will not come back to life, since Raelians teach that the soul does not exist, such evildoers will stay in a state of nothingness. This reminds us of the Jehovah's Witnesses conception of the 'definitive death'. We find here the principle of the "life accounting" mentioned by Max Weber in his *Sociology of Religion*. According to Weber, we find life accounting in Zoroastrianism, among the Hindus, in popular Judaism, and finally in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Oriental Christian Churches (Weber 1993: 155). For this purpose of life accounting, Rael advises his followers to have collected a small part of their frontal bone after death and to keep it in a bank so as to be regenerated and re-engendered on the New Earth (Rael 1979: 13). All the righteous and Rael's disciples will be part of this final resurrection, typical of millenarianism. (Rael 1979: 28).

In the Raelian doctrine, the human does not have a soul, but the idea of one's genetic code replaces it (Rael 1979: 37). We find in Rael's message the characteristics of UFO millenarian doctrines such as the imminent coming of the extraterrestrial to bring the salvation to the anointed earthmen, and to start an era of happiness and peace on Earth following a time of woes. On the New Earth post-contact, there will be a unity of all the people of the world based on the brotherhood and on the spiritual realization. Starvation, illness, and aging will be eradicated. This situates Rael in the stream of Jewish and Christian millenarianism (Renard 1988: 96–97). His mission does not give birth to an esoteric or an occultist movement such as those situated in the heritage of George Adamski (1891–1965), like the Aetherius Society (George King, 1919–1997), Unarius Academy (Ruth Norman, 1900–1993) and the Center of Cosmic Brotherhood Studies (1919–2006). In this way, Rael is post-Adamskist. Ultimately, after the dawning of the millennium, the Elohim will live in the Embassy built by the Raelians. They will donate to humans their technology and their scientific knowledge which will enable us to turn the Earth into a Paradise. We find here a progressive utopia, with access to idyllic utopian conditions of life due to modern techniques and to the high level of science. This is in contrast to some religious movements that call for a return to the lost paradise of Eden, described in bucolic or pre-technological terms (regressive utopia). Jean-Bruno Renard (1988: 114) a French specialist in ufology, finds in such progressive utopianism a reminiscence of the Cargo Cults in which people believe in the arrival of supernatural beings from the sea or from the sky, with them the promise of abundance. On the New Earth, death will disappear because humans will now live 700 years, and even following that long life, will be created again thanks to the genetic codes collected before their death.

Finally, in accordance with other ufological authors' cosmologies, Rael asserts that there are inhabited planets in the universe (three in total, in his mind). He proves the creation of the human with the verse: "A farmer went out to sow his seed" (Matthew 13:3). The farmer is the Elohim. They failed three times to create a mankind because of the bad condition on the planet (Matthew 13: 4–9). On it, the seed did not grow. But "Still other seeds fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown" (Matthew 13:8). Thus, there exist three inhabited planets designated by their harvest: "hundred, sixty, thirty times." Furthermore, they would have challenged the three planets in order to choose the one which will have done the greatest scientific progress on the doomsday (Rael 1998: 67). Specifically, they should be able to create a new man who is able to live in another planet if people must adapt themselves to different conditions on Earth to succeed to the creators once they have received they message (Rael 1998: 68).

22.4 Religious Practices

The Raelian religious worship includes several specific practices. The first practice concerns “the transmission of the cellular plan.” This practice is the Raelian baptism. Within their theology, the soul does not exist. The soul is replaced by the idea of genetic code, which is itself a vibration specific to each person. Raelians deny the concept of a person’s family heritage as a form of religious communal belonging. Typically, only the adults of eighteen years old or older may be baptized, however younger people may receive the baptism at the age of fifteen if the Raelians are convinced that they exactly understand the meaning of this practice, and if they are truly willing to receive it. As part of the process, the Raelian movements records the name of the baptized person, who is invited to ask themselves to be erased from the register of the Catholic Church or other religious body, since one cannot have one’s name in two religious registers.

The actual process involves an individual referred to as the “Guide of the Guides” putting her, his, or their hands on the head of the follower, and by the mean of telepathy, transmitting to the Elohim’s massive computer their cellular code. During the accounting of the Judgment Day those whom the council of Elohim have decided deserve a new life on Earth will have their registered cells cloned. According to Rael, “it is possible to regenerate a dead from a cell of his being since it includes the physical plan and the intellectual plan of which he is part of” (Rael 1998: 140). The goal is not to make the persons themselves eternal because there would be a problem of overcrowding.

The Guide of the Guides may also lend his abilities to baptize to a “Bishop Guide,” who performs the transmission of the cellular plan in his name. This type of transmission looks much like the apostolic succession in the Catholic Church (Rigal-Cellard 2018) in which a bishop transmits a sacramental grace to a priest at the ceremony of ordination. The Raelians hold the ceremony of baptism four times a year during the Raelian feast days: the first Sunday of April (the feast of the first man on Earth), 6 August (the date of the atomic bombing in Hiroshima in 1946, which marks a new era), 7 October (the day of the second meeting of Rael with the Elohim), and 13 December (the day of the first meeting of Rael with the Elohim). The baptism has two functions: to make the baptized an official member of the Raelian community, and to enable him or her to be regenerated after the Apocalypse, which is equivalent to the final resurrection in certain religions.

Another key practice for Raelians is daily telepathic contact with the Elohim. A Raelian must try to establish a telepathic contact with the Elohim (they think to them) on each Sunday at 11:00 AM (local time), and think to the

Elohim once a day at the time of their choosing. This is a kind of meditation through which the believers must try to contemplate, to view themselves in the context of infinity, among the Elohim, in the society, and within themselves. To help the meditator, Rael gives a list of thirteen sentences to address to the Elohim such as “Elohim, you are there and I want so much to meet you” (Rael 1998: 184). The Raelians also engage in a practice called “sensual meditation,” a technique of relaxation that is practiced in private or collectively, as well during Raelian training sessions for the ‘raising of the consciousness’. To engage in this meditation, one must sit or lay down, surrounded with pleasant pictures to look at, with pleasant music to listen, nice scents to smell and tasteful foods to eat. This meditation can be done alone or shared with someone we appreciate and with whom we feel in harmony. Self-massages can be done, or messages given to each other. The meditation can be concluded with sexual intercourse, to sublimate the pleasure into spirituality and to make every effort to provide the partner with satisfaction and happiness. The word “sensual” used here means that the meditators must feel in tune with the universe to reach a peace of mind which enable them to spread love around themselves and to communicate telepathically with the Elohim (Cherblanc 2005: 25).

A third key practice calls for each follower of Rael to support the mission to build the Embassy for the Elohim. They intend for this to be a residence in a nation with a mild climate. That property will have seven rooms for the guests with a bathroom, a conference hall, a dining room and a swimming pool in the centre of the garden, all surrounded by a wall. That Embassy is precisely described and according to Bernadette Rigal-Cellard (Rigal-Cellard 2018), it looks like the description of the temple of Jerusalem (2018: 90–92). The idea of such an embassy also reminds of the Beth Sarim mansion, built by the Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1929. This luxurious mansion was meant to host the Biblical Patriarchs, who would come back on Earth before the return of Christ (Rutherford 1939: 272).

Several other Raelian practices are quite common among religions, for example, home proselytization. Followers are to invite and share a meal at least once a year with persons interested in Rael’s message. Furthermore, Raelians must attend the meetings led by the national Guide to celebrate ‘the entry in the time of Apocalypse,’ that being August 6, which recalls the bombing of Hiroshima in 1945. This day is symbolic because humans proved that they could understand matter, and may either destroy themselves, or enter in the Golden Age described in many sacred writings.

Finally, Rael’s disciples practice a secular asceticism. According to a French spokesman of the movement, the Raelians are allowed to live their life as they want. The Elohim gave advice for the conduct of life to Rael, who then

transcribed them (Rael 1979: 47–66). The ordinary members are free to follow this advice, or not. On the other side those who commit in the organization must accept the Elohim's advice. They are not allowed to smoke and to use drugs. They are allowed to drink a very small quantity of alcohol but never publicly. Rael advises his followers to engage in a "hydric diet," meaning drinking only water during a day, once a week at any day to purify the body. Sometime, this is done during a Raelian meeting, with the aim to be more in touch with oneself before meeting the others. In her survey on French Raelians, Bernadette Rigal-Cellard (Rigal-Cellard 2018) found that respondents affirmed that they consider it as a practice of spirituality to increase their spiritual level and to deepen their personal improvement.

In comparison with other religions and spirituality of the New Age, the Raelians religious practice does not include spiritual healing. They do not lay hands on the sick people nor pray for them, and have no healing sanctuaries. Rather, they consult conventional doctors. Raelians believe that the Elohim cannot currently help Raelians with their health concerns because they cannot intervene on the planet until their return on Earth. So adherents do not ask their 'brothers of space' to cure them, and they do not believe that they can benefit from their powerful techniques and advanced sciences, as we may imagine.

Rael symbolizes his movement and his teaching by a svastika (which represents the perpetual motion in the universe and is also a symbol in theosophy), which is represented inside of the Star of David that represents the Chosen People. Given the controversial nature of the svastika symbol, Rael has recently replaced the svastika with a spiral symbol, which also represents the perpetual motion.

22.5 Rael's Social Ideas

Rael completes his spiritual message with social and moral principles that he considered revolutionary because they challenge the principles on which some people "have established their power, the religion, the politics, the army, the labour, the family, the fatherland" (Rael 1979: 115). But not all of these ideas come from the Elohim's revelation. Some are his own. Some belong to the ideology of the counterculture of the seventies when Rael published his books. Rael's disciples are not obliged to accept them. The underlying philosophy of Raelism is the humanitarism. Rael invites his followers to create a worldwide humanitarist party and to militate in its favour. This party proposes the "Third Way" between capitalism and communism. Indeed, Rael

points out that the motivations for capitalist profits lead to social injustices. He also notes that people are not enthusiastic by communism either. Thus, he proposes to increase equality among people by the mean of the suppression of inheritance. Since inheritance inevitably causes inequalities not related to the recipient's abilities, Rael proposes that the properties of the deceased become the State's properties, excepting the family house which can be given to the owner's children. According to this program, farmers would not own their farmland. They would rent it from the State for a 49-year term, with their successors being able to then renew the rental when they retire. Rael legitimized this economic humanitarianism with an appeal to Leviticus (25:8, 14–16, 23) particularly the verse 23: "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me." Politically, Rael proposes to establish a world government. Rael proposes to replace the government of the nations by an international government so to bring the peace in the world. To do this, he envisions a unique currency in the world and a world language, to be invented by linguists. Until that time, people may speak Esperanto (Rael 1998: 189).

Rael's doctrine calls for the political notion of geniocracy so as to govern the Earth. In theory, the word geniocracy designates a government led by geniuses or very intelligent persons. Rael affirms that the world ought to be managed by intelligent persons, instead of ordinary people who run campaigns and subsequently win elections. Although he does not define what qualifies are sufficient in terms of intelligence, Rael wants that candidates for political elections to be 50% more intelligent than the average of the population, and furthermore, he wishes that only people who are 10% more intelligent than the average to be allowed to vote. Rael does not say how he measures the intelligence nor if he believes in the validity of the intelligence quotient tests. He only says that the diplomas are not a proof of intelligence (Rael 1998: 179). He considers also that the gifted children are the most precious of the humanity (Rael 1998: 170).

To avoid war, Rael invites the human to stand up against "the last shape of tyranny imposed on the people of the Earth: militarism" (Rael 1979: 112,115). He wishes to suppress the armies and to convert the soldiers' duties to the maintenance of the public order. He recommends his followers to be conscientious objectors (Rael 1998: 179). Due to his pacifism, Rael also calls for nations to cease manufacturing atomic bombs, to stop nuclear tests, and to neutralize their current stock of bombs (Rael 1998: 93). On another level, in order to protect the planet Earth, Rael plans to combat the overcrowding of the earth. Rael supports the thesis of Paul and Ann Erlich (1968) translated into French (in 1971) by the environmentalist movement, *Les Amis de la Terre* ("The Friends of the Earth"). According to the authors, our planet cannot provide food and

raw materials to such a very large population as we currently have. Several environmentalists named this overcrowding the 'Population Bomb'. Thus, Rael advises that couples raise a maximum of two children, only to replace the generations

Considering public policy, Rael advises his followers and other citizens to obey the laws of their country. However, when human laws are opposed to the laws of the Creators, he advises obedience to the latter (Rael 1998: 179). Rael is opposed to the death penalty because he believes that nobody has the right to kill another person. He affirms that most of those engaging in non-minor criminality are insane, and do not act of their free will. By contrast, a criminal who has wilfully acted will not be resuscitated at the judgment Day and will therefore fall into definitive death. He recommends keeping criminals away from the society so as to repent until scientists find a cure for the criminal behaviour (Rael 1998: 188).

Rael's message is imprinted by the quest of happiness. To be happy, men and women ought to have pleasure with others and with themselves. To this purpose they ought to give up self-righteousness. Rael proposes to replace sex education at school by "sensual education" in which pupils would learn how to find pleasure with their body, so as to feel in tune with themselves and to feel in harmony with the infinite (Rael 1998: 186). Raelian sensual meditation (see above) also aims at providing wellness and happiness. One other element of the Raelian hedonism is the lack of valorisation of labour. According to Rael, life must not be fully dedicated to labour (Rael 1998: 180). People ought to spare time for the pleasant things in life. The valorisation of pleasure has driven the Raelians to create the association CLITORAID to enable victims of female genital mutilation to recover genital sensation (see below). In sum, Rael's theology is underlined by a hedonist philosophy.

22.6 Organisation

Rael has organised his community to regulate and to avoid the distortion of his teaching, and to prevent moral and ideological excess among his followers. Thus, he has established a hierarchy similar to the Catholic Church's for his own movement, despite his strong criticism toward that church. His organisation, the Raelian movement, has several levels, from the base upward: 1) Level zero includes those who have received baptism, and the beginners; 2) Level one, the assistants "animators"; 3) Level two, the animators who are allowed to deliver speeches on the Raelian doctrine to an audience that is less than twelve persons; 4) Level 3, the assistants to the "priests-guides," who are allowed to

present Raelian teaching to audiences greater than twelve persons, but are not allowed to transmit the cell code through the practice of baptism; 5) Level 4, the “priests-guides” (the majority of the followers), who are allowed to deliver speeches in front of an audience greater than twelve persons, and are also allowed to transmit the cell code; 6) Level 5, international level, comprising the “bishop-guides” who have the same abilities as the previous ones, but they also can ordained the guide-priests; 7) Level 6, the guide of the guides, that is, “the Prophet,” elected by the college of the guides-bishops. Rael has occupied this function until the present, as there have been no other candidate owing to the fact that he is the only contactee of the movement; 8) Level 7, the Elohim, including the seven hundred immortals whose duty is to look upon all things, instead of the other Elohim who are not obliged to work. The seven hundred educate 200 trainees (Rael 1998: 98).

Furthermore, Rael has also established two councils of supervisors, a Disciplinary Committee, which examines the cases of persons who do not follow the instructions of the Guide, and a council of elders, which examines the case of members who have been accused of not acting in accordance with Rael’s teachings in public, particularly when they smoke and drink (in private they are free to do and to say what they want). Both committees may expel a guilty member and may propose to suppress the transmission of the cell code, but only Rael himself may take the final decision of dismissing a member from the movement.

The Raelian movement includes other divisions. Foremost of these is a female religious order named “The Order of Angels.” These ‘nuns’ are willing to look upon the Prophets and the Elohim when they will come back to Earth. Until that time, they provide the wellness (*veiller au bien-être*) of the members of high levels of the Raelian hierarchy. They are divided in two categories, those angels who have a professional and private life aside from their role in the Raelian movement, who wear a collar made of white feathers; and the ‘Chosen,’ who dedicate their entire lives to Rael and the Elohim, and wear a collar made of pink feathers.

The Raelian movement International has its headquarters in Switzerland. The Raelians have created numerous groups to achieve secular and humanitarian missions. These include:

- The Raelian Foundation, with its headquarters located in Vaduz (Lichtenstein). This Foundation takes charge of printing Rael’s books, manufacturing accessories related to the Raelism (medals and chains), and providing for the needs of Rael.
- The DIFRA (distribution company) sells Rael’s books in different countries where it has a manager.

- The Raelian Fund, which is the bank of the movement, has its headquarters in the Bahamas and Republic of Panama. According to Anne Cathelin (2004: 65), the Fund is estimated to be valued at twelve million US dollars, including four million derived from membership fees.
- Clonaid (created in 1997) is supported by a board of Raelian investors (named Valien Venture LTD). Its representatives assert that they are able to clone human beings, and can provide this service for the cost of two hundred thousand US dollars. Another association linked to Clonaid is INSURACLONE, which claims to provide services to genetically sample and clone children so as to cure them of fatal diseases, or even to replace children if they were to die. These laboratories are supervised by Brigitte Boisselier (Cherblanc 2005: 43).
- Clitoraid is a non-profit organization created in 2009 that aims to reconstruct via surgery the clitorises of women who have endured female genital mutilation. It is registered as a tax exempt charity in the United States, and since its creation five hundred women have benefited from this surgery in a clinic at Bobo Diaou Lasso (Burkina Faso).
- Nopedo was created in Belgium to denounce the paedophilia in the Catholic Church, identifying itself as an “association for the defense of the children victim of the Catholic priests [which] was created by Rael to publicly denounce the Catholic priest’s intolerable abuses in order they stop and that finally the government bring justice to the victims.” (Nopedo, n.d.)
- Websites. Like other minority religious groups and churches, the Raelians and the associations linked to the main group own websites to spread their ideas and to reply to critics.

22.7 Conclusion

Having examined key tenets and practices of the Raelian movement, we will briefly discuss several sociological questions concerning Rael and his movement. Firstly, it seems that the contents of the Raelian revelation are linked to the ideological background of the 1960s and the 1970s. As mentioned above, at that time, there was a renewal of curiosity about flying saucers, and emergence of groups dedicated to engaging with this phenomenon. Indeed, these decades have left an imprint by the Beat Generation (whose ideology arrived in Europe in the 1960s) and hippies’ ideas in the stream of the counterculture. According to these countercultural ideas, the ethics of the valorisation of labour and consumption were contested, in favour of the quest of for pleasure, of which sexual permissiveness is included. At this time, self-development and body practices to reach the height of wellness and self-transformation of the

self were trendy. The Raelian criticism of the valorisation of labour, its practice of sensual meditation, and model of sexual education of youth are all influenced by this countercultural ideology. However, although many minority religious groups of the 1960s and 1970s reached for their inspiration to Buddhism, Hinduism, esotericism, or paganism, and generally ignored the Bible, Rael is not 'post-Biblical'. Rather, he refers to the Bible to legitimize his revelations.

Secondly, how to qualify the leadership of Rael? Authors such as Anne Cathelin (2004: 260–290) consider Rael a prophet. This affirmation needs to be discussed in the light of Max Weber's concept of prophet (1993: 46–59). We certainly find in Rael several characteristics of the prophet in the Weberian sense, which are: "in virtue of his mission, he proclaims a religious doctrine or a divine commandment" (Weber 1993: 46); he is the founder of a religion, by providing new revelations or a religious renewal by preaching ancient revelations (Weber 1993: 46); he does not receive his mission "from a human agency, but seizes it as it were" (Weber 1993: 51); he delivers a conception of the world based on a unitarian and significant vision of life (Weber 1993: 59); his deeds and his speech may lead to the creation of a circle of permanent aides (students, disciples) having personal ties with him, and participating with him and his charisma, as well as the creation of a group of followers which may be a permanent community, "who support him by giving him money and services for the accomplishment of his mission" (Weber 1993: 61).

Rael possesses most of the elements of Weber's ideal type of the prophet, but he misses the main criteria of the prophet, "the charisma, for the prophet is the bearer of purely personal charisma" (Weber 1993: 46). For Weber, charisma represents the extraordinary gifts of leadership (Weber 1993: 47), meaning that to the followers, he is "bestowed with supernatural or superhuman forces or characteristics or at least in day to day life inaccessible to the common of mortals" (Weber 1978: 241–243).

Although his followers are satisfied with his techniques of sensual meditation and although they accept more or less his instructions, Palmer's study (2004) and Cherblanc's study (2005) show that his disciples do not attribute to Rael extraordinary gifts such as the gift of healing, speaking in tongues, or foresight. As said above, he affirms that Jesus received techniques to perform his miracles from the Elohim, but Rael himself has not received such techniques. He is not able to do extraordinary acts. Thus, he is not able to provide the confirmation of his encounter with the Elohim and to 'authenticate' (in Weber's meaning) the mission they give him which is absolutely essential to establish his charismatic authority (Weber 1993: 47). Since the main characteristics of the prophet are missing, we do not assert that Rael is a prophet (to have a high profile in the media does not mean one is charismatic). Among the types of religious leaders, Rael is neither a reformer who questions certain aspects of

a religious group (doctrine or organization or practices), nor is he a religious seeker who invents a new spirituality after having experienced or studied existing ones. He is also not a mystagogue (Dericquebourg 2001: 149–158), one who gathers disciples to whom he provides the benefits of his gifts but who does not deliver teachings. Rather, Rael is typical of founders of UFO movement, that is a writer who relates experiences of contact with extraterrestrials, and thus became a thinking master.

This leads to the question of how to define the Raelian movement on a social level. Rael gave his community the shape of a hierarchical organisation with a religious female order reminiscent of the Catholic Church, intended to control the public behaviour of his disciples, and prevent a distortion of his teachings. But in fact, the Raelian community seems less formal in real life. Palmer's (2004) and Cherblanc's studies (2005) show that the religious practices ordered by Rael, such as the donation of ten percent of one's annual income, the transmission of the cell code, and the removal of the forehead bone for genetic storage, are rarely applied. Cherblanc counted about 20 'removals of the forehead bone' and only 569 transmissions of the cell code in Quebec from 1985 to 2005 among the 4,000 persons who declared themselves to be disciples of Rael. In 1996, there were no removal of the forehead bone among the Raelians.

Most of the Raelian followers attend meetings of the movement and read the Raelian magazine (*périodique*). They affirm to be attracted by the sexual freedom and the self-improvement teachings of the movement (Cherblanc 2005: 48). According to Palmer, only 15% of the Canadian disciples tithe ten percent of their annual income to the movement, and 50% pay the minimum annual contribution of one hundred Canadian dollars (Palmer 1998: 310). Facing this low commitment in the movement, Rael has even accepted as disciples those who have not engaged in the practice of cell transmission. Thus, Rael has taken into account a type of informal belonging. In spite of a strong organization in the statutes, the Raelian movement becomes a movement *à la carte*, that is one in which the followers choose the beliefs and the practices they prefer, like in the prototypical "cults" in the classic sense (Nelson 1968). We may then situate it in the cultic milieu. This milieu designates a public interested in marginal spiritualities such as "the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and the New Thought, of the alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure." (Campbell 1972: 122) The cultic milieu is characterized by individualism, freedom of conscience, a low commitment to the community, not ceremonial religious worship, a conception of the life and the universe they name 'philosophy' (rather than religious doctrine), and a link between the sciences and spirituality. They

are confident in the future. According to the classification of the various types of cult (Nelson 1969: 233), we may qualify the Raelian Movement as a centralized cult, that is a cult with a hierarchy and one leader at its top in which the followers stay away from several commandments of the hierarchy.

More generally, we conclude that Rael has created an original religion in the French religious landscape beyond the main churches—Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic—and besides the minority religious groups already implanted in France such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists, and Latter-day Saints. Raelism shares with the Church of Scientology the lack of theological roots in France and in the western European societies where they were implanted, in spite of the fact that Rael has ancestors among the small stream of ufology authors and their audiences. Now, one must wonder how Raelism will continue after the death of Rael.

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UFOs as Players in History: A Japanese New Religious Movement, ‘Spiritual Technology,’ and *Ancient Astronauts*

Franz Winter

23.1 Introduction

The following chapter focuses on the Japanese new religious movement Kōfuku no Kagaku (literally, ‘the science of happiness;’ henceforth: KnK), which internationally presents itself as Happy Science (since 2008).¹ The movement, officially founded in 1986, is in many ways a typical example of the most recent phase of new religions in Japan, often referred to with the term *shin-shinshūkyō* (new new religions), as different from the prior ‘older’ *shinshūkyō* (new religions). These more recent *shin-shinshūkyō*, which came into being since the 1970s, share several characteristics, amongst others manifold references to a vast array of concepts allegedly deriving from and pertaining to a ‘spirit world’ (*reikai*; often referred to as *ano yo*, ‘that world’) as distinguished from the ‘real world’ (mostly referred to as *kono yo*, ‘this world’); a vital interest in highly differing religious contexts, both of Asian and Western origin, that are combined into the teachings—often highly superficial and seemingly disintegrated (see Shimazono 2004: 18–19; Astley 2001: 102–104; Clarke 1999: 12–14); and the importance of newer forms of media (such as manga, anime, or films) to promote their ideas in addition to traditional modes of propagation (such as books, magazines etc.). In addition, KnK gives the impression of selecting various successful techniques of other Japanese new religious movements, such as a typically hierarchical structure, the system of ‘exams’ for members (as in Sōka Gakkai), a specific culture of spectacular presentation in the public through mass events and festivals (as in GLA Sōgō Honbu), accompanied by massive advertisement campaigns on various media levels in crucial phases of its development (as in Agonshū); and the focus on the importance of its publishing sector (as in Seichō no Ie) (Winter 2018: 211; Baffelli 2011: 259).

¹ Prior to that, the movement was internationally known as The Institute for Research in Human Happiness, which was abbreviated IRH or IRHH (depending on copyright issues in the various countries of its missionary activities).

Accordingly, the study of KnK is a fruitful endeavour as this movement encompasses various features of new religions in Japan and produced a plethora of material on various media level that may be taken into consideration. In this vast amount of material, references to ufological concepts and patterns of thought play a major role. However, it is important to state at the beginning of this chapter that KnK is *not* a UFO movement in the stricter sense of the word. It is, however, a movement whose founder draws on references, patterns, and elements that deal with ufological contexts and that can be situated and contextualised within a specific religio-historical setting. The references to UFOs and extraterrestrial life are a constant factor, to the extent that all these ufological materials makes up part of a 'normal' description of the history of mankind. A particular focus will be laid on one specific aspect of ufological traditions, namely the *ancient astronauts* theory, that plays a prominent role in KnK. It is an ideal focus of interest, as it summarises major concepts and approaches and, as will be seen, is easily applicable in regard to several areas that play an important role within the teachings and publications of the movement. My study will try to situate this specific material in the context of the movement's teachings and the wider religio-historical setting which forms the background of these patterns. In this regard the concept of 'science' as purported by the movement is of primary interest as it is intrinsically interwoven with the interpretation of the various 'sources'.

Furthermore, the author provides an additional preliminary remark regarding the scope of this chapter. This study mainly considers KnK's teachings up to the early 2000s and the materials produced during that time, not the later developments after this time. Just recently, in the late 2010s, the movement reinforced ufological references, thereby reintroducing older patterns, but also supplemented this with additional information, and proposed new approaches and explanations. As these recent developments and implications cannot be evaluated thoroughly at the time of the writing of this chapter, the present study includes only a summarising approach that situates this newer material in the context of the most recent developments and major shifts in its self-presentation.

23.2 The Early Formation Period of KnK and the Concept of 'Science'

23.2.1 *A New Religion Emerges*

To evaluate the movement's material, it is important to first provide some insight into the development and formation of *Kōfuku no Kagaku*, which mainly requires providing a history of its founder, Ōkawa Ryūhō, his self-perception,

the perception of him within the group, and the developmental changes these concepts went through in the course of the years. In addition, this chapter considers the group's references to 'science,' which are crucial in the movement (as is evident in its self-designation as 'the science of happiness'), as this is important for the understanding of the implementation of the UFO material.

The official date of the foundation of this movement is 1986, when the then 30-year old Ōkawa Ryūhō opened the first branch-office in Tokyo. Ōkawa was born 1956 as Nakagawa Takashi in the small town of Kawashima on Shikoku island.² Since 1981 he claimed to have contact with the 'spirit world' (*reikai*): Its prominent inhabitants allegedly initiated such conversations with Ōkawa, who was then working as a businessman for a trading company in Nagoya after a rather successful school and university career, which he finished as a graduate from the highly renowned Tokyo University (*Tōkyō daigaku*). The rather high social standing of its founder is one of the defining characteristics of KnK and a major difference to comparable movements that emerged around the same time (such as the infamous *Aum Shinrikyō* movement and its founder Asahara Shōkō [1955–2018]). Through 'automatic writing' (*jidōshoki*) Ōkawa began to converse first with Nikkō (1246–1333), one of the disciples of the Buddhist reformer Nichiren (1222–1282), then with Nichiren himself who prepared him for his mission for mankind with the formula "*hito o aishi, hito o ikashi, hito o yuruse*" (in the official English translation proposed by KnK: "love others, nurture others, and forgive others"; see Okawa 1996a: 139; Ōkawa 1994a: 351). The first publications ever made in the context of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* are reports of Ōkawa's contacts with these representatives of the spiritual world. They were officially published a year before the foundation under the name of a 'friend,' whom Ōkawa asked for help after the first encounters with the spirit world,³ and they include an impressive sample of various figures of the philosophical and religious history of East and West, including the already mentioned Nichiren, but also Jesus, Socrates, Laozi, Gandhi, Lincoln and other important religious or philosophical teachers, historical figures, or various deities (like the Japanese sun goddess Amaterasu or the Egyptian god Amon; see Winter 2012a: 45–53, for an overview).

2 Although the official name change from Nakagawa Takashi to Ōkawa Ryūhō took place in 1986 with the official foundation of *Kōfuku no Kagaku*, I shall use this name throughout this chapter as it is the common and known one.

3 As was 'revealed' at the beginning of the 1990s, Yoshikawa Saburō, the 'publisher' and 'interviewer' of Ōkawa in the books, was in actuality his father. The use of a pen-name was explained as a tool to protect Ōkawa, who was then, in the first half of the 1980s, still working in a trading company. See Astley (1995: 377).

From a religio-historical point of view the material presented therein may be interpreted as belonging to the vast array of the so-called *channeling* tradition. This genre was one of the starting points of the Euro-American New Age movement (Hanegraaff 1996: 23–41), and many texts belonging to this current were translated into Japanese since the 1970s. In Japan these publications are commonly referred to as belonging to the so-called *seishin sekai* ('spiritual world') literature and tradition, which has been interpreted as an adaptation of the Euro-American New Age in Japan (Prohl 2007; Fukusawa 2001; cf. the critical remarks in Pye 2002).⁴ While the idea of getting into contact with a (superior) world beyond is a common feature in the formation of many of the Japanese new religions since the nineteenth century (Staemmler 2009: 112–116; Stalker 2008: 76–78), Ōkawa's *reigen* show a clear resemblance to the New Age *channeling* genre (Winter 2012a: 324–326; Staemmler 2009: 111). The references to that specific arena are also clear when considering the main content of these publications: there is extensive information on the coming of a 'new age' (*shinjidai*), which will bring along a 'new civilisation' (*shinbunmei*). Certain topics referred to are also well known features of Western New Age literature: thorough information on mythical civilisations and 'lost continents,' which once flourished but later were destroyed (like Atlantis or the continent *Mu*), 'occult' traditions, which have been alive since antiquity and give insight into the reality behind certain historical events or power centres, or the importance of the 'spiritual world' (*reikai*) and how to get in contact with it. In addition, Ōkawa himself discusses writings of the Western *channeling* genre in his *reigen* (see, for example, Yoshikawa 1985: 191–203), and places himself in this tradition (see his presentation of the 'secret of channelling,' pointing to its allegedly universalistic dimension, in Ōkawa 1994b: 127–158). Ōkawa's publications are also part of a specific period in the 1980s where *channelling* became extremely popular on a worldwide level, a phenomenon which once was labelled the "popular channelling craze" (Hanegraaff 1998: 41, see also Gebhardt 2001: 22). As we will demonstrate in the following presentation it is exactly in this context in which can be placed most of the material in regard to UFOs and the adjacent context.

In this early period the movement might have been labelled a 'study group' of channelled material purported by a medium. The further development, however, made it a distinct religious group with a new teaching. After a rather

4 Recent studies challenge the idea of the importance of the *seishin sekai*, which is mainly connected with the assumption of the importance of the so-called "religious boom" (*shūkyō būmu*) since the 1970s. This has been mainly claimed by the media on various levels, while academic studies show a much more differentiated picture. See Roemer 2012; Ishii 1995.

calm period *Kōfuku no Kagaku* began to present itself through large mass-events in the surroundings of Tokyo at the beginning of the 1990s, and in the process, both shaped and presented a changed set of its main concepts and beliefs. This refreshed self-representation was the starting-point for a rapid growth in membership, which rose in the following years due to intensive and professional marketing campaigns (on the difficult question of membership figures see Winter 2012a: 90 and 98; on the estimates in the 1990s see Reader 2006: 152; Wiczorek 2002: 167).

The publications of Ōkawa in the second half of the 1980s already show major differences when compared to the original *channelling* modelled books and resulted in a new concept. The first books were soon replaced by new publications, which clearly mark a shift in the self-perception of Ōkawa after the official foundation of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* in 1986. After a set of books comprising new spiritual messages, where Ōkawa presented channelled material in a more authoritative way as a spiritual teacher (and not a mere medium) a new series of books was launched in 1987 subsequently from June to October, which was called the 'law-series' (*hō-shirīzu*). The first three books of this collection, namely *Taiyō no hō* (The Laws of the Sun), *Ōgon no hō* (The Golden Laws) and *Eien no hō* (The Laws of Eternity), are said to contain all the basic teachings on cosmology, anthropology, and ethics and may be regarded as the fundamental doctrinal texts of the group, which underwent several re-editions and changes in the course of the further development of the movement. They were presented as the new and contemporary revelations of the Buddha.⁵ Soon after this announcement of new teachings of the Buddha, Ōkawa began to present *himself* as the reincarnation of the Buddha, not only his spiritual messenger. This was done officially and in public in the year 1989 in a book whose title was *Buddha saitan* (The Rebirth of Buddha), although he allegedly previously mentioned this insight to a couple of followers before that time. This book involved a systematic re-interpretation of the main teachings of Ōkawa focusing on his new role. The core messages are that Ōkawa represents the reincarnation of Buddha, and the doctrine of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* is fundamentally a Buddhist one, although the major content is still based on the aforementioned

5 This is evident from the picture used on the cover of the original publications showing a traditional Buddha statue and the subtext with direct references to the Shakyamuni. The book *Taiyō no hō*, for instance, is presented as containing "revelations of the Buddha illuminating the new age" (*shinjidai o terasu shaka no keiji*). It is also worth noting that the original versions—although referring to the Buddha on the title pages—technically and primarily used the term *shinri* ("God's truth"); this was replaced by *buppō shinri* ("Buddha's Truth") in the following editions. Images of the covers of the first editions are given in Winter 2012a: 60.

New Age content. This emphasis on Buddhism changed a little bit later when Ōkawa was presenting the final truth with regard to his nature, which was done officially in the year 1991 in the so-called *Eru Kantāre sengen* (El Cantare Declaration) in the Tokyo Dome in a big mass-event (see Winter 2008: 74–76; Baffelli 2007: 89–90; Astley 1995: 360–362). The main message of this event, which marked a new phase in the history of this movement, was that Ōkawa is the reincarnation of a spiritual being called *El Cantare*.⁶ This ‘consciousness’ (*ishiki*) already had a couple of reincarnations before Ōkawa and the Buddha, thereby covering the whole history of humanity, in East and West, North and South including the ‘lost continents’ Atlantis and *Mu*.⁷ From a religio-historical point of view the result is a rather fascinating mix of various features, mainly of New Age origin but with a Buddhist apparel that is highly important on the terminological level.⁸

23.2.2 ‘Science’

Before going into details regarding the UFO references and the *ancient astronauts* a few remarks regarding the notion of ‘science’ (*kagaku*) shall be made, as much of what can be said about the UFO attitude of KnK is based on a rather curious concept. In its Japanese self-designation, *Kōfuku no Kagaku*, the movement apparently refers to *kagaku*, that is ‘science’, as a defining characteristic. However, an in-depth look at the main teachings clearly shows that the concept of *kagaku* as purported by the movement is beyond any reference to a concept of ‘science’ in the conventional academic understanding of the word. An evident sign is the total absence of any in-depth explanation on the character of ‘science’ in the publications of KnK. In a recent bilingual *English Truth Handbook* ([*Kōfuku no kagaku kokusaikyoku*] 2008), which is meant as a guidebook in question and answer format for Japanese members who may be confronted with English speaking people, there is no information or explanation of the term ‘science’ (or anything similar). When members are asked what

6 On this rather unusual expression, obviously inspired by terminology used by the founder of the new religious movement GLA Sōgō Honbu, Takahashi Shinji (1927–1976), see the information given in Okawa (1995: 43–46).

7 A canonical list contains the following ‘historical’ personalities: *El Cantare* had been *La Mu*, a king on the continent *Mu*; *Thoth*, a king on the continent *Atlantis*; *Rient Arl Croud*, a king in ancient South America; *Ophealis*, a god acting in Archaic Greece; the Greek god (and king) *Hermes* in Ancient Greece; *Buddha* in India; and *Ōkawa Ryūhō* in present-day Japan. See Ōkawa (1994a: 358–359).

8 The doctrinal shift led to a revision of the older publications, particularly changes in the terminology and additions to older versions (see Okawa 1996a: 142, emphasising the importance of the new interpretation of his own status).

specifically is meant with 'the science of happiness' they commonly draw on the basic teachings of the movement, which are said to be the essence of its 'science': the actual leader and president of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* is regarded as the representation of a spiritual entity (*El Cantare*, as demonstrated above) which is responsible for the earth and makes up part of an elaborate and not fully explained hierarchy of spiritual beings in a multidimensional universe. Through his specific capacities Ōkawa is able to give insight into the 'truth' in the spiritual world which he announces to his believers. Something like a core of the teachings which are closely intertwined and presented in the publications as the most important essence of the spiritual world, i.e. the 'science of happiness', are teachings on the so-called four 'principles of happiness' (*kōfuku no genri*), sometimes referred to as the 'fourfold path' (*yonshōdō*) which consists of: love (*ai*), wisdom (*chi*), self-reflection (*hansei*), and progress (*hatten*) (the concept is summarised e.g. in [Kōfuku no kagaku kokusai-kyoku] 2008: 157–168). These concepts function as a kind of guiding principle for the individual and draw on general intellectual and behavioural features, such as an altruistic self-understanding (KnK's interpretation of *ai*), a focus on the 'truth' as purported by the movement (*chi*), constant analysis of the individual behaviour (*hansei*), and a stress on success (*hatten*), thereby encompassing both the private level, i.e. the family life, and the area of one's own work and job, that will benefit from the engagement in KnK and lead to 'success' (*seikō*) with the teachings of the 'successful' Ōkawa (see Winter 2012a: 124–125).

This particular approach to 'science' as a result of encounter with a spiritual world and the essence of Ōkawa's teachings can be interpreted as a specific strand of interpretation of this term that can be traced back to Western esoteric concepts, formalised and popularised mainly in writings of the highly influential Theosophical tradition (for details see Winter 2014: 105–107). This specific mode of interpretation had a particular reception within Japan that goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century (with figures such as Asano Wasaburō, 1874–1937, a member of the influential new religion Ōmoto; see Staemmler 2009: 275–285; Tsukahara 2012). In the further reception it plays a vital role in the context of new religions that deal with the various concepts of a 'spiritual world' (*seishin sekai*; for details see Winter 2014: 106–107). However, what becomes clear with this specific notion and use of the term 'science' is a kind of transitional area of interest, namely the tendency to intermingle 'spiritual' and 'scientific' concepts, mainly to give the impression of a presupposed *scientific* grounding of the assumptions purported in the teachings. Following the terminological suggestions by Olav Hammer this attitude might be referred to as 'scientism' as distinguished from (not to say

opposed to) a concept of 'science' (Hammer 2004: 201–330, for the Western esoteric tradition).⁹

As will be shown in the following section, this specific perspective plays a vital role in the interpretation and formation of ufological patterns that generally intermingle with various claims of scientific grounding. In addition, the interest in how UFOs as artefacts built by a higher intelligence of extraterrestrial origin function on a technological level is a major point of interest. In this context, another keen interest is an area that might be referred to as 'spiritual technology' (see Winter 2014; Repp 2011), effectively 'technology' or technical devices that works with or are closely connected to 'spiritual' input, and consequently depend on the presupposed spiritual advancement of those who deal with this kind of technology. The example of the 'time machine' in one of KnK's major anime which will be presented in the next section is a vivid example of that attitude. Another reference can be made to the anime-version of the *Eien no hō* (Laws of Eternity) from 2007, where a 'technical' device called *reikai tsushinki* (literally, 'device to communicate with the spirit world'), that allegedly was conceptualised by Thomas A. Edison, does not begin to work thoroughly until the arrival of a young girl who is deeply imbued by 'religion' as the guiding principle in her life (see Winter 2012a: 327). Without this additional ingredient the device won't work.

23.3 From Nazca to Ezekiel: References to the *Ancient Astronauts* Theory in KnK

A rather obvious feature of KnK's teachings is the omnipresent reference to the *ancient astronauts* complex (Richter 2012; Grünschloß 2007; Bullard 1996; Magin 1995), which might be found everywhere in the various publications, the films, or the manga of KnK. A typical example is the introductory passage of the film version of the book *Ōgon no hō* (released 2003), which is one of the above mentioned core publications containing essential teachings.¹⁰ This specific book mainly deals with KnK's view of history which is conceptualised in the film by introducing two youngsters who travel through history with the help of a 'time machine' (*taimu mashin*) which brings them to all the major

9 For various other adaptations of this concept of 'scientism' in the Asian cultural context see the articles by Farley (2011), Nanda (2011), or Humes (2011); for China see also Chiu (2016: 30–35).

10 The film (with English subtitles) is freely available on the internet, see "The golden laws Spiritual Anime Full Movie," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABE2BnLM-ac>, accessed 01/11/2018.

events in (KnK's version of) history and enables them to meet important persons. The film also provides an alleged 'scientific' foundation to the presupposed possibility of a journey through time in a future generation of mankind, which is also an important point of reference in various other publications of the movement (see, for example, the hints given in Ōkawa 2003: 10–19). However, at the beginning of the film the 'time machine' goes out of control, subsequently passing various epochs and scenes in world history. Its appearance is interpreted as a UFO by those who glimpse a sight of it, and perceive it accordingly. This rather comical approach gives the opportunity to go through a literal sample of *loci classici* of the *ancient astronauts* myth, which are presented *en passant* without any further explanation. This points to an already established *canon* of preastronautic knowledge which is familiar to the consumer of the film, including the famous 'Nazca lines' (or petroglyphs) in southern Peru, the so-called 'vision of the throne of God' in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel, or the interpretation of Old Egyptian iconographical material as indicating UFOs.¹¹

The frame and major concepts are obviously based on the publications of the highly popular Swiss author Erich von Däniken (born 1935), whose literary output once was referred to as a 'world phenomenon' that became a major ingredient of the ufological literature and found extensive reception in Japan as well.¹² Beginning with the book *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft* (1968; published in English in the following year as *Chariots of the Gods?*; the same year the book was translated into Japanese by Matsutani Kenji) von Däniken found a world-wide community of believers who eagerly followed his ideas purporting the rather frequent interference of extraterrestrial beings in the history of mankind and in many occasions (Robertson 2016: 77–81; see also the chapter by Swartz and Hammer in this volume). Proof of their presence is mainly derived from a peculiar interpretation of various archaeological artefacts and iconographical material (preferably those of uncertain origin and difficult contexts) or the mass of mythological and folklore traditions with their plethora

11 The relevant scene starts at 15:02, see "The golden laws Spiritual Anime Full Movie," <https://youtu.be/ABE2BnLM-ac?t=907>, accessed 01/11/2018. The ancient astronauts' interpretation of Egyptian iconography features also prominently in a book by Asahara Shōkō with additional reference to the presupposed traces of "yogic" techniques in that ancient civilisation (Asahara 1992).

12 See Econ-Verlag (1973), which is a documentation of the world-wide popularity of Erich von Däniken's books and the immense number of translations into various languages. See also Närvä (2016: 645–646); Reece (2007: 171–175); and Robertson (2016: 79).

of all kinds of god, demigods, half-human-half-god beings, gnomes or the like, that easily fits the scheme of this ufological or extraterrestrial interpretation.¹³

In the case of the aforementioned film of KnK the references to von Däniken's concepts can be traced into details. The *ancient astronauts* styled presentation of the 'vision of the throne of God' of the Old Testament book of Ezekiel and details of the depiction and the behaviour and moving scheme of the 'throne' viz. the 'time machine' in the film version of *Ōgon no hō*¹⁴ are clearly modelled on the description in von Däniken's book¹⁵ and films.¹⁶ The same applies for the mode of representation and interpretation of the famous 'Nazca lines' that are a classic point of reference in von Däniken's publications (see, for a recent example, von Däniken 1997).

Another instance of a clear reference to the *ancient astronauts* context would be KnK's interpretation of South American Indian cultures, that were traditionally closely aligned to that context, once again with von Däniken and his interpretations as an important trigger. In a video of KnK that is only available in their so-called 'temples'¹⁷ and that portrays a "spiritual journey into other dimensions" (*shinpi ijigen ryokō*) through the land of the 'ancient Incas' (*kodai Inka*), the home of one of the prior reincarnations of *El Cantare*, there is also a short glimpse on that aspect. It clearly refers to von Däniken's interpretation of the carving on the sarcophagus of the Mayan emperor Pakal (the Great, 603–683) that became a classic of *ancient astronaut* promoters as the 'astronaut of Palenque'. The allusion is also given in the film version of the *Taiyō no hō*, when it comes to the presentation of the Inca-kingdom and once again it is just referred to in passing without any further explanation as in the already mentioned scene in *Ōgon no hō* (on that and the interrelation of South

13 For the interpretation of various beings and creatures in Japan see the information below in the next section of this chapter.

14 The relevant scene is at 16:46, see "The golden laws Spiritual Anime Full Movie," <https://youtu.be/ABE2BnLM-ac?t=1006>, accessed 01/11/2018.

15 A classical description of this scenery with illustrations can be found in von Däniken (1968: 73–82); see also von Däniken (1979: 80–85); on that see also Partridge (2015: 394–395).

16 The film version of von Däniken 1968, published 1970 (with the same title *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*) has an animated version of the 'vision of the throne of God' that is more or less directly copied in the KnK film. The relevant excerpt of von Däniken's film can be watched online on <https://youtu.be/ypNFCPKCONo>, accessed 01/11/2018.

17 Within KnK's publications the general Japanese term for what in English is referred to as 'temple' is *shōja*, which is the common Japanese word for a Buddhist monastery (*vihāra*); in addition a couple of their 'temples' are designated with more advanced terminology, such as *shōshinkan* (literally, 'hall of the right mind') or *miraikan* (literally, 'future hall'). See Winter (2012a: 134–139).

American Mayan, notably not Incan!, civilization with New Age literature see the summary in Winter 2012b: 244–247).

In regard to the theories and explanations in the context of the *ancient astronauts* complex there is another feature which plays an important role in KnK's description of the history of mankind, namely the reference to the 'lost continents', which are Atlantis (located in the Atlantic Ocean) and—even more important for the Japanese context—the super-continent Mu (located in the Pacific Ocean). In this context references to the UFO material and contact with alien extraterrestrial worlds is a constant factor as it is combined with the idea that these former civilisations were on a very high state of development, technologically far above the standard of today (Robertson 2016: 80, on the interrelation between 'lost continents' and the *ancient astronauts* concept). Occasionally the lost continents' civilizations themselves were interpreted as of alien origin, a motive that goes back to the early days of UFO-literature with ufologist Bard Stieger's 1967 *The Flying Saucer Menace* as a major starting point (Trompf and Bernauer 2012: 110). Erich von Däniken also draws on this idea, combining it with speculations and interpretations of various mythological material (von Däniken 1969; further and more recent examples in Trompf and Bernauer 2012: 110–111).

In the publications of KnK this feature is particularly emphasised when it comes to the description of the lost continent Atlantis (*Atorantisu tairiku*) where the use of spaceships was a common feature. This is stressed in the description of king *Thos*, the ruler of Atlantis, who was one of the prior reincarnations of the being *El Cantare*: the king, whose name is obviously a slightly changed version of the Egyptian God *Thoth*,¹⁸ is introduced as the ideal scientist and usually addressed as 'all-knowing' (*zenchi*) und 'all-able' (*zennō*). Because of his contacts with extraterrestrial beings he was able to build great spaceships which are a typical descriptive feature in KnK's iconographic presentation of Atlantis (see, for instance, Ōkawa 1994a: 273–274; or in the manga-version, Ōkawa 1996b: 180–181; the same applies for the film version of the *Taiyō no hō*, where the contrast between the highly developed Atlantis and the not-so advanced continent *Mu* is of major importance for the story-line).

23.4 KnK's Interest in *Ancient Astronauts* in the Wider Cultural Context

When referring to UFOs and supposed contacts with extraterrestrial contexts, KnK clearly draws on a topic that is important in Japanese society and that

18 On these awkward terminological explanations see the information in Winter (2012a: 210).

possesses a specific history of its own. The beginning of contemporary interest in UFOs is typically marked by the alleged sightings of Kenneth Arnold of 'flying saucers' in June 1947 near Mount Rainier in Washington State, and the publication of the book *Flying Saucers have Landed* by George Adamski in 1953 as describing 'real' contact with extraterrestrial beings with religious implications (see Grünschloß 2000: 5–8). When compared to this measure, Japan embarked on its own ufological context rather early. This is due to the fact that there was a specific prehistory and interest already before that which could name popular authors such as Oshikawa Shunrō (1876–1914), once labelled the pioneer of Japanese *science fiction* literature (and heavily influenced by Jules Verne; see Schnellbächer 2007: 33–35). In his work references to spaceships and intergalactic travel are a commonplace that were easily continued within the new frame of a religiously interpreted ufology.

But it was particularly after the aforementioned Western input that the interest grew immensely (Schnellbächer 2001) when the early standard publications of the genre were translated into Japanese and the common Japanese terminology for UFO, namely *soratobu enban* (literally, 'flying disk'; a calque of the expression 'flying saucer'), was introduced. Already in 1954 the aforementioned book *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was translated by Takahashi Yutaka and published with the title *Soratobu enban jikkenki* (literally, 'records of flying disks'), followed by a Japanese translation of the book *Flying Saucer from Mars* by Cedric Allingham (*nom de plume* of the British fiction writer Patrick Moore and his friend Peter Davies, who produced the book as a hoax). This initiated a specific interest into this genre which obviously responded to a certain curiosity in society and lead to the formation of various organisations devoted to researching this phenomenon, collecting data, evaluating media reports (see Minakami 2008: 4–20; 33–51), and providing interpretation including the various conspiracy theories about the alleged concealment and suppression of the 'truth' about extraterrestrials and their representatives on earth (on the latter see Minakami 2008: 80–99).

In this context, the *ancient astronauts* theory plays a vital role as it heavily draws on Japanese religious and cultural history that provides a mass of potential material for the specific preastronautic interpretation. Popular figures of Japanese folklore such as the *kappa*, commonly described as small humanoid beings in the liking of an ape or a frog, with a webbed at their hands and feet and a kind of water container on the head (see Harada 2008: 20–27; Ross 1996: 31–32), or the even more popular *tengu*, wild animal creatures living in the mountains and sometimes abducting humans (a phenomenon called *tengu*

kakushi; see Harada 2008: 55–67),¹⁹ or the *tennyo* (literally, ‘heaven woman’) with their ‘feather dress’ (*hagoromo*) are typical examples which underwent an interpretation as (allegedly misunderstood) extraterrestrial creatures (for a summary of the material, see Greene 1978). Consequently, various descriptions and scenes of Japanese religious history were interpreted as indicating extraterrestrial contact (see Thompson 1993: 180–182). Another instance would be the interpretation of various conspicuous geological formations as UFO landing strips or indicators of extraterrestrial contacts. One major example is the famous underwater rock formation at the coast of the Yonaguni island (*Yonaguni shima*), which is the southernmost of the Japanese Ryūkyū islands, approximately a hundred kilometres east of Taiwan. After their discovery in the 1980s it was particularly the Okinawa based geologist and oceanographer Kimura Masaaki (born 1940) who promoted the idea that these ‘monuments’ belong to an ancient culture that may be connected to the mythical continent of Mu thereby proving that the Japanese islands were once part of this super-continent in the Pacific Ocean (see, for example, Kimura 2006, as a recent summary). This concept was internationally promoted by the well-known bestseller author Graham Hancock, particularly in his 2002 book *Underworld: Flooded Kingdoms of the Ice Age*, whose title page prominently shows a picture of the Yonaguni monuments (for details, see Hancock 2008: 362–396; the book was translated into Japanese already in 2002 by Daichi Shun it was also the basis for a highly popular documentary that was released 2003). Furthermore, these concepts were connected to various theories of extraterrestrial cultures and their remains on the earth that make the Yonaguni monuments a standard reference point in current *ancient astronauts* theories.²⁰

Another important area of cultural production that shows an intense interest into UFO and all the issues related to it is the manga and anime culture in

19 On abduction of humans by extraterrestrial beings see also <http://www.our-j.com/hypoti.html>, accessed 11/12/2008 (site currently defunct), where a popular summary of the most common interpretations was provided. The notion of *kakushi* is highly popular within traditional Japanese folklore and is purported to date as a common and well-known feature. A famous recent example of a direct reference to this concept is the highly successful and critically acclaimed anime of Miyazaki Hayao *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* (internationally promoted as *Spirited Away*) in 2001, which is to date the highest-grossing film of Japanese film history.

20 Yonaguni and its alleged connection to extraterrestrial beings plays prominently in season 2, episode 3 of the influential series *Ancient Aliens* together with a couple of other ‘sunken’ cities or continents; see <https://www.history.com/shows/ancient-aliens/season-2/episode-3>, accessed 04/11/2018.

Japan. This specific sector has an eminent importance for the publications of KnK, as some of the movement's features, not only in their manga and anime, but even in the context of other areas of its material production, show an intrinsic relation to elements of the broader Japanese manga and anime culture. This goes in accordance with the fact that this specific sector in the publishing industry has an outstanding importance within Japan and once was labelled "a defining characteristic of Japan's publishing culture" (Cooper-Chen 1997: 98). Its influence on all cultural levels is evident and many manga and anime have close connections to religious issues and topics (Thomas 2012; Winter 2012b; MacWilliams 2012). In this regard a specific interest in advanced 'technology' is a constant feature in the various publications: Many manga heavily include elaborate descriptions of all kind of technical items, special 'energies', or highly sophisticated technologies that become important in the course of the story. This is closely intertwined with science fiction literature where detailed information on all these aspects is more or less imperative. Therein a constant mode of references to a hotchpotch of 'scientifically' sounding terms and expressions is evident, some of them derived from actual research areas in contemporary physics and astronomy (such as 'black holes', 'anti-matter', 'speed of light', and nowadays predominantly 'quantum mechanics', viz. 'quantum technique') but used in a totally misplaced and decontextualized mode, some of them apparently invented and deriving from the imaginative power of the writers and anime makers.

In this regard it is absolutely justified to maintain a direct connection between these imaginations of science fiction and the manga-culture and major features of the publications of *Kōfuku no Kagaku* (Winter 2012a: 159–165). This is also a close parallel to several aspects of the movement *Aum Shinrikyō*, which showed the same interest in the manga and science fiction content. In regard to this movement one well-studied example is the importance of the so-called 'Cosmo Cleaner' (called *kosumo kurinā* in its Japanese transliteration), a kind of filter device that was built by Aum Shinrikyō's technicians in order to protect the group's members from the alleged pollution that threatens human society (Repp 2011: 199). Its name derived from the very popular Anime series *Uchū senkan Yamato* (*Space Battleship Yamato*), that was aired as early as 1974 on Japanese TV and became an international success as well (under its US-American title *Star Blazers*). The movement's founder, Asahara Shōkō, was fond of manga and anime production, as becomes evident with other aspects of his teachings as well. In addition to the aforementioned anime series other popular productions of this genre, such as *Mirai Shōnen Conan* (internationally promoted as *Conan, The Boy in Future*), *Genma Taisen* (*Genma Wars*) or the worldwide famous *Akira* series had major influence on the formation

of various aspects of his teachings, particularly in regard to the imminent end of the world due to major sceneries of a global war and the final apocalypse. As was shown by Richard A. Gardner these cross-references should not be regarded as simple borrowings or even mere plagiarism, but they are indicating a common pool of patterns and notions that were relevant within a specific culture that was highly popular among young people in Japan.²¹ To some extent major features of Asahara's teachings might be regarded as a "recycled version of images, ideas, and notions circulated in a variety of forms by the mass-media and especially in the Manga-genre" (Gardner 2001: 133; see also Winter 2012b: 66–69; Gardner 2008). This even led to the designation of Aum Shinrikyō as a 'manga religion' (*manga shūkyō*), an expression that was used in a critical sense as early as the end of the 1980s in journalistic articles, for instance in the highly popular magazine *Aera* (Schodt 1996: 46–47; see also 226; critical evaluation of this terminology in Gardner 2008). The same can be applied in regard to the teachings of KnK as is evident in its tendency to reproduce most of its teachings in the form of manga and even full-length anime, which generally are of high quality in its making. The UFO material is more or less an additional and natural ingredient.

23.5 Summary and a Short Remark on Recent Developments: From *Ancient Astronauts* as Players in History to Extraterrestrial Beings as Reptiloid Enemies of Mankind?

As was shown in this article the references to the *ancient astronauts* theory play a major role in KnK's publications. It is closely intertwined with its particular notion of 'science' that includes a specific view on history and a rather curious interpretation of historical events throughout world history. Therein references to extraterrestrial interference or at least contacts with extraterrestrial beings serve as a bridge and further proof of the elaborated multidimensional structure of the universe that is so often referred to in the publications without any further details. In this regard the word *himitsu* (mystery) is a guiding term throughout many publications of Ōkawa: through his presupposed superior insight the founder and 'president' of KnK is able to lift the 'veil of mystery' (*himitsu no bēru*) and look 'beyond the veil of eternity' (*eien no bēru no kanatani*) which points to his all-encompassing insight into the 'real' structure

21 A close connection between Aum Shinrikyō and the milieu of the so-called *otaku* culture was also proposed by the sociologist Miyadai Shinji in his study of Japanese youth culture of the 1980s. See Gebhardt (2001: 250–251).

of the universe that is portrayed as multidimensional and guided by various spiritual beings.²² The references to extraterrestrial beings and contacts are just an additional ingredient that is presented as self-evident so that it is not in need of further explanation. That becomes obvious in the way this material is referred to in many of KnK's publications, namely as a natural and self-explanatory fact without any additional information. Particularly the *ancient astronauts* topos is treated in reference to a seemingly canonical pool of material, that was coined in the context of ufological literature in the second half of twentieth century. As was shown this attitude can be placed in a major context of the reception of features of the New Age in Japan, that became influential at least from the 1970s onwards and was integrated in certain frames of Japanese religious history. Therein references to the *ancient astronauts* thesis, that was promoted prominently and shaped by the Swiss bestseller author Erich von Däniken, play an important role. Their integration into the various publications of KnK fits into their general description of the universe as a multidimensional and highly elaborated structure whose 'mysteries' can be understood through the help of the teachings of Ōkawa. This attitude can be put into the larger frame of cultural developments in twentieth century Japan, encompassing both the reception of the originally US-American UFO craze but also the high importance of the manga and anime culture as a cultural arena of major importance in the Japanese context. In this regard KnK seems to integrate features and respond to a common area of interest within society.

As mentioned in the introduction the references to extraterrestrial beings, their alleged presence and influence on earth as well as the various dangers deriving from that became an even more important aspect of KnK's publications just recently. An additional ingredient of this rather new take on the material is the stress on the presupposed 'dangerous' influence of extraterrestrial beings that are allegedly living amongst us. In some of the recent publications even the well-known idea of 'reptiloid' extraterrestrials which try to dominate and suppress the human beings became important (for the background of the 'reptiloid' alien thesis, that was mainly propagated by the prominent writer David Icke and its history, see Robertson 2016: 121–167, particularly 141–144). An example would be one of the most recent anime published by KnK, entitled *UFO gakuen no himitsu* (literally, 'the mystery of the UFO campus') from 2015, whose story-line includes aspects such as the abduction of human beings by aliens, humans that are under the control of those mighty beings (through an implanted chip inside their brain), and the alleged infiltration of the world by extraterrestrial entities that are portrayed as ugly reptiloid monsters at the end

22 The quotes are from the film-version of *Eien no hō*, see Winter (2012a: 327).

of the film. Once again highly differing concepts of various origin were copied and integrated in a major KnK-publication. However, they seem to indicate a shift in the general framing: Publications such as these basically purport the idea of a constant danger that is omnipresent and could be fought against with the help of the movement's teachings. When taking the recent developments of the last decade into consideration (as far as it is possible to evaluate them now) it seems to be a further step in a highly problematic swing away from its original this-worldly orientation and the stress on the importance of success within society through one's own effort and diligence to a rather closed and seemingly confused focus on an alleged omnipresent threat and imminent danger. This is probably rooted in the problems and the heavy losses in reputation and membership figures that became increasingly evident in the last years. The emphasis on an imminent and omnipresent danger to the world and particularly the Japanese people was already highly important in the course of its failed political endeavours that began with the foundation of the so-called Happiness Realisation Party (Kōfuku Jitsugentō). Although it participated in several national elections from 2009 onwards it saw a constant loss of voters (starting with 459,387 votes in 2009, which fell to 229,024 already in the next election the following year) and was never able to gain a single seat. The advertisement campaigns accompanying this new and offensive publicity approach were very intense, not to say rather harsh.²³ The various commercials in that campaign were, among other topics, focused on the alleged threat to the Japanese state coming from North Korea (and China), and challenged the strict separation of religion and state in the constitution of the modern Japanese state (see Winter 2018: 224–225; Pokorny and Winter 2013: 40). The political party's advertisement campaign stressed features reminiscent of this initial phase, for instance, purporting visions of upcoming disasters in Japan. In a real-life film published 2012 and entitled *Fainaru jajjimento* (Final Judgement) the story develops around a small group of people who become aware of the imminent threat coming from the fictional Asian state Ōran (*Ōran-koku*). All this obviously plays with the fears of many Japanese who became increasingly disillusioned in regard to the future development of Japan and the obvious rise

23 See the article, "Japan's Happiness Party plans to attack North Korea," <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/japan/6016544/Japans-Happiness-Party-plans-to-attack-North-Korea.html>, accessed 13/02/2019, on alleged plans of the then president of the political party, who was the wife of Ōkawa (whom he divorced only recently). A highly critical summary of the party's main message is also given at <https://www.japan-times.co.jp/community/2009/08/04/community/party-offers-a-third-way-happiness/#.XGZ-pLgxnIU>, accessed 15/02/2019.

of China as the new power in East Asia, both economically, but also politically. The future will show whether the movement will continue this path.

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Taiyō no hō. Eru Kantare e no michi, 2000.

The Golden Laws: *Ōgon no hō. Eru Kantare no rekishikan*, 2003.

The Laws of Eternity: *Eien no hō. Eru Kantare no sekaikan*, 2007.

Fainaru jajjimento (Final judgement), 2012.

UFO Gakuen no himitsu, 2015.

Internal video production (only available in the temples of KnK):

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Other Films

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Graham Hancock, *Flooded Kingdoms of the Ice Age*, 2003.

East Asian UFO Religiosity

Lukas Pokorny

24.1 Introduction

Drawing on my definition put forth in the *Handbook of East Asian New Religious Movements* (Pokorny and Winter 2018: 4–6), East Asia is taken to comprise China/Taiwan, the Koreas, Japan, and Vietnam. UFO religiosity here is not limited to the belief in aliens-cum-spacecraft but may also involve extraterrestrial entities in the absence of related vehicles and vice versa. This chapter is a first tour d’horizon of a subject hitherto not systematically researched by scholars of East Asian religions. Several movements of East Asian origin (Japan, China/Taiwan, South Korea) are introduced with a focus on their ufological aspects. Particular emphasis is given to the Japanese context where UFO religiosity thus far has taken its most expressive form.

East Asian ethnic UFO religiosity aside, a number of western UFO groups are visibly active in the region, such as most sizeably Scientology (operating branches in Japan: *Saientorōjī* サイエントロジー, <https://www.scientology.jp/>; South Korea: *Saiōnt’ollogigyō* 사이언톨로지교; Taiwan: *Shāndǎjī Jiàohuì* 山達基教會, <https://www.scientology.org.tw/>; and Vietnam: *Khoa luận giáo*) and Raelism (present in Japan: *Raerian Mūbumento* ラエリアンムーブメント, <https://www.raelianjapan.jp/>; South Korea: *Raellian Mubūmōnt’ū* 라엘리안 무브먼트, <http://www.raelian.co.kr/>; Taiwan: *Léiěr Yùndòng* 雷爾運動, <https://tw.rael.org/>; and Vietnam: *Phong trào Rael*, <https://vi.rael.org/>) with both having several hundreds to thousands of adherents altogether. Smaller groups with local followings going into the dozens comprise, among others, Benjamin Creme’s (1922–2016) Share International (Japan: *Shea Intānashonaru* シェア インターナショナル, <http://www.sjsh.co.jp/>; allegedly also being active in South Korea and Taiwan); Eduard Albert “Billy” Meier’s (b. 1937) FIGU or Freie Interessengemeinschaft für Grenz- und Geisteswissenschaften und Ufologiestudien (Japan: *Figu Randesuguruppe Yāpan* フィグ ランデスグルッペ ヤーパン, <http://jp.figu.org/>); and George King’s (1919–1997) Aetherius Society (Japan: *Aseriasu Sosaetī* アセリアス・ソサエティー, <https://www.aetherius.org/jp/>). The presence of these movements—and especially that of Raelism¹—

1 The history of Raelism in South Korea, for instance, goes back to the early 1980s (Mun 2013).

added to the unfolding UFO discourse in East Asia. This discourse was created by and large due to the globalisation of the New Age current (C. *xīnshídài* 新時代; J. *nyūeiji* ニューエイジ; K. *nyueiji* 뉴에이지), which has been spreading markedly via a surge of book translations from the 1970s, and again gaining pace since the 1990s through the internet and related film and TV productions.

24.2 Movements of East Asian Origin

24.2.1 Japan

Japan is the hub of UFO religiosity in East Asia. A key discursive role was played in particular by GLA (*Jī Eru Ē* ジーエルエー), short for God Light Association founded in 1968 by Takahashi Shinji 高橋信次 (1927–1976). As of 2018, the Tōkyō-based movement claims nearly 55,000 members—half of which being a more reasonable estimate. Next to small branches in Australia, Brazil, and the United States, GLA also maintains a limited following in South Korea. Starting out as a largely Buddhist-minded medium increasingly sympathetic vis-à-vis Christian ideas, late in his life Takahashi introduced an ancient astronaut episode in his teachings to shed light on the dawn of humanity (Whelan 2007). According to Takahashi, some 365 million years ago, hailing from the star Beta (*Bēta hoshi* ベータ星) a fleet of “anti-gravity photon spacecraft” (*hanjūryoku kōshi uchūsen* 反重力光子宇宙船) landed in the eastern Nile valley in what is present-day Egypt. Aboard the ship were several thousand people—who were to become humankind’s ancestors—alongside seven archangels (*daiten-shi* 大天使) led by Michael (*Mikaeru* ミカエル) as well as an individual named El Ranty (*Eru Ranti* エル・ランティ). The latter is deemed a most exalted spirit being second only to the Great Divine Spirit of the Great Cosmos (*Daiūchū daishinrei* 大宇宙大神霊) or God. This Great Consciousness (*daiishiki* 大意識) charged the True Messiah (*Sin no Meshiya* 真のメシヤ) or El Ranty, whose modern-day incarnation is Takahashi Shinji, to oversee Earth’s development. Spiritual components of El Ranty are thought to have later taken shape, among others, as Moses, Jesus, and Śākyamuni Buddha. The lands first occupied by the space settlers were named El Qantara (*Eru Kantarā* エル・カンタラー), later to be known as Garden of Eden (*Eden no sono* エデンの園), a paradise on Earth. However, the arrival of a second fleet of Beta spacecraft was to incite disharmony. While, at the time, El Ranty had already moved to the Heavenly Realm (*tenshōkai* 天上界), his aide, the Archangel Michael had remained behind. Ultimately, the rising conflict had Michael also leave for the Heavenly Realm taking with him the virtuous portion of humankind. Thereafter, hell materialised through the Fall of the Archangel Lucifer (*Rushiferu* ルシフェル)

who turned into Satan (サタン) and vice became abundant on Earth, being frequently antagonised on a larger scale, albeit only temporarily, by incarnations of El Ranty et al. Hence, humankind entered the cycle of civilisational rise and decay as can be seen most strikingly in the fates of the Mū civilisation and the Atlanteans. Shortly before his death, Takahashi Shinji is claimed to have recognised his daughter, Keiko 高橋佳子 (b. 1956), as an incarnation of the Archangel Michael, spiritually inaugurating her as heir. With her father's passing, she resumed to spread the True Law (*shōhō* 正法), aiming to break this cyclical deadlock by directing humankind to the way towards enlightenment and concomitantly restoring Utopia (*yūtopia* ユートピア), that is, the original Eden. In anger and disbelief several high-ranking members turned away, some branching off with their own groups.

An important splinter movement that has been launched following the demise of Takahashi is Chino Shōhō 千乃正法 (Chino's True Law). Established by former GLA sympathiser and medium Chino Yūko 千乃裕子 (née Masuyama Hidemi 増山英美; 1934–2006), it became the most visible native representative of UFO religiosity in the early 2000s claiming up to 2,000 members, and attracted international attention under the name “Pana-Wave Laboratory,” a reference to a sub-organisation within the group. As a consequence of the negative 2003 media coverage (Dorman 2005) and the death of Chino, membership numbers plummeted with only a few remaining today. Chino likewise rejected Takahashi Keiko's legitimacy and also became very critical of Takahashi Shinji. She claimed to be the actual incarnation of the Archangel Michael, which would render her the true successor to pass on the True Law—hence the name of the group. Guided by GLA's ancient astronaut account, Chino divulged her own origin version (Chino 1977). 365 million years ago, a group of extraterrestrial scientists from the Star Veh-erde (*Bē erude hoshi* ベー・エルデ星), including, among others, seven archangels, landed in the Nile valley. They called the place El Qantara, which was later given the name Garden of Erden [*sic*] (*Eruden no sono* エルデンの園). The exploration party was led by Count El Shalrea Cantareh (Eru Sharurea Kantāre エル・シャルレア・カンターレ) alias El Lantie (=El Ranty; *Eru Ranti* エル・ランティ), a famed professor of physics and inventor of a gravity-reversing spacecraft that allowed for superluminal travel. Two additional teams of researchers arrived in quick succession. Among the latter group were individuals that would later spiritually augment (or co-incarnate as) Moses, Buddha, and Jesus—all being cousins of El Lantie.² Earth was previously chosen by El Lantie for its fitting and flourishing biosphere in

2 The spirit co-incarnating as Jesus, for example, is held to be that of a former Prince of the Pleiades, who was later adopted by the King of Veh-erde, El Lantie's uncle.

order to expand the territory of the Solar Federation, a coalition of star systems spanning thousands of light years³—M45 or the Pleiades located in the constellation of Taurus; M35 or NGC 2168 located in the constellation of Gemini; M36 or NGC 1960 located in the constellation of Auriga; and Veh-erde whose exact location remained undisclosed by Chino. The four civilisations had been at war with each other in the distant past and so decided to politically unite establishing the Solar Federation, with the aim of jointly creating Utopia, that is, implementing the True Law. The Federation's millenarian project was already well progressed with Veh-erde at the vanguard when Earth became part of its dominion. By now the four solar systems had successfully raised Utopia.

El Lantie passed away and ascended to the Heavenly Realm at the age of 55, four years after his arrival on Earth. Thenceforth wielding the highest authority in the Heavenly Realm, his spirit became known to humankind under various names such as, most prominently, Jehovah (*Ehoba* エホバ). He was to retire from this most exalted position as Great King (*daiō* 大王) only recently (in 1977), being succeeded by the Archangel Michael. Since then both spirits reside in the highest, that is, the tenth dimension of Heaven—the Cosmic World (*uchūkai* 宇宙界)—alongside the spirits of Moses, the Buddha, and Jesus.

The Veh-erdens created the first humans. Throughout history and, notably, in the past 10,000 years various highly cultivated spirits of the “star people” (*seijin* 星人) co-incarnated many a time as important historical (or mythical) figures to further beacon humankind towards Utopia, the Solar Federation's ideal encapsulating the True Law, which is the expression of the divine. They taught them—by means of religion, because scientific reasoning vis-à-vis the ancients was not deemed feasible—how to live in accordance with nature. The first verbalisation of the True Law is rooted in the 3,500 years old teachings of Apollo (*Aporo* アポロ) of Delos, a co-incarnation of Michael and son of Zeus (*Zeusu* ゼウス), who in turn was a co-incarnation of El Lantie.

Chino was believed to be in contact with all these guiding spirits, for she herself is a co-incarnation of Michael. Having learnt about her identity, in 1977, both Takahashi Keiko, the leader of GLA, who had been possessed by Satan, as well as her father, Shinji, attempted to murder Chino and her protectors, the seven archangels. The battle that ensued eventually brought the destruction of Satan and Takahashi Shinji (Chino 1978).⁴ Another attack was launched in the early 1990s by communist forces secretly targeting Chino using harmful

3 How these distances could have been travelled in the pre-superluminal age is not explained by Chino.

4 Satan is believed to have been co-incarnated at the time of the Garden of Erden as El Lantie's twin brother.

“scalar waves” in an attempt to slowly electromagnetically poison her. Chino’s death would have enabled the communists to unopposedly achieve dominion over the East Asian region. Sensing the threat that would come to fruition at some point, already in the early 1950s a group of Venusians headed by the Archangel Thor (*Tōru* トール) approached the United States government, offering the President their help, which was refused. Thor remained on Earth alongside other spirits such as El Lantie, later closely watching over Chino. In 1994, Chino took matters in her own hands to stop the growing environmental and societal hazards elicited by scalar wave weapons. Members were therefore tasked to commence investigations into the nature of scalar waves and explore means of protection. This mobile task force of devotees engaging full-time in research was named Pana-Wave Laboratory (*Pana Wēbu Kenkyūjo* パナウェーブ研究所). In 2003, a van procession drove across Honshū to search for an electromagnetically unpolluted area, which drew the attention of the media. What spiked additional interest was a doomsday prediction by Chino set for 15 May of the same year. Like with her previous predictions regarding Japan’s destruction, this as well as a re-dated (22 May) one failed. In this case disaster was allegedly either averted due to a force field created by a Venusian UFO fleet protecting earth, or, more trivially, a simple miscalculation on Chino’s part. In 2004, another prediction transpired anticipating the catastrophe to occur probably at some point in 2005. In mid-December, Chino reported that the entire UFO fleet orbiting earth had crashed and that the Pana-Wave Laboratory would now commence the construction of its own spacecraft in order to escape Earth’s imminent destruction. Assembling the materials needed for building the ship turned out to be more difficult than expected, which led Chino to devise a new plan to save the faithful. In April 2005, she indicated that a rescue mission by another UFO fleet was on its way and that members would be moved to “Planet A” after a six-month space journey while earth was to be annihilated. The construction of a spacecraft landing area began to facilitate the rescue. Ultimately, in late October 2006, Chino passed away due to cancer, apparently the consequence of long-time scalar wave poisoning. The UFO fleet did not materialise for Chino’s doomsday prediction was obviously miscalculated once again (Jimenez Murguía 2011).

The presently most notable Japanese religious movement that saliently cherishes UFO beliefs is *Kōfuku no Kagaku* 幸福の科学 (Science of Happiness; international label: Happy Science; henceforth: KnK). Founded by Ōkawa Ryūhō 大川隆法 (b. 1956 as Nakagawa Takashi 中川隆) in 1986, the Tōkyō-based KnK today variously claims a well-overstated between some ten to fifteen million members. Notwithstanding this exaggerated figure that must be reduced to a more sober 200,000 to 400,000 adherents, KnK enjoys sizeable public

visibility, particularly owing to Ōkawa's veritable "publication frenzy" that has produced more than 3,000 books to date. Ōkawa's books belong to the standard inventory of virtually every esoteric bookshop and reading corner in Japan. In Taiwan (starting in 2005) and South Korea (2007), KnK operates two branches each, as well as one branch in Hong Kong. There is no formal branch in Vietnam nor in the People's Republic of China (PRC); yet, according to a personal memo from the KnK Headquarters, there seems to be an avid readership in both countries.

The early cornerstones of KnK's doctrine are founded upon the teachings of Takahashi Shinji. GLA's formative influence was readily acknowledged until the early 1990s in relation to Ōkawa's mediumistic interviewer, his father, Nakagawa Tadayoshi 中川忠義 (1921–2003), himself a former high-ranked member of GLA (Winter 2012: 45–53, 191–199). Later, the KnK universe has been greatly expanded thereby reducing the GLA impact. Whereas KnK's ufological dimension always had a firm place, specifically within emic historiography, since 2010 the number of related talks and publications skyrocketed, contriving an increasingly intricate narrative (cf. Ōkawa 2015).

KnK's story of creation (Ōkawa 2011c) begins some one-hundred billion years ago with the Primordial Buddha [or God] of the Great Universe (*Daiuchū no konpon butsu* [shin] 大宇宙の根本仏 [神]) starting a sixty-billion years long cosmogonic planning stage, which resulted in the inception of the three-dimensional world. God spiritually animated the cosmos and chief celestial constellations and bodies by incrementally scaling down his consciousness qua independent spirit projections. The eleventh-dimensional stellar consciousness of our solar system, one of billions guided by the twelfth-dimensional galactic consciousness, that is, the Spirit of the Milky Way, was born some ten billion years ago, giving way to the first tenth-dimensional planetary consciousness three billion years later in the form of Mercury. However, Mercury could not support life. So another one billion years later (i.e., six billion years ago), Venus was formed and half a billion years thereafter Venus' consciousness projected down to the ninth dimension manifesting in a spirit being named El Miore (*Eru Miōre* エル・ミオーレ), who went on to create life on the planet. After some experimentation with plants and animals, he created a humanoid species cultivating them for over a billion years. The Venusian race was human-like yet ultimately vested with far superior cognitive and physical traits. Under El Miore's guidance, they succeeded in establishing Utopia and handling interstellar travel. Eventually, Venus was to become uninhabitable due to forces of nature, but before suffering extinction, the Venusians spread to other planets while some stayed behind in highly evolved spiritual forms assisting El Miore's unfolding quest on earth. At the time, the three higher dimensional consciousnesses

(Sun, Earth, and Moon) responsible for Earth commenced to create basal life on the planet. El Miore, who acted as advisor, was finally invited some 600 million years ago to craft more complex life based on his Venusian experience. 200 million years later the creation process of humankind started and El Miore took on the name El Cantare (*Eru Kantāre* エル・カンターレ), becoming the Great Spirit (*tairei* 大霊) of Earth. Greatly elevated Venusian life energy was part of El Cantare's creational recipe. After the creation of 770 million individuals, El Cantare sought to introduce lesser lifeforms from other planets (*chikyūgai seibutsu* 地球外生物) to allow humankind to gain leadership experience. He thus turned to other ninth-dimensional spirits who then joined the terrestrial spirit group under El Cantare's lead—Therabim (*Serabimu* セラビム) from the constellation Cygnus who would be later incarnated, among others, as Confucius; Moria (*Mōriya* モーリヤ) from Cancer of which Moses is an incarnation; and Amor (*Amōru* アモール), presently El Cantare's deputy, from Sagittarius of which Jesus is an incarnation. The high spirits decided to invite extraterrestrial immigrants to further populate the planet. First, a Reptilian race (*reputarian* レプタリアン) from the star Zeta (*Zēta hoshi* ゼータ星), also known as Beta, in the Magellanic Clouds arrived in their spacecraft (*uchūsen* 宇宙船) over 300 million years ago led by the ninth-dimensional being Enlil (*Enriru* エンリル), who later became venerated among ancient Mesopotamian civilisations.⁵ One of his lieutenants, a fellow spiritually evolved Reptilian, was Lucifer, who incarnated as Satan 120 million years ago and created Hell.⁶ The Zeta Reptilians were a belligerent people and soon conflict with humans arose, putting Earth at the brink of a world war. El Cantare then for the first time incarnated as an individual named Alpha (*Arufa* アルファ) in the region

5 KnK holds that most deities worshipped in past and present are actually highly cultivated extraterrestrials. Similarly, the chief religions of old, alive or extinct, have been founded by extraterrestrials, such as by the various incarnations of the ninth-dimensional spirits overseeing Earth. Overall, aliens are viewed as cultural heroes and bringers of civilisation, but also, occasionally, as agents of destruction. Enlil, for instance, is thought to have, among others, unleashed the great Deluge of biblical times.

6 Lucifer (*Rushifā* ルシファー) or Luciel (*Rushieru* ルシエル) was a staunch advocate of Reptilian philosophy, desiring that El Cantare would adopt it for Earth in order to speed up spiritual evolution. This would have entailed faster technologisation—the attainment of a certain level of advanced technology representing the threshold for joining the Cosmic Federation (*uchū rengō* 宇宙連合) (Ōkawa 2011a). Lucifer's proposal was rejected by El Cantare and other ninth-dimensional spirits because the Reptilian Machiavellianism-like "Might Is Right" ideology was deemed archaic and going against the very principle of love that gives (see note 7). Lucifer therefore rebelled and was slain by his angelic twin, the Archangel Michael. Unwilling to accept his failure, he incarnated on earth and was again defeated by Michael. His spirit transmigrated to the lowest part of the spirit world where he raised the domain of Hell under his reign.

of today's Africa in order to instruct the people and accordingly alleviate crisis. To balance sensitivities, he invited a further one billion people from Orion who arrived in a massive space fleet. Along with the new immigrants, three ninth-dimensional spirits came to Earth: Kaitron (*Kaitoron* カイトロン) or the theosophical Koot Hoomi (*Kūtohūmi* クートフーミ), whose later incarnations included Archimedes and Isaac Newton; Orgon (*Orugon* オルゴン) or Maitrayer [*sic*] (*Maitorēyā* マイトレーヤー); and Achemene (*Akemēne* アケメーネ), considered the Manu of Hindu mythology. Roughly 150 million years ago, El Cantare incarnated as Elohim (*Erohimu* エロヒム) in today's Middle Eastern region to teach yet again countering false religions that were legion. Twenty million years later, upon El Cantare's invitation a last wave of extraterrestrial immigration began. This time two billion people arrived from Pegasus, among them the last two ninth-dimensional spirits completing El Cantare's advisory board: Theoria (*Seoriya* セオリヤ) who incarnated as Zeus, and Samatria (*Samatoriya* サマトリヤ) who incarnated as Zoroaster and Mani. Extraterrestrial migration from and to Earth continues up to the present, albeit in far smaller numbers. Their superior spiritual and technological achievements notwithstanding, aliens are apparently especially intrigued by humankind, for its accomplishments in the realms of culture, religion, and politics are perceived to eclipse that of most space civilisations. Immigration and temporary site visits of the space people (*uchūjin* 宇宙人) are held to be on the rise following the dawn of the nuclear and space ages, which is also why the number of UFO sightings is surging since the mid-twentieth century. In fact, the past influx of extraterrestrials rendered between thirty to forty per cent of humans part of an alien lineage. Moreover, human races are effectively taken to derive from the diversity of alien races. The Anglo-Saxons, for example, are a people of Reptilian ancestry, which would explain their imperialistic penchant.

The creation of Hell and the subsequent spread of evil prompted El Cantare to let his consciousness incarnate seven more times at crucial junctures in humankind's history over the past 17,000 years in an attempt to re-anchor the pursuit of Utopia in people's minds.⁷ El Cantare's current incarnation is Ōkawa Ryūhō, who once again is slated to avert disaster while teaching the Law (Pokorny 2020). More so than at the time of one of his previous incarnations some 7,000 years ago—as Rient Arl Croud (*Riento Āru Kuraudo* リエン ト・アール・クラウド in an ancient Inca Kingdom—El Cantare has to cope with deceitful machinations of extraterrestrials, specifically, evil Zeta Reptilians

7 KnK's Utopia or Buddha Land (*butsu kokudo* 仏国土) is envisioned as a world of happiness grounded in love that gives (*ataeru ai* 与える愛); a substantialisation of God's will, that is, the Law (*hō* 法).

(Ōkawa 2010). Presently, aliens belonging to more than twenty different species are residing on Earth. They possess a variety of forms, corporeal and occasionally incorporeal. The bodily forms oft-times resemble the depictions of aliens in mythology, fiction, and Hollywood movies. For instance, the Dogons are veritable lookalikes of the Na'vi from James Cameron's *Avatar* universe;⁸ some Martians look like human-faced pegasi, who came to Earth in a pyramidal spacecraft when their culture went into decline and exerted a particular influence on the ancient Egyptians; many of the Star Wars aliens, most prominently the Wookie Chewbacca and Yoda, but also Japan's monstrous cinematic favourites Godzilla and King Kong, are modelled on actual extraterrestrials dwelling on Earth. The reason being that writers and filmmakers have, if only subconsciously, already spotted specimen of these aliens in real life. The two extraterrestrial civilisations most significant for Earth's development are the Pleiadeans and their even more ancient peers, the Vegans, two space races who have realised Utopia on their home worlds. They are believed to be predominantly of Venusian origin and appear as beautiful, remarkably cultivated humans with a Nordic physiognomy. Vega is home to the Cosmic Federation's (also called the Federation of Planets; *wakusei rengō* 惑星連合) headquarters, a coalition of eight advanced spacefaring civilisations that aim at safeguarding the Cosmic Treaty (*uchū kyōtei* 宇宙協定), which shall ensure balance between civilisations in the universe. That is to say, aliens must not intervene into the affairs of other planetary civilisations, specifically with Earth (*chikyū bunmei fukainyū* 地球文明不介入). However, this Cosmic Rule (*uchū no rōru* 宇宙のルール) is being continuously undermined, most notoriously by the Zeta Reptilians and their cyborg (*saibōgu* サイボーグ) servants, the Greys (*gurei* グレイ) (Ōkawa 2011b). The Greys are the most populous alien "species" found on Earth, maintaining operation bases throughout the solar system with the largest one located on the "tenth" planet Nibiru. They are tasked by their Reptilian lords to carry out their evil machinations, which, among others, involves the abduction (*abudakushon* アブダクション) of humans, apparently happening millions of times for experimental and physically engineering purposes. Frequently, the abductees are cloned to enable alien spirits to "walk-in" (*wōkuin* ウォークイン), that is, take possession of the bodies; something that

8 The Dogon people in West Africa would originally hail from a star system carrying the same name. The Maya civilisation largely comes from the neighbouring Sirius system but also consisted of incarnated Dogons, which later formed the Aztec civilisation. The Dogons are thought to be an insidious and weak people, which is why both civilisations were eventually conquered. Notably, KnK traces former United States President Barack Obama's (b. 1961) spiritual ancestry back to the Dogons. It is thus reasoned that his "feeble" presidency (2009–2017), if it had continued, would have led to the fall of the United States.

may occur to non-cloned humans as well, for it would allow the alien spirits to enter the reincarnation cycle of the terrestrial spirit group.⁹ Alien impact is deemed all-pervading. A striking example would be the catastrophe that wiped out the dinosaurs, which was indeed an alien attack. Likewise, modern technology is to a great extent believed to come from aliens, specifically the Reptilians who, in return, receive permission by the political authorities to infiltrate human civilisation and conduct abductions. Moreover, in doing so they already managed to indirectly control parts of the world's elite, pitting the various political actors against each other. While it has been the Reptilians that helped the United States achieve military and economic dominion in the past two centuries, starting with the Dèng Xiǎopíng (1904–1997) era (1978–1989), several alien species turned their attention to the PRC. Lately, the PRC has successfully forged close relationships with the aliens, being supplied with new technologies and weaponry and, in return, allowing the aliens to use secret military bases on their soil. KnK cautions that the Reptilian influence may very well propel the PRC's aggressive militarism, which will result in escalating conflicts and, eventually, World War III (Ōkawa 2012). Furthermore, the rising level of evil in the world will soon be viewed by some alien races as an invitation to bring destruction upon billions of those deemed not to follow the teachings of El Cantare. However, KnK is keen to antagonise this grim future scenario, thereby also paving the way for advanced space travel technology (*uchū kōkō no gijutsu* 宇宙航行の技術), of which humankind is only one step away. Faster than light journeys will then be made possible, among others, by utilising natural spacetime warping processes and, at some point later, through matter-antimatter spirit world travelling.

These examples of fully-fledged UFO religions aside, ufological elements can also be traced elsewhere, such as, most notably, in Kurama Kōkyō 鞍馬弘教, a Tendai Buddhist-derived movement launched in 1947 by Shigaraki Kōun 信楽香雲 (1895–1972) and operating from Kurama Temple (*Kuramadera* 鞍馬寺) near Kyōto. It is the place where Usui Mikao 臼井甕男 (1865–1926), the founder of Reiki 靈氣, is traditionally held to have achieved enlightenment in 1922. Kurama Kōkyō envisages a triune deity named *Sonten* 尊天 that consists of Bishamonten 毘沙門天 (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa), the 1,000-armed Kanzeon 觀世音 (Skt. Avalokiteśvara), and, outstandingly, Gohō Maōson 護法魔王尊—the three respectively representing light, love, and power. Gohō Maōson is venerated

9 In this respect, it is held, for instance, that the elite of the Spanish Empire were actually Reptilians, who walked-in, many later reincarnating as Spaniards and thus expediting colonial expansion.

as the conqueror of evil and Spirit of the Earth. He is variously believed to have flown with his wings, navigated a vessel, or travelled on or alongside a meteorite from Venus to Earth some six million years ago, where he henceforth oversaw evolution and salvation of humankind in particular. In Japanese Theosophist circles Gohō Maōson is occasionally identified as Sanat Kumara (Sanato Kumāra サナト クマーラ).

24.2.2 *China/Taiwan*

Two key exponents of East Asian UFO religiosity originating outside of Japan are Fǎlún Gōng 法輪功 (Practice of the Law Wheel) or Fǎlún Dàfǎ 法輪大法 (Great Law of the Law Wheel), and Zhēndào Jiàohuì 真道教會 (True Way Church; commonly rendered as Chen Tao). Founded by Lǐ Hóngzhì 李洪志 (b. 1951/52) in 1992, Fǎlún Gōng emerged as a result of the *qìgōng* boom of the 1980s and 1990s in the PRC. Until the authorities cracked down on it in 1999, the number of Fǎlún Gōng practitioners reportedly went into the tens of millions. Today, Fǎlún Gōng has spread globally, with a sizeable followership in East Asia. Figures provided by the group speak of several thousands to tens of thousands of practitioners in Vietnam starting with only a handful in 2000; more than 300,000 in Taiwan; and figures in-between these two for South Korea (*P'arun'gung* 파룬궁; *Pōmnyun'gong* 범륜궁) and Japan (*Fārungon* ファールンゴン; *Hōrinkō* 法輪功). Although mostly marginalised or ignored even by core practitioners, ufological elements play indeed an important systemic part in Fǎlún Gōng doctrine. Lǐ addressed the subject especially in the mid- to late 1990s in his publications, talks, and interviews.

Humans were once Buddhas, Daos, and Gods (*fú, dào, shén* 佛、道、神), that is, enlightened beings wielding tremendous powers. However, misdirected interaction had them gradually spiritually deteriorate. If it were for the all-balancing and all-permeating Law (*fǎ* 法), these karmically rotten beings would have been completely annihilated; yet, owing to the utmost compassion of their still enlightened peers of old, they were saved and thus capacitated to “return to the origin” (*huánběn* 还本); that is, to cultivate themselves and ultimately once again embrace their original enlightened nature. Based on the principle of *fǎ*-rectification (*zhèngfǎ* 正法), when earthly civilisations would reach a critical mass of moral transgressions, a purification process would be triggered (Pokorny 2020). The ensuing destruction would eradicate all those acting contrary to the Law; something that apparently occurred on Earth eighty-one times so far and which is very soon to happen once again. Every time practitioners of the Law would survive and live on in a reset world—like many Chinese alongside a few others did during the last Great Catastrophe

(*dà jié nàn* 大劫难), a deluge—or be transferred to other planets.¹⁰ Those who settled on new planets would likely evolve technologically but not always equally in spiritual terms, which resulted in wars between some spacefaring civilisations. Not necessarily all of the “space people” (*wàixīngrén* 外星人) are former earthlings; in fact, every star and planet is inhabited—the multidimensional cosmos harbours virtually infinite life. Whereas Earth has not yet become involved in those larger scale galactic conflicts, extraterrestrials have very well secretively launched infiltration operations with the ultimate goal to effectively replace humankind, for they are envious of the human body and spiritual potential. Aliens, which are variously shaped like ghosts or humans with a nose “made of bone” (cited in Penny 2012: 131), have dwelled on Earth since the early nineteenth century, journeying inside UFOs (*fēidié* 飞碟), capable of apparently superluminal as well as interdimensional travel. Lǐ Hóngzhì argues that most technologies developed since that time have been given to us by the alien visitors in order to make humankind vitally dependent on them. Technology and science would virtually zombify humans and allow the greedy and lust-driven aliens to execute their evil master plan, that is, clone them, nest into the doppelgangers, and take on their identities. Eventually natural human reproduction will be declared illegal once the aliens have taken over substantial parts of the ruling elite. A few countries have been especially targeted, rendering them crucibles for misguiding technology (Japan), culture (United States), machinery (England), and “race-mixing” (*hùnzá rénzhǒng* 混杂人种) (Spain), which will unroot humans (Lǐ 1998; cf. Chang 2004: 69–72).

Zhēndào Jiàohuì, alternatively Shàngdì Jiùshúhuì 上帝救贖會 (God's Redemption Association) or, formally, Shàngdì Zhěngjiù Dìqiú Fēidiéhuì 上帝拯救地球飛碟會 (God Saving the Earth Flying Saucer Association) was founded in 1993 in Běipǔ 北埔 in North-western Taiwan by the then College professor Chén Héngmíng 陳恆明 (b. 1955). Informed by Buddhist, Daoist, Christian, and ufological themes, Chén espoused a decidedly catastrophic millenarian worldview that led him and some 140 members to move in 1997 to the “Pure Land of God” (cited in Prather 1999: 2), that is, the United States. Relocation was deemed necessary for East Asia was predicted to become the epicentre of an impending cataclysm consisting of both manmade and natural disasters. Concretely, a prophesied military blockade of Taiwan by the PRC in January 1999 was held to herald imminent destruction, in quick succession expressing itself most saliently through a new Korean War, a great flood ravaging the East Asian region, and Taiwan's self-inflicted nuclear devastation. Ultimately, an

10 In this respect, for example, former Earth civilisations created the moon to illuminate the night, and developed nuclear plants, of which traces are still extant.

atomic war would lay waste the whole devilish world (*mójiè* 魔界), save for North America, which will be transplanted to Mars in 2043 when utter global annihilation would be complete, after which a new world-cycle would commence.¹¹ In fact, the previous world-cycle envisioned by the adherents was apparently authentically captured by film director Luc Besson (b. 1959) in his 1997 movie *The Fifth Element* (Wright and Greil 2011: 166). Prior to the grim events of 1999, Jesus—whose physical father Joseph had been a previous incarnation of Chén—was believed to descend to Earth on a spacecraft (i.e., God's Aircraft; *shàngdì de fēixíngqì* 上帝的飛行器) on March 31, 1998, following a TV proclamation on Dallas, Texas's Channel 18 six days earlier. He would take on the shape of Chén talking freely to the people in all the languages of the world. In the future, the surviving humans would gain access to the “divine science and technology,” an example of which are flying saucers (*fēidié* 飛碟), imagined by Chén variously as material objects and light spheres (Cook 2003: 305). When Jesus was not broadcasted on March 25, the prophecy of the Second Advent was adjusted; God would have indeed “landed,” descending into every human being. Failing to materialise in early 1999, the cataclysm was repeatedly postponed. Eventually, the group, which had attracted enormous media attention, went silent and gradually dissolved.

24.2.3 South Korea

An interest in UFOs (also *yuep'o* 유에프오; *mihwagin pihaengmulch'ae* 미확인비행물체; or flying saucer, *pihaeng chōpsi* 비행접시) slowly emerged in South Korea from the 1970s, going hand in hand with a rising number of UFO sightings (UFO *mokkyōk* 목격), some since then even being reported in the national media. The New Age boom of the 1980s gradually popularised ufological elements for the wider religious discourse, leading some news outlets to speak of a veritable “UFO craze” (*UFO yōlp'ung* 열풍) already in the 1990s. Although there are as yet no larger-scale religions of Korean origin that draw their self-identity on UFO mythology, a few notable movements utilise ufological themes. For example, in Yōngsaenggyo Hananim'ui Sōnghoe 영생교하나님의성회 (Religion of Eternal Life Holy Society of God; alternatively: Victory Altar, Sūngni Chedan 승리제단), founded in 1981 by Cho Hŭi-sōng 조희성 (1931–2004) and presently comprising several tens of thousands of adherents, flying saucers frequently to be seen in the skies are deemed emanations of the Spirit of God (*Hananim'ui yōng* 하나님의영); in the same vein those

11 Upon the outbreak of the global war, to ensure survival those living in North America might either be led underground or spend their time in a UFO, the latter for which members had already started their preparatory training.

achieving salvation would metamorphise into such UFO-like immortal subjects of radiant light (Cho 2008). Another case is Chŭngsando 증산도 (Way of Chŭngsan), established by An Se-ch'an [Unsan] 안세찬 [운산] (1922–2012) in 1974, which is comparable in size to Yŏngsaenggyo. An eminent international (overseas specifically in the United States and Japan) representative of the Chŭngsan cluster of religions (Pokorny 2018), Chŭngsando has likewise become a key actor within South Korea's esoteric current (cf. Baker 2009: 221). Hence, since the 1990s, Chŭngsando scholars attempted to reconcile UFO beliefs with Chŭngsando doctrines, claiming that confirmations of extraterrestrial life are in fact already found in its scripture—the *Tojŏn* 도전 (Statutes of the Way). In spite of some alien civilisation's (*woegye munmyŏng* 외계문명) advanced technology, God has allegedly assigned to our planetary civilisation the key role in His cosmic salvific concert. Extraterrestrials are held to be in contact with people on Earth since ancient times. These days communication with these extraterrestrial intelligences (*oegye chisŏngch'e* 외계지성체) is maintained largely through various channelling (*ch'aenŏlling* 채널링) techniques, such as automatic writing or speaking. In the messages received from various alien astronauts (*oegye ujuin* 외계우주인), such as from the Pleiades, the teachings of Chŭngsando are emphatically confirmed, for they would possess cosmic validity. The disasters that are to befall humankind in the near future (Pokorny 2020) would effectively similarly occur throughout the universe. Notably, extraterrestrial envoys would have reported that Earth was entering the Photon Belt (*kwangjadae* 광자대) in 1998, speeding up humanity's spiritual evolution and, accordingly, its technical progress. Earth would thus soon rise phoenix-like as a galactic civilisation—following initial catastrophe.

24.3 Conclusion

The western esoteric current has left its imprint on East Asia's new religious developments, specifically since the 1970s. This New Age informed discourse evolving over the past decades in East Asia—most echoingly dubbed by Japanese and South Korean scholars the “New Spirituality Movement” (*shin-reisei undō* 新靈性運動 and *sinyŏngsŏng undong* 신영성운동, respectively)—does not fall short of a growingly important ufological dimension. Its most eminent institutionalised crystallisations have been summarily addressed in this chapter. What is evident even from this succinct outline is that while East Asian UFO religiosity naturally engages the conventional tapestry of narratives, the specific religio-cultural canvas creates much contextual leeway for conspicuously new doctrinal avenues. That is to say, East Asian UFO religiosity weds two variegated discourses and thus articulates in a strikingly creative

panoply of novel mindscapes; mindscapes that await much more in-depth investigations.

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