

THE POST-WAR POPULAR FETISH OF THE NON-HUMAN OTHER: UFOS, ALIENS AND OURSELVES

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Abstract - Three years of qualitative fieldwork within the worldview of UFO believers reveals an extensive set of mythic narratives which blend scientific and religious notions concerning the presence of non-human others in the human condition. The idea of what can constitute an other has shifted over the previous half century, as once deviant and rare ideas regarding non-human intelligence has become a staple of popular culture, humor, and even political and social intrigue. The current historical context of distrust in official discourses of government and scientific institutions tends to aid alternative strategies for coming to grips with alienating aspects of modernity. While often appearing as a guise of an exotic anthropology, beliefs in aliens and their technological accoutrement speaks much more widely to our recent disaffection with ourselves, than it does to the question of authenticating ourselves through the encounter with radical alterity.

Key words - UFOs, aliens, other, non-humans, science, religion

Introduction: the positions of the sciences concerning extraterrestrial contact:

Encountering the other in our lives is a process oft fraught with mistrust and fear. The promise of the other rests on a premise that this new and unfamiliar being appears to us as ingratiating and ultimately recognizably human, in the manner in which we have been parochially accustomed to remark on and define such humanity. It is curious, then, when we as human beings turn to ideas concerning the presence of non-human others in our lives. The case for the presence of some sentience other than ourselves has traditionally been presented by theology, and of late, perhaps the life sciences of zoology. Yet it is to the human sciences we must turn when fellow humans claim some presence of neither a god nor an animal in our midst. Such beings, if they exist at all, must have their own culture, their own society, and however different they may be from us, they will become recognizable to us only through their sociality and their interactions with us as social beings.

This search for the alien other to self extends itself in both directions when we consider current beliefs in extraterrestrials. The ultimate exoticism, surely, would be beings from other worlds, unlike anything our species has ever known. Whatever the classification and locus of this other, whether non-human or extra-human, it is the *desire* to search for and believe in, against all empirically public evidence, the proximal existence of beings from other worlds that must be explicated.¹

Discursive theories that attempt objective explanation of the emic worldview that come from sciences and thinking which are contraposed to that of the social sciences. The most prevalent form comes from the discourse of

psychology, with its species of psychiatry and psychopathology. Deviant beliefs of all kinds are generally fruitful diagnostic territory for a sometimes overzealous psychology (for a general but incomplete critique of these options cf. [22]), and the UFO subculture certainly provides no exception. One clinical view, which is sometimes attached to the disorder known recently as schizo-affective, is a sense that subjects are trying to make up for lack of parental or other intimate attention undergone in childhood. This childhood neglect hypothesis has the analogical capability of interpreting the attentiveness rendered to believers by aliens and their visits as filling a kind of mental void, substituting for real community and the lack of sociality these persons are saddled with due to their unfortunate upbringings. A neurosis based on neglect then, is one possible interpretation out of many that psychology has proffered.

There are also theologically inspired theories coming from studies of myth and narrative that have weighed in on these issues. In fact, the very first theoretical work concerning the UFO phenomenon, by Jung ([11], cf. also [27]), and perhaps still the most worthy of serious attention, interprets the 'new' phenomenon of 'things from the sky' as a technologically advanced secularization of many thousands of years of previous myths which include contact with objects and beings associated with them that come from many diverse cultures. Jacob's ladder is thus revisited in a mytho-poetic narrative that begins at least with Ezekiel in the west (cf. [3]).

It can be so treated anthropologically as well, that is, as a kind of millennial movement constructed in the face of the daunting presence of weapons which can consume all of life on earth. It may be no historical coincidence that the

trend for sightings, crashes, and popular discourse about extraterrestrial events begins immediately after the invention of the atomic bomb and in the same general vicinity as its invention. This contiguity is of course interpreted emically as testament to the aliens' concern about our dangerous new technologies, but from a standpoint of social history and culture critique, one would more plausibly take into account the widespread cultural horror and anxiety associated with not only the presence of apocalyptic weaponry, but the exposing of the most systematic attempt at an apocalypse ever engineered in human history, through the Nuremberg trials and the evidence documenting genocide and holocaust. It is hardly a stretch to link this new cultural awareness of the darkest images of humanity with an attempt to turn away from our own species to a radically other (cf. [24]).

If we piece together an historical scene of distrust of political authority, fear of the power of the nation state or nationalism, a jaded cynicism about the progress of science and its technological children, and the media suggestion and further commodification of a welcome fantasy, we may explicate the widespread yet still somewhat abnormative belief in aliens and their presence more concisely. Media, of course, does not portray in an equal distribution all of the current elements of any popular culture, let alone much of what may remain of folk cultures around the world. Indeed, much of the substance of the UFO believer's 'folk culture' has either been created or co-opted by popular media. Some of what was marginal to the mainstream has found unbridled success there, yet others have remained in the murky shadows of what has been called 'irrationality'.

It is also an open ended question as to just how much of the commodification of culture, or the addition of new cultural elements, is accepted as whole cloth by the consumer. Even though we are well aware that commodification mystifies us, subjects us to the object, and reduces our status to borrowing that of the object which we may or may not possess, human creativity in using, trading, or re-evaluating popular culture in the mass marketed sense is also well known. The willingness to believe in the extramundane as a mode of escape from the forms of alienation within the current mode of production and the increasing anonymity and lack of intimacy with other actual human beings, may be a more or less anxious attempt to re-enchant a rationalized world. The making of beliefs themselves into commodities for sale is of course a bold extension of the project of the original object fetish. Yet there is clearly also a dialogue which takes place in this realm, more so than that of mere advertised and purchased wares or functional items. When the beliefs produced and consumed do not have their source in the mundane reality of the everyday, this dialogue becomes at once sonorous and diffuse. There is a reciprocity of meanings associated with any exchange. The beliefs that are exemplified below carry a surfeit of market value. In other words, there is not yet an entirely willing and massive market available for their consumption. Attempts at the creation of one have been ambiguous, because one of the effects of science fiction

fantasy or melodrama, for example, is to ironically admit to that very romance that is necessary for these media to perform their desired function, that of the escape from the mundane reality without escaping the closed circuits of production and consumption. Ultimately, we must exchange realities while not losing the reality of exchange.

Scope and Methods of the Study:

To do so, a three year research project was undertaken in the rural south and mid-west of the United States with the aim of updating the understanding of contemporary desires for the non-human other that are often in dialogue with the context of a popular culture that is shot through with a kind of gloss on science and technology (cf. [29], [31]). Qualitative methods were used, including passive and participant observation, interview, and archival research. About sixty persons were informally interviewed, while about twenty were shadowed to various lengths. As well, several dozen internet sites were scanned longitudinally for relevant discussion, up to date 'news' and reports of contacts and their outcomes. This research pursued only those who were *not* members of the so-called UFO religions or sects; that is, otherwise normative persons who claimed some abnormative experience and interpreted it as an alien encounter.

Before embarking on a detailed examination of the constitution of one set of such beliefs, a description on the believers themselves in terms of who tends to be a member is in order. Members tend to be white, middle class, and male with some formal higher education and a sectarian or non-religious background. They are urban, semi-literate in the sciences or other fields, and consume relatively large amounts of popular culture, including perhaps most importantly science fiction (cf. [19]). This is not to say that there are not significant numbers of females who share the aforementioned other characteristics. It would, however, be premature to quote statistics based on qualitative research samples to this regard. Much less likely to be found holding the emic viewpoint are members of rural minority groups, marginal social classes, and those with a vested interest in upholding some other and conflicting belief, such as that of radical religious faiths, or very orthodox traditional belief systems whether scientific or otherwise. The non-believers tend to be rural, 'illiterate' in both the sciences and in their fashionable knowledge of popular culture, and do have no interest in fictionalized 'science' melodrama or allegory (cf. [7]). Also well documented, and also part of this particular research project, are the annual large conferences on UFO-ology, usually held in the southwestern states.

Categories of 'emic' perception concerning the presence of extraterrestrials:

There are a number of categories of emically defined evidence which are consistent across both interview and published material. The most aggressive evidence comes from supposed crash sites. From the now mythic hypotheses surrounding Roswell in 1947, UFO crashes

would intuitively be the most obvious place to collect data to prove the existence of alien others. Informants agreed that the best recent example of this phenomenon occurred in 1996 near Varginha in Brazil. Apparently up to three hundred witnesses saw either the object in the sky, the object crash, and/or beings emerge and be captured by members of the Brazilian air force. One subject, who had befriended an eyewitness, relates that

'There were six creatures aboard the craft, and three emerged stunned, scared, but manifestly alive, the other three presumably having died on impact. The military officers, who were very nervous, shot one on sight, and clubbed another senseless, dragging it away in a net. The other apparently died of fright at the site. The captured alien later succumbed at a military hospital after attempts were made at local public medical facilities to revive it. The behavior of the humans involved was appalling. The object itself was hoisted onto a flatbed and quickly spirited away.'

Amongst the crash related narratives, the rather savage behavior of our fellow humans involved is a constant theme. Yet as serious as are the motives and implications of such examples, either the etic has to accept that if they are verifiable, that official forces were in place and were so well organized as to wipe out any physical trace of such events, or their veridicity rests on mass delusion of a rather unlikely kind. Otherwise, they simply did not occur at all, and some other occurrence was grossly misinterpreted. No amount of qualitative research amongst natives will serve to clarify exactly what these events are. Needless to say, their main import is to bolster the certitude that in-group persons feel regarding the reality of alien contact.

Abductions are another major category of evidence for this emic worldview. The most famous, and immortalized in television movies and other media, is that of the Hills' 1961 experience. Although these kinds of events remain of interest in the most diverse scholarly realms, the general sense is that they represent altered states of consciousness of which human are fully capable without extraterrestrial impetus (cf. [6], [18], [22]). Analogous states may be found in cultures very different from our own, including Inuit and Roma (cf [2], [15], [25], and other contributors to [28]). Yet the theme of abduction mimics closely the desire for the mysterious and sometime unexpected presence of the radically other (cf. [6]). Abduction events are much more numerous than crash events, and some emic claimants number them in the tens of thousands ([8], [21]). Any of these as representing something out of ordinary experience, whether actual or imagined, may be re-interpreted in this manner.

Yet with thousands of cases to draw on, obviously many other kinds of people have been contacted and taken in some manner with methods rather precocious even for aliens. The emic question has gradually become not 'why me', but for most fervent believers, 'why not me? I interviewed a number of persons who were intent on being at least contacted, if not abducted. The following was typical of the somewhat disaffected lament: 'I must confess that I often drive by myself over the loneliest stretches of two lane, sometimes even one lane road across the southwest, that I can reasonably find. I have

seen some things that raise my hopes, but they usually can be explained by other factors.'

The emotional and cultural backdrop of these individuals merits anthropological attention as well. Members with these tendencies are in fact relatively socially dislocated from family and work responsibilities. Even if close ties are retained, those within this research sample tended to be retired with adult children, or were actually alone in life. At the same time, most members do not practice their desires so aggressively. More often than not, interview material included themes of secondary direction, like those who went camping every summer vacation with such hopes in the backs of their minds, or those on their way to some business who drove at night rather the day, or who simply drove rather than flew. One example will suffice:

'It started way back before we had kids. My husband and I talked about it, we had just seen some movie or something. Wouldn't it be neat to be contacted, or to be taken aboard a ship? Chance of a lifetime, that sort of thing. So every year we pack up, drive down to New Mexico, or Nevada or wherever, usually down there, and camp for a while and wonder and hope. Our kids think we're silly. Thankfully not crazy. I guess young people in general don't care about the big things in life anyway.'

Many informants mentioned that they had been awakened to the idea of contact through abduction by watching some sort of low budget film, either from the 1950s or 1960s.ⁱⁱ

Direct contact without abduction is the next category on the scale of likelihood, if we accept the face validity of the emic claims that crashes are rare, abductions less so, and so on. Contact may come in the form of conscientiously planned landing encounters, unplanned encounters at landing sites or of fly pasts, or of waking dream states and other altered states of the psyche (cf. contributors to [17], and [28]). Taking each of these in its turn, one finds that emic views of planned encounters at predetermined landing sites, planned, that is, apparently on the parts of the aliens themselves, provide the most informative and congenial contact category. These are still more rare than the other species of this genus of evidence, but are more common than outright abduction. As one might expect, a typical example includes the tropes of isolation from both human constructed spaces and other humans upon which one might be presumed to call for help or witness, or both:

'We were camping out quite a ways away from the paved road. It was dark, except for the fire. We were suddenly bathed in a bright light, and an object descended into field beside us. Beings were emitted from this craft, and came toward us in a locomotion which was not quite human, but altogether graceful. They were non-threatening, and simply said they were curious to see humans. After looking us over for a while, and using some instruments, they turned around and left much as they had appeared. That was that and we thought little enough of it. Needless to say, we did not tell anyone who cared about us or who might give us trouble.'

Benign encounters such as this generalized example serve the emic viewpoint with an optimistic affirmation that

the aliens' purposes are those of recognizable scientific goals, or at least tourism. The assumed purposes of contact will be discussed further below, but whether or not the encounter is peaceable or violent does not alter the belief in the existence of alien others.

Happenstance encounters at landing sites are either deemed as fortuitous or dangerous. If the former, members have tended to get out of vehicles and stop to look, even attempt greeting. Such attempts, apparently, are usually ignored. If the latter, subjects relate that they attempt to get away from the proximity of the aliens as quickly as possible. Once again, in this sample, such attempts are successful, as the aliens usually do not engage in pursuit. Once in a while the research recorded examples of 'confrontations' where alien and human battled one another to equivocal results.

On the one hand, numerous subjects stated that they had never given aliens a second, or even a first thought before experiencing such encounters. It was typical in interview narratives for such persons to state that they themselves doubted their observations, or at least to attempt what they felt would be accepted as a more 'rational' motive for their experience. Akin to both religion and deviant desire, the topic of abnormative experiences is usually taboo in most public social contexts. Far more people, on the other hand, admitted to being very interested in the subject long before they had an encounter, and of course, most members in this research had never claimed to have had any direct physical encounters. Many of those that had had experiences which were generalized into the quote above remained open to the possibility of aliens, but said that they were not 'true believers'.

Contact by 'paraphysical' means is yet more common than happenstance physical contact. Subjects were numerous who had undergone so-called 'trophotropic' events, which to them were experiences inexplicable by any other convention than those currently in use in the UFO subculture (cf. [26]). Persons asleep, not necessarily alone in the dwelling, and either at home or abroad, are apparently apt targets for visitations and examinations, including the oft-cited bio-medical exams to which many of these experiences ultimately refer (cf. [21]). Most of these 'paraphysical' contacts are both unexpected and unwanted, so there is usually a palpable element of fear of the unknown in place. The following renditions may be taken almost as an archetype of the intrusive nature of such contacts:

'I thought I was asleep, but I became aware of a force pulling at me - pulling out my very life force, if you will, pulling at my soul, or whatever. I look across the bed and at its foot there was an alien creature with its limbs outstretched, and with some energy emanating from its extremities. I did not scream, I don't know even if I could do so, but I was also angry. I simply thought at it as hard as I could, 'I am stronger than you!', I thought this, and it broke off its attempt and disappeared.'

Children are also often topics of contact narratives, as they are perceived by the narrators as more credulous and much less anxious than adults (cf. [6], [9]). Their close relationship to the fantasy worlds of play and the

youthful media of magic and monsters apparently make them more willing participants in the interstellar quest of science. This was a second-hand account of a parent:

'At first I thought that someone was abusing my daughter, checking her over like that, and in those areas of the body in particular. Such types would likely wear large dark glasses to hide their facial features, and might wear an overall body covering to appear to be amorphous. But I realized with a chill that the sunglasses might well have been actual eyes, and the overall clothing of which my daughter likened to a dance unitard might have been the alien's actual skin. The thing that did it for me was that she said the man had not fingers, but claws.'

However one interprets the crises of childhood, there is a common element both within the subculture and without it. For example, amongst more normatively oriented parents, the tendency is to both explain to the child some sensible and less frightening rationale, and also to use the same for themselves. Given the child-like attributes of the youthful human being, very often it is in fact the adult who is much more concerned about any such event than is the child. There is also the suspicion that parents wish to project scrutiny away from domestic travails onto external agents; witness the moral panics concerning child abduction, day care abuse, and elementary school teachers or the statistically rare stranger abusing children. Sightings are the most common event in terms of evidential categories. These come in four types, and these types may be combined. The combination of all four at once constitutes the best sighting related evidence for the emic view. They are: a) surface visual, b) surface radar, c) air visual, d) air radar. For the sociologist, this category is the most well stocked in terms of more likely scenarios, as there is plenty of rolling footage of peculiar looking objects, and plenty of radar data of the movement of objects at speeds and in manners hitherto thought beyond our technology. (cf. [16])

There were three other categories of evidence within the emic point of view. 'Reverse engineering' subsists on oral narratives which may be hoaxes. Here, informants tell of projects they were seconded to work on because they were top level engineers or scientists with corporations which had large longitudinal military contracts. They were asked, upon shown alien ships, to take them apart and rebuild them again, while learning how they actually worked. Once again, there is no direct evidence of these events, but they are taken very seriously by believers. Photographs exist perhaps in their hundreds of thousands, but increasingly such can be faked in the most elaborate manners through the use of digital reproduction systems such as 'Photoshop'. The researcher has seen many hundreds of these and some are very impressive in terms of what one is supposed to believe is in the image. Finally, information leaks from officials who are 'inside-dopesters' and the like have become very important for the affirmation of a belief system that is still relatively desperate for any piece of evidence it can muster to its cause. Once again, the researcher has seen many 'leaked' or declassified documents now in the hands of

members who have themselves 'contacts' within the more furtively guarded echelons of public service.ⁱⁱⁱ

Claimants explanations for the presence of aliens on Earth:

Given the narrative accounts of evidence that are dear to the UFO believers, we can now turn to other categories of emic belief. One of the more accessible is the descriptions of the aliens themselves and their various purposes for contacting human beings.

There are four major categories that this research revealed, some of them affirming parts of previously well-known taxonomies. The first type of alien, or genus, one can call the 'insectidae'. These are the 'communion' fellows who are about 3 feet tall and have large black bug-like eyes, no mouths, and appear to sport either gray or greenish gray skins. This is the type of alien which attempted to 'steal' the life force of the person in the example above. The jury is apparently out on whether or not these creatures have an individuated consciousness, or whether they are biological robots who serve other, higher masters. They have been observed, according to the emic statistics, many thousands of times, and are well ensconced in their routines upon our planet. Their purpose is generally said to be that of investigation, either ethnographic or having to do with evolutionary biology. Several mythic abduction narratives involve these beings practicing medical tests and taking cell samples and the like from captive humans. These narratives have oft provided the plots for films. They have been featured 'guests' on more television shows and tabloid covers than one would care to enumerate. Suffice to say that the insectidae, whatever their ontological status, are apparently here to stay.

The second type are the 'hominidae'. These beings are evolutionary relatives of ourselves, and have journeyed here as part of the obligation even interstellar kin must feel for one another. These aliens uniformly are the most friendly, ingratiating, and gregarious group. They have several species associated with them, the most common being the so-called 'mediterraneans', shorter, darker skinned and with darker hair, and the 'aryans', taller than ourselves by about two feet, with light features and blue eyes. It is argued that the hominidae send emissaries to earth's various cultural and ethnic regions to blend in with the locals, like astute anthropologists doing covert fieldwork. The aryan have been seen with the insectidae, hence giving rise to the theory of their ministrations of the latter. It is interesting that the more human like creatures are assumed to be the masters in every case. A slightly less congenial interpretation of their presence has to do with their preparations for self-defense.

A third genus, and the only one which has specifically malicious intents for human beings, are the 'sauridae'. These are eight foot tall reptilians, with diamond shaped yellow eyes and the mandatory tail. The accounts that document their presence are usually couched in terms of assault, and when the human is female, particularly a form of bizarre sexual assault. A medical professional who had dealt with many such cases, related that

'Most women who have suffered these grievous assaults were, as you might imagine,

rather mortified and will have to go through many years of rehabilitative counseling, perhaps never to entirely recover. Imagine being raped by another human is bad enough, but by a large reptilian creature not of this earth - appalling. Of course, I have had cases where the women said, that though she was shocked and fearful, it ended up being the best sex she had ever had.'

Whatever the reaction to these most intrusive forms of contact, believers agreed that the sauridae were the genus that one had to be wary of in the extreme, and whose purposes were solely those of hedonism and opportunism.

The final element of this alien taxonomy is the genus 'amphibiae'. These are the most recent group of aliens to visit earth, and it is they who have made up the unfortunate crews of the latest set of UFO crashes, including the incident near Varginha as distilled above. They also are the members of the species that have been documented in the confrontational scenes of the Northwest rain forest region of North America. They are about four feet tall, with oily brown skin and red slits of eyes which give them a rather menacing appearance. Here, as opposed to the offensive reptiles, the amphibiae are mere tourists, or share some ethnographic goals with other species.

What claimants suggest motivates those who do not believe:

A final category of emic belief which loomed large within this research concerned the in-group's interpretation of the out-group's reactions to, not only the former's beliefs, but also to the actual presence, once again, as defined emically, of aliens on earth.

These mainstream cultural reactions, whether at the level of nation-state or demographic or ethnic group, are diverse and regional. They are interpreted as having mainly to do with the influence of the out-group's religious beliefs, or the material and political stake each particular nation-state has in the world game of competitive access to resources and capital, and the extent of military power and prowess to which each nation may be said to aspire (cf. [7]). The North American situation is most often the topic of emic narrative, given where the research was located. Here, believers simply stated that the world governments have too much to lose in the current world political and economic order to make public what officials already know about aliens and contact. It is universally assumed within the subculture that aliens of whatever genus are capable of both mental and technological feats far beyond contemporary human evolution, both biological and cultural, and thus any public introduction of these abilities would forever alter the course of human history. Indeed, this is a rational and realistic position within even mainstream science, given the assumption that aliens exist and could or have made contact. Even within the UFO subculture, it was generally assumed that there were at least conflicting motives amongst the various alien species, some of whom were protective and some more aggressive, with most somewhat apathetic. The analogy to western religious mythologies and their denizens

should be too obvious to warrant further comment (cf. [19], [21]).

The 'Disclosure Project' is a public arm associated with the United States government which lobbies for political honesty on the grounds that advanced alien technology would solve all world problems in a brief period of time. Its spokespeople are often scientists, military officers and engineers who claim to have been 'inside-dopesters' for decades, until their bad conscience apparently got the better of them and they came out of their 'alienating' closets. Many documentary videos have been constructed out of thousands of hours of narratives not dissimilar from the sample the researcher encountered and sold at conferences or over the internet.

Other motifs within the North American interpretation of mainstream events and reaction to alien presence include the widespread idea that popular culture television shows - most notably the 'Star Trek' sagas - novels and quasi-documentaries have deliberately been crafted to prepare us for eventual contact. The following was typical to this regard:

'Gene Roddenberry [the creator of Star Trek] was a contactee, you know. They suggested he work on this idea that would gradually inure humankind to the presence of other species, and to some of the dangers associated with this knowledge. The whole thing was an exercise in cultural tolerance. That is why the main thing with the first series was that they had a cross cultural bridge crew, an alien in Spock, yes, but more importantly for American audiences and their bigotries of the times, a Black woman, a Russian, and a Japanese.'

Media hype, public service or otherwise, also serves to commodify the belief system and to sell it to an even wider market than already may exist. For reasons introduced at the beginning of this article, the concept of the alien is uniquely profitable. The world as it is, however, is not beholden to most persons' desires, and is only yet partially enthralled to the desires of the powerful. But human thinking is not at its best when it accedes to the desires of any of us, rich or poor, as it ultimately breeds an inability to think with appropriate candor and skepticism at all. Popular culture knowledge of UFOs and the like are a famous current example of this problem.

Conclusion - the desire for a different world:

Where there are powerful structural forces at work in our lives - the influence of media and the suspicion of large organizations such as corporations and governments, for example - we are that much more likely to attend to our anxieties and aspirations regarding what appears as either threatening or redeeming. That the phenomenon of UFO beliefs attests to both our longing for some kind of egress from not only our worldly existential state but from the state of a world so often disappointing or even horrifying, as well as our fears about some source of these tribulations which is not even human, so impoverished we feel ourselves to be in the face of such problems, is I think the most likely source of our interest in them. More than anything substantive, it is this desire which links such phenomena (ghosts, angels and even

sports or entertainment figures transfigured by their apparently super-human exploits) to the human project. That such extensions of the 'merely' human are still based in an understanding of what we ourselves are capable of suggests a clear link to our general humanism, which is not a school of thought per se, but more the experience of our conscious cultural gestalt. That these kinds of desires in the face of social problems and our emotional reactions to them are ancient and have long motivated religious beliefs of all kind is also well known.

Our personal understanding of what it means to be human tends to be limited by what we take to be the normative formula for day to day living. We are very much aware that we are more often sentenced to accept our situations than to have direct and utter control over them. We are socialized into this ability to accept as children, no matter what culture we hail from. Coercion is the hallmark of all childhoods, perhaps even more than is non-responsibility. We learn to coerce ourselves 'voluntarily', to perform the roles and scripts of a large sociality. We can withhold our cooperation of course, but there are often consequences, sometimes serious ones. The desireful imagination which populates the cultural landscape with exotic otherness transforms the world as it is to the world as it might be, a world that we might like better, and therefore is an exercise in human freedom. This ability to choose, in spite of clear public and empirical sanctions, suggests that we have not completely abandoned ourselves to the fruitless limbo of human torpor.

Notes

i The argument for intelligent life on other worlds is a well-known one, and rests upon the assumption that strength in numbers can overcome the vicissitudes of both cosmic and biological evolution (cf. [1], [23]). The question of extraterrestrial life is of course a quite different one than one of actual contact. Most scientists consider the first to be of plausible, even likely, interest, while the second remains marginal. Although the scientific position on alien intelligence and contact begins to look more glum as empirical fact is piled upon fact, one must admit that there remains high probability that extraterrestrial intelligence exists, even though that chance must grapple with the correspondingly very low probability that such has been able, or willing as the case may be, to contact us here on earth. This scenario, which is, as far as the etic position is concerned, our contemporary one, is challenged by the believers who form what this research calls the UFO subculture in general (cf. [3], [4], [5], [14], [30]).

ii One wonders how significant early mass media was in creating a market for the idea of alien contact (cf. [25], [30]). Certainly there has been a popular culture element from the earliest period, specifically American pulp science fiction from the 1930s onward, even earlier if one includes authors such as Lovecraft, and Europeans like Wells and Verne (cf. [13]). Yet what occurs for believers is a transformation of imagined worlds, of possible worlds, to those with a reality both expected, as within any millennial movement, and probable (cf. [9] for the transformational

quality of mythic allegory in this case). The archetypal attitude from which potential understanding of the presence of the empirically 'unseen' was originally investigated by William James, who in turn reproduced much of his and others' inventories of interview material. The theme of belief beyond perception is blended with belief through altered perception (cf. [20]), and may be succinctly understood as being part of "the human ontological imagination, and such is the convincingness of what it brings to birth. Unpicturable beings are realized, and realized with an intensity almost like that of an hallucination." ([10]:72).

iii The one document that was most striking was a large manual, apparently dating from about 1963, that detailed how military servicemen were to clean up, secure, and decontaminate UFO crash sites. The procedures appeared to be detailed and based on prior experience. Whether or not the document was a fake was beyond the researcher's ken, but even if it was genuine, its mere presence does not provide evidence, as emic members believe, of the existence of aliens, their vessels, and subsequent contact. It may have been a 'what-if' scenario document, as one might suspect that the denizens of government were and are themselves hardly immune to the influence of popular culture. I have suggested elsewhere that only two cases have come to my attention where there appears to be some physical evidence of abnormative, though not necessarily unearthly, phenomena (cf. [12]).

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