

AMBIGUOUS INTRUSIONS:
THE UFO / ALIEN ENCOUNTER PHENOMENON AND THE POLITICS
OF REPRESSION

By

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Abstract

Despite a growing body of scholarly and scientific literature, the topic of UFOs (Unidentified Flying Objects) – and the related question of alien encounters – still elicits profound scepticism, dismissal, and ridicule within the academic community and the sciences. This reaction is indicative of a ‘UFO taboo’ – a concerted effort to marginalize and suppress recognition of the UFO. The UFO taboo operates in society as an ‘epistemology of ignorance’ that relegates the subject to the realm of science fiction, tabloid journalism, fringe theories and collective cultural fantasy. A literature review of the leading scholarly work on the subject will serve both to contextualize the history of the UFO problem, and counter the inviolability of the taboo. This paper will outline some disciplinary perspectives beginning with an examination of the political theory behind the taboo. The school of Transpersonal Psychology, the pioneering work of John E. Mack, and a parallel approach in Anthropology will help us conceptualize the most controversial aspect of the phenomenon: the alien abduction experience. The paper concludes with a summary of the major explanatory hypotheses for UFOs and abductions, and points to the need for an international interdisciplinary research project. This paper makes no attempt to solve the UFO problem. But by asking what the UFO – through its insistent presence and our strange apathy towards its presence – can tell us about our world, our systems of knowledge, and our systems of rule, the paper argues for the importance of the phenomenon and the onus that is placed on science and the academy to legitimate its study and contribute to our understanding of it.

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There are two things about the UFO controversy that make it uniquely interesting. The first is that it is probably the deepest mystery that mankind has ever encountered. The second is that it has been the object of so much denial despite the fact that it is certainly a real phenomenon.

Whitley Streiber in *Forward to Dimensions* (Vallée, 1988, p3)

In short, considerable *work* goes into ignoring UFOs, constituting them as objects only of ridicule and scorn. To that extent one may speak of a “UFO taboo,” a prohibition in the authoritative public sphere on taking UFOs seriously, or “thou shalt not try very hard to find out what UFOs are.” (Wendt/Duvall, 2008, p610)

1. Introduction

This paper contextualizes the phenomenon of the UFO (Unidentified Flying Object) and the related issue of alien encounters. In particular, the paper examines the authoritative disregard of the subject in the domain of serious inquiry. Despite a growing body of scholarly and scientific literature within the last six decades, the topic of UFOs (and alien encounters) still elicits profound scepticism, dismissal, and ridicule within the academic community and the sciences. This reaction is indicative of a ‘UFO taboo’ – a concerted effort within the three major consensus producing institutions (government, science and media), to marginalize and suppress recognition of the UFO or relegate it to the realm of science fiction, tabloid journalism, fringe theories and collective cultural fantasy. As such, the UFO taboo operates in society as an ‘epistemology of ignorance,’ a term Charles Mills (1997) uses in the context of race, and which I use here apropos of examining ways in which ignorance of the UFO phenomenon is produced, circulated, and enforced, along with the political and psychological underpinnings of the taboo.

A literature review of the leading scholarly work on the subject will serve both to contextualize the history of the UFO problem, and counter the inviolability of the taboo. The paper will outline some disciplinary perspectives beginning with an examination of the political theory behind the taboo. The school of Transpersonal Psychology, the pioneering work of John E. Mack, and a parallel approach in Anthropology will help us conceptualize the most controversial aspect of the phenomenon: the alien abduction experience. The paper concludes with a summary of the major explanatory hypotheses for UFOs and abductions, and points to the need for an international interdisciplinary research project, delineating some of its features. This paper makes no attempt to solve the UFO problem. But by asking what the UFO – through its insistent presence and our strange apathy towards its presence – can tell us about our world, our systems of knowledge, and our systems of rule, I argue for the importance of the phenomenon and the onus that is placed on science and the academy to legitimate its study and contribute to our understanding of it.

2. The Taboo and Definitions

Authoritatively in the United States, the UFO phenomenon (as well as the related issue of alien encounters) is treated as a ‘known.’ UFOs need not be investigated because they are ‘known in advance’ to have an androgenic or natural explanation. Claimants of alien encounters and abductions are likewise ‘diagnosed in advance’ as mentally ill or mendacious. This official disregard continues to prevail in the United States, whereas other countries, with France at the forefront, continue to investigate and disclose information. CNES (Centre national d'études spatiales), the French space agency

(France's equivalent to the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration or NASA), operates GEIPAN (Groupe d'études et d'information sur les phénomènes aérospatiaux non identifiés), a department set up in 1977 to investigate UFOs, and which has since 2007 made its archives available online to the public. In 1999 high-ranking French military generals, along with the former head of GEIPAN and former head of CNES undertook an independent group project called COMETA (Committee for In-Depth Study) and published an important report: *UFOs and Defense: What Should We Prepare For?* In it the authors determined that 5% of the flying objects pointed to in UFO sightings seem "to be completely unknown flying machines with exceptional performances that are guided by a natural or artificial intelligence" (Kean, 2010, p5). The report concludes that the best explanation for them is the extraterrestrial hypothesis. The current head of GEIPAN since 2005, Yves Sillard, has stated unequivocally and on the record that, "the objective reality of unidentified aerial phenomena, better known to the public as UFOs, is no longer in doubt" (ibid, p88).

My personal interest in UFOs and alien encounters is ontological, political, and career-related. As a film producer and screenwriter I am interested in anomalous phenomena and controversial subject matter, as they are often a starting point for creative and intellectual expansion. I have a tendency to approach non-ordinary claims with a willingness to at least provisionally entertain their possibility and examine the evidence. To approach the phenomenon maturely, we must first recognize that scepticism towards the existence of the UFO phenomenon is firmly rooted in an epistemology of ignorance. Decades of disinformation and official ridicule along with relegation of the phenomenon to the realm of tabloids and sensationalist movies have succeeded in obscuring the reality

of UFOs and their profound scientific and ontological significance. This obscuring is evident in the semantics of the very term, ‘UFO’.

‘UFO’ is commonly misconstrued as referring to an extraterrestrial space vehicle when in fact its scope of meaning is limited to what its acronym stands for: unidentified flying object. Thus many experts and military professionals involved in the study of UFOs prefer to use the more neutral term UAP – Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon – as unlike the term UFO, it does not elicit a negatively conditioned response. As to whether an Extra-Terrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) can be made for some UFOs, this remains a reasonable possibility open to further analysis.

Further, a vetted UFO or UAP is one not amenable to any conventional explanation (such as a weather balloon). A *genuine* UFO is designated as such once all known androgenic and natural causes have been ruled out. Genuine cases such as the Rendelsham Forest incident (1980), the Belgian UFO wave of 1989-1990, the Phoenix Lights (1997) and the Chicago O’Hare airport UFO (2007) to name a few, were witnessed by thousands of people who provided corroborative descriptions, including trained pilots and military professionals.

Despite mounting physical evidence of aerial anomalies and the striking patterns of narrative similarities in alien abduction claims, none of this seems to merit serious investigation by government, science and media. The roots of this ‘epistemology of ignorance’ are to be found in the political rather than the scientific sphere. As political scientists Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall point out:

It is one of the ironies of modern rule that it is far more acceptable today to affirm publicly one's belief in God, for whose existence there is no scientific evidence, than UFOs, the existence of which—whatever they might be—is physically documented (2008, p605).

3. A Modern History of UFOs – Science, Politics and the ETH

The first public accounts of UFOs – beginning with the 1947 Kenneth Arnold sighting – followed World War Two and the deployment of the atomic bomb. Don Donderi in his book *UFOs, ETs, and Alien Abductions: A Scientist Looks at the Evidence* (2013) argues for the reality of an extraterrestrial presence in our skies and presents a historical overview of the evidence, beginning with the Kenneth Arnold sighting. Donderi graduated with a PhD in applied and experimental psychology from Cornell University and served as Associate Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at McGill University. As Donderi recounts in his opening chapter, Arnold, a private pilot, reported seeing nine bright metallic objects flying in formation over the Cascade Mountains in Washington State on June 24, 1947. Arnold made no ET claim, but said the objects appeared long and rounded, traveling at speeds over 1200 miles per hour. An anonymous writer for the Associated Press headlined the incident with the term ‘flying saucer’ and the somewhat risible term gained popular currency (Donderi, 2013, pp 4-6).

In his book, Donderi goes on to cover the growing number of sightings and in particular, government response and policy towards the UFO problem. “From 1947 to about 1980, UFO history could be described as a “chronology of doubt” (ibid, p24). In chapter three, titled “Low, Big and Slow – The End of Doubt” Donderi examines some of the most startling and best documented post-1980 sightings, such as the Hudson Valley, New York sightings, in which a V-shaped object the size of an aircraft carrier was witnessed by thousands of residents over a four year period (1982-1986). He recounts the Belgium UFO Wave of 1989-1990, in which an estimated 13,500 people on the

ground – 2,600 of whom filed written statements – saw lights or what were described as lighted triangular shaped UFOs moving slowly and silently over Belgium. The events peaked on March 30, 1990 when UFOs were tracked on radar and two Belgian Air Force F-16s attempted nine separate intercepts of the targets. The UFOs evaded at incredible speeds. On three occasions the F16 pilots achieved radar lock on the targets for a few seconds, only to be rapidly evaded. Donderi concludes this section with the Stephenville, Texas sightings of a ‘mile-long’ UFO on January 8, 2008, sightings corroborated by multiple independent witnesses (Donderi, 2013, pp55-70).

Donderi’s book also looks at US government policy and cover-up, the alien abduction phenomenon, and UFO science and technologies. He takes an unequivocally strong position on some UFOs being of extraterrestrial origin and is thus a proponent of the Extra-Terrestrial Hypothesis (ETH). For Donderi the evidence speaks for itself and he argues that it be understood in strictly physical terms. It is the effect of the UFO taboo rather than any insufficiency in evidence that prevents us from recognizing the extraterrestrial threat in our midst. Concluding his book, he writes:

Over the past half-century we have had intermittent contact with extraterrestrial civilization. We do not know the motives and cannot predict the future behaviour of the extraterrestrials who observe us and who occasionally catch and release some of us to satisfy their curiosity about the predominant species on this planet. ... There are psychological barriers to recognizing the straightforward facts about the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs and the direct involvement of extraterrestrials in human life, but the evidence is clear and people are beginning to understand it (Donderi, 2013, p197).

Donderi’s stance, in advocating the ETH, is perhaps the boldest for a scholar of high academic rank. Both he and David M. Jacobs, retired Professor of History at Temple University and author of *The UFO Controversy in America* (1975), take a very dire view of the UFO phenomenon, assessing it as a threat to humankind.

An excellent scholarly contribution to the political history of the UFO phenomenon is the book *UFOs and Government: A Historical Inquiry* by Michael Swords and Robert Powell (2012). Based on primary documentation, it provides a chronology outlining the history of the way governments have dealt with the UFO mystery. As Swords writes in the forward, “the sources of our information are the governments and their military and intelligence organizations” (Swords, 2012, pX). Swords, a retired professor of Natural Science at Western Michigan University, also edits the academic publication *The Journal of UFO Studies*.

By 1948 an increasing number of military pilots had reported UFO sightings and the US Air Force (USAF), using the name Project Sign, commissioned a group to study the phenomenon. The group issued an Estimate of the Situation in September 1948, which concluded that some UFOs, based on flight characteristics and the limits of known technologies at the time, could have an extraterrestrial origin. The Pentagon rejected this conclusion, and Project Sign was dissolved and replaced by Project Grudge in 1949. The short-lived Grudge was an effort to contain the problem rather than understand it. Air Force Captain Edward J. Ruppelt who joined Grudge as director as it transitioned into Project Bluebook, said of Grudge: “Everything was being evaluated on the premise that UFOs couldn't exist” (Ruppelt, 1956, pp.59-60). Ruppelt is credited with having coined the term ‘unidentified flying object’ to replace flying saucer and flying disc, the terms being used at the time.

Astrophysicist Dr. J Allen Hynek, who later became one of the world’s foremost experts on UFOs, joined Bluebook, and while Ruppelt and Hynek initiated sincere efforts to analyze the phenomenon, developing protocols and standardized questionnaires for

interviewing witnesses, etc, their work was stymied by interference from the CIA who got involved in the UFO problem in December 1952. The year 1952 had seen a significant increase in UFO reports including incidents over Washington DC in July. On the weekends of July 19-20 and 26-27, blips appeared on radar at Washington National Airport and nearby Andrews Air Force Base, and an airliner crew saw lights in the sky that matched the radar blips. Interceptor jets were sent up but were unable to locate the UFOs. The Truman Administration was alarmed and contacted Ruppelt at USAF for answers. The 1952 UFO wave resulted in the CIA initiating the Robertson Panel, January of 1953. The panel concluded that UFOs were not a direct threat to national security, but could pose an indirect threat by overwhelming standard military communications due to public interest in the subject. It recommended that programs be created to debunk UFOs to the citizenry (Swords, 2012, pp.170-203). Hynek, who had worked as an advisor under Sign, Grudge and Bluebook, and went on to study UFOs independently (originating the Close Encounters Classification System), commented on his experience with Bluebook after it was officially dissolved in 1969:

The public was, in fact, placed in the role of 'the enemy,' against whom 'counterespionage' tactics must be employed. From my personal experience, I frequently felt that those in charge did consider people who reported UFOs or who took a serious interest in them and wanted information about them, as enemies (ibid, p.243).

By the late 1960s, UFO stories were being relegated to the pages of sensationalist tabloid media. By 1967, America's most well known tabloid *The National Enquirer* had expanded into supermarkets and under the direction of its owner Generoso Pope Jr., shifted the paper's focus on gore to coverage of UFOs, alien abduction stories and the paranormal. Pope, who had graduated from MIT in engineering, and had joined the CIA's

psychological warfare unit in 1952, left the CIA after a year to purchase the *Enquirer* (Vitek, 2008, pp.37-42).

The decisive blow to Project Bluebook and to mainstream scientific interest in the UFO problem came in January 1969 when USAF released the Condon Committee report, the result of a two year ‘objective’ study at the University of Colorado under the direction of physicist Edward Condon. Condon, indicating bias from the beginning, remarked in a lecture in late 1967 that UFOs were nonsense, “but I’m not supposed to reach that conclusion for another year” (Donderi, 2013, p.45). Condon wrote the executive summary and conclusion to the 1,485-page report, advising against further study of UFOs, as such studies were unlikely to yield any scientific advances. Peter Sturrock, an emeritus professor of applied physics at Stanford University, in his article, *An Analysis of the Condon Report* (1987), found that Condon’s conclusion bore little relation to the analyses of the cases in the bulk of the report and often contradicted the conclusions made by individual staff members. The Condon Report resulted in the closure of Project Bluebook in 1969. The mainstream media headlined Condon’s conclusions, and the ‘UFO taboo’ was made official. As Sturrock says, the report was “the most influential public document concerning the scientific status of this problem. Hence, all current scientific work on the UFO problem must make reference to the Condon Report” (Sturrock, 1987, p.1).

4. UFOs Abroad – Confronting the Dangers

The ‘UFO taboo’ in America was effectively in place. However, this did not prevent the phenomenon from continuing to occur. Governments of numerous countries

began to conduct their own studies, and as documented in Leslie Kean's book *UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record* (2010), the US, while suppressing UFO study domestically, took an avid interest in how other countries were dealing with the phenomenon. Kean's book provides an overview of UFO occurrences around the world between 1976 and 2007, presented together with first hand accounts by Air Force generals and high-level officials, including Nick Pope, former head of the British Defense Ministry's UFO Investigative Unit. John Podesta, a current advisor to the Obama Administration and final White House Chief of Staff under President Bill Clinton, endorses the book and writes its forward, stating that it "clearly leaves the taboo against taking UFOs seriously with no leg to stand on" (Kean, 2010, p.xii). Kean documents two cases in which military pilots engaged UFOs: in 1976 over Tehran in Iran, and in 1980 over Peru. In both cases the pilots attempted to fire at the UFOs. General Parviz Jafari writes his account in Kean's book, of "a bright object flashing coloured lights" and flying at low altitude over Tehran. Two pilots in an F-4 pursued the object but as they got within close range their instruments "went out" and they could not fire. Jafari was ordered to pursue in a second F-4. "It was flashing with intense red, green, orange and blue lights so intense I was not able to see the body. The lights formed a diamond shape." As Jafari got close, the UFO jumped 10 degrees repeatedly "in an instant." When both Jafari and ground control had radar locked on the UFO, he attempted to fire. "Suddenly nothing was working. The weapons control panel was out and I lost all instrumentation, and the radio" (ibid., pp.86-88).

In the 1980 encounter over Peru, military pilot Oscar Santa Maria Huertas was ordered to shoot down a balloon-shaped UFO hanging motionless at an altitude of 600

meters over restricted airspace. Huertas, an award-winning pilot and marksman, fired into the object at close range. In his written account Huertas states:

But nothing happened. It seemed as if the huge bullets were absorbed by the balloon and it wasn't damaged at all. Then suddenly the object began to ascend very rapidly and head away from the base.

Huertas pursued the object at high speed until it suddenly stopped. Avoiding collision, Huertas positioned himself for a second attack. "I locked the target and was ready to shoot. But just at that moment, the object made another sharp climb, evading the attack" (ibid., pp.94-98). Kean was able to learn of these UFO chases "partly because of US government interest in both cases, which led to the filing of American reports with intelligence agencies" (ibid., p.148). Huertas concluded his statement saying:

In 1980 I had a combat experience with an unidentified flying object that flew and manoeuvred in the air without any recognizable features of aircraft... This object performed manoeuvres that defied the laws of aerodynamics" (ibid. pp 94 – 98).

Kean points out that, in both the Iranian and the Peruvian case, the objects "repeatedly evaded attack at the very last moment ... as if they somehow 'knew' ... when the pilots were about to push the button" (ibid., p.149).

In their article "*A History of Government Management of UFO Perceptions through Film and Television*," published in the interdisciplinary journal *The 49th Parallel*, Robbie Graham of the University of Bristol and Matthew Alford of the University of Bath argue that there is a broad consensus among governments "that UFOs are objectively real – albeit currently not fully understood by science ... Standing outside this consensus is the United States, which is conspicuous for its almost total silence on the UFO issue" since the closing of Project Bluebook in 1969 (Graham/Alford, 2013, p.4). They contrast US silence with a list of countries actively and openly studying UFOs:

Today, numerous governments worldwide maintain dedicated and costly UFO study projects – collating and often investigating what collectively amount to thousands of UFO sighting reports made annually to authorities. In South America alone, the governments of Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Chile and Brazil either operate UFO investigations units or actively collect UFO sighting reports through their militaries. Other governments, including those of France, New Zealand, Denmark, Canada and Russia, have in recent years released to the public thousands of pages of previously classified UFO files (ibid., p3).

Following the aforementioned French COMETA Report in 1999, the UK began releasing to the National Archive most of its UFO files. Graham and Alford quote from a 400-page assessment of the UFO phenomenon released in 2006 under the Freedom of Information Act, in which a UK Defense Intelligence Staff acknowledged that:

The phenomena occur on a daily, world-wide basis... That UAP exist is indisputable. Credited with the ability to hover, land, take-off, accelerate to exceptional velocities and vanish, they can reportedly alter their direction of flight suddenly and clearly can exhibit aerodynamic characteristics well beyond those of any known aircraft or missile – either manned or unmanned (ibid., p4).

Perhaps the most striking incident in UK UFO history is the Rendlesham Forest Incident in December 1980 in Suffolk just outside RAF Woodbridge, at the time being used by the US Air Force. Over a three-day period, dozens of USAF personnel witnessed unexplained lights, with several people reporting the landing of a craft or multiple craft. A sceptical Lieutenant Colonel Charles Halt went to investigate. In the words, of Pope, the former head of the British Defense Ministry's UFO investigative unit, writing in Kean's book: "He, too, encountered the UFO, becoming one of the highest ranking military officers ever to go on the record about a UFO sighting" (Kean, 2010, pp 170-174). Halt, with a team of four men, equipment and a tape recorder went into the forest, describing moment-to-moment what he saw: "There's no doubt about it... This is weird... It almost burns your eyes... He's coming toward us now... Now we're observing what appears to be a beam coming down to the ground." Halt described the UFO in his filed report as being "metallic in appearance and triangular in shape ... a

pulsing red light on top and a bank of blue lights underneath... The animals on a nearby farm went into a frenzy.” He witnessed the UFO land in the forest and take off again. At the landing sight, he and his team found ground indentations in a triangular pattern, radiation in the soil samples, and a hole in the tree canopy (ibid).

Seargent James Penniston, not only witnessed but *touched* a landed craft at Rendlesham Forest on December 26, 1980. Penniston was the senior security officer responsible for the protection of war-making resources at Woodbridge base and held top-secret US and NATO security clearance. Like Halt, he saw in the forest clearing, in his own words, a “triangular-shaped craft,”

there were blue and yellow lights swirling around the exterior as though part of the surface and the air around us was electrically charged. ... It felt like static electricity, which made your hair stand up and dance on your skin. But there was no sound at all coming from the craft. Nothing in my training prepared me for what we were witnessing. ... After ten minutes without any apparent aggression, I determined the craft was non-hostile to my team and decided to approach further. Following security protocol, we completed a thorough on-site investigation, including a full physical examination of the craft. After my first walk-around of the craft, astonishment and awe overwhelmed me. ... On one side of the craft were symbols that measured about three inches high ... These symbols were pictorial in design; the largest symbol was a triangle, ... They were etched into the surface of the craft. I put my hand on the craft, and it was warm to the touch. The surface was smooth, like glass, but it had the quality of metal, and I felt a constant low voltage running through my hand and moving to my mid-forearm. After roughly forty-five minutes, the light from the craft began to intensify. Burroughs and I then took a defensive position away from the craft as it lifted off the ground without any noise or air disturbance. It manoeuvred through the trees and shot off at an unbelievable rate of speed. It was gone in the blink of an eye (ibid., pp.179-184).

Immediately following the Rendlesham Forest Incident, agents from the USAF’s Office of Special Investigations (OSI), according to Lieutenant Halt’s written account, “harshly interrogated five young airmen, some of them in shock at the time, who were key witnesses. These men reported later that the agents told them not to talk about the UFO events, or their careers would be in jeopardy.” During the interrogations drugs were

administered to the men combined with some forms of duress and hypnosis. The sessions had lasting, damaging effects of the men involved (ibid., pp.186-188).

It thus seems clear that UFO denial is an enduring policy within the higher echelons of the US security and intelligence apparatus. It endures regardless of changes in administration, despite the influx of new cases with substantial data, and despite the increasing efforts of other countries to understand the phenomenon. To inquire into the source of the taboo, we turn to political science.

5. Political Theory of Sovereignty and the UFO

Alexander Wendt, currently the Ralph D. Mershon Professor of International Security at Ohio State University, is a political scientist who is one of the core social constructivist scholars in the field of international relations. His 2008 paper “Sovereignty and the UFO,” co-written with Raymond Duvall of the University of Minnesota, proposes that the UFO taboo can be better understood within the context of the imperatives of anthropocentric sovereignty. They argue that anthropocentric sovereignty – asserting the centrality of humans in notions of sovereignty – is a quite modern framework. “For millennia Nature and the gods were thought to have causal power and subjectivities that enabled them to share sovereignty with humans, if not exercise dominion outright” (Wendt/Duvall, 2008, p.608). With the separation of church and state, modern rule is assumed to be entirely anthropocentric, operating from within the borders of the social world. Wendt and Duvall argue that because a possible explanation for the UFO problem is extraterrestrial, taking UFOs seriously calls into question the assumption of anthropocentric sovereignty upon which modern rule and its command of loyalty is

premised. Considered on its own, the UFO taboo appears unscientific and irrational.

“Scientifically, human beings do not know that all UFOs have conventional explanations, but instead remain ignorant” (ibid.,p.611). The puzzle deepens when we consider that:

If any UFOs were discovered to be ETs it would be one of the most important events in human history, making it rational to investigate even a remote possibility. It was just such reasoning that led the U.S. government to fund the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI), which looks for signs of life around distant stars. With no evidence whatsoever for such life, why not study UFOs, which are close by and leave evidence (ibid)?

For Wendt and Duvall, the state has two faces – one displaying a regime of governmentality, the other sovereign power. When the former is threatened, the latter comes to the fore. Sovereign power is “the ability to determine when norms and law should be suspended – in Carl Schmitt’s terms, to ‘decide the exception’” (ibid., p.612), as in a state of emergency. If UFOs were revealed to be extraterrestrial they would represent a direct challenge to anthropocentric sovereignty and our ability to ultimately decide our future. Their superior technology, their apparent ability to control how they are encountered, and our inability to define or identify their nature, intent, and limits, all call into question the sovereign’s right of rule and its command of loyalty (premised in the claim that it can protect its citizenry). The “particular character of the UFO’s undecidability ... poses a metaphysical challenge to anthropocentric rule” (ibid., p.622). Along these lines, an official acknowledgement of the UFO problem and its unknown status, would entail an admission of complete vulnerability. The UFO disrupts the hegemonic projection of power that the US maintains over the world. The possibility of an ET threat has a binding effect on humanity, requiring a global response, and thus diminishing the integrity of the sovereign state. As Ronald Reagan said in a September 21, 1987 address to the United Nations General Assembly, “how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world”

(Reagan, 1987). Thus, sovereign power in the US turns away from the UFO problem, insisting it is 'known' and by this sleight of hand manoeuvre, disregarding the question the UFO poses to sovereignty. As Wendt and Duval put it: "UFO scepticism is akin to denial in psychoanalysis: the sovereign represses the UFO out of fear of what it would reveal about itself" (ibid., p.625). UFO denial is like the Emperor's new clothes, a charade in which we pretend along with the sovereign that nothing is exposed.

Wendt and Duval highlight four techniques by which the state makes UFOs 'known.' 1.) Authoritative representation portrays the study of UFOs as pseudo-science. 2.) Official inquiries, essentially show trials, systematically distorted by rejection of the ETH hypothesis. 3.) Official secrecy and non-disclosure removes knowledge from the system. 4.) Disciplinary measures such as formal attacks and everyday dismissals which in turn lead to a "spiral of silence" and self-censorship (ibid., p 626). They conclude by advocating resistance by way of "militant agnosticism." This is achieved not by any 'belief' in UFOs, but by:

"seeing" rather than ignoring the UFO, taking it seriously. ... The reproduction of UFO ignorance depends crucially on those in positions of epistemic authority observing the UFO taboo. Thus, private agnosticism ... is part of the problem. Only breaking the taboo in public constitutes genuine resistance (ibid., p.628).

Wendt and Duvall's theory highlights the importance of the UFO in exposing the insecurity of modern rule.

6. The Abduction Phenomenon - Psychology and the Transpersonal View

While scepticism toward the UFO phenomenon can be countered by reviewing the physical data and expert testimony, a more radical and incredulous aspect of the UFO

phenomenon revolves around those who claim to have encountered or been abducted by alien beings. Most scientists and mental health professionals routinely dismiss such claims as resulting from “deception, suggestibility (fantasy-proneness, hypnotizability, false memory syndrome), personality, sleep paralysis, psychopathology, and environmental factors” (Appelle, 1996). However, actual evaluations of abductees, as opposed to armchair theorizing, has concluded that, “assessment by both clinical examination and standardized tests has shown that, as a group, abduction experiencers are not different from the general population in terms of psychopathology prevalence” (Appelle, 2000).

This was also the conclusion of Harvard Medical School professor of Psychiatry and Pulitzer Prize winning researcher John E. Mack. Beginning in the early 1990s, Mack carried out individual case studies with nearly one hundred alien abductees. He is perhaps the most credentialed and qualified scientist and scholar to have studied the abduction phenomenon, conducting research within his area of specialization, clinical psychology. In his second book on the alien abduction phenomenon, *Passport to the Cosmos* (1999), he states that the majority of abductees are ordinary people with non-ordinary claims. “No consistent psychiatric disturbance has been found that could account for these reports, nor has a major psychological study of this population demonstrated more psychopathology than a matched comparison group” (Mack, 1999, p5). Mack, who had no previous interest in UFOs or aliens, and had expected at the outset to find a pattern of pathology, describes his shift in thinking:

I was faced with the choice of either trying to fit these individuals’ reports into a framework that fit my worldview – they were having fantasies, strange dreams, delusions, or some other distortion of reality – or of modifying my worldview to include the possibility that entities, beings, energies – something – could be reaching my clients from another realm. The first choice was

compatible with my worldview but did not fit the clinical data. The second was inconsistent with my philosophical groundings, and with conventional assumptions about reality, but appeared to fit better what I was finding (ibid).

Mack's first book on abductions, published in 1994 and titled *Abduction – Human Encounters with Aliens*, is a documentation of his investigation of “abductees,” also called “experiencers.” Mack makes clear he does not presume the physical reality of abduction, but assesses that the experience is real for the experiencer. Abduction accounts often contain a common set of experiences that are surprisingly consistent across a wide demographic. Mack highlights typical characteristics of the abduction experience. They usually begin in homes or when abductees are driving. The first publicized abduction experience, known as the Betty and Barney Hill Abduction of 1961, occurred while the couple were driving. Onset characteristics include intense blue or white light flooding the bedroom, an odd buzzing or humming sound, apprehension, direct sighting of one or more humanoid beings, and close-up sighting of strange craft (Mack, 1994, p.18).

Abductees often claim missing segments of time, recollection of being floated through walls, ceilings or other solid objects, being transported into a craft by a beam of light, and feelings of helplessness, terror and paralysis. In the ships, they may find themselves in a dark, dank vestibule, but soon are taken to a brightly lit room, sterile and hospital-like, with some equipment. They are placed on tables or reclining chairs, where beings appear to them, as luminous entities, reptilian creatures, Nordic looking blond human-like beings,

but by far the most common entity observed are the small “grays,” humanoid beings three to four feet in height. ... By far the most prominent features are huge, black eyes which curve upward and are more rounded toward the center of the head ... in addition to boots, the aliens usually wear a form-fitting, single piece tunic-like garment... (ibid., pp. 21-23)

Some sixty private elementary children at the Ariel School in Zimbabwe witnessed these latter type entities in 1994, although they did not report abduction. Mack flew to Zimbabwe and interviewed the children who spoke on camera and drew pictures of their sighting of three spacecraft and two alien beings. A documentary clip of these remarkable interviews is available on Youtube (Allix, 2004).

Typical abduction experiences often involve a painful medical procedure, sexual act, or both, and is followed by a telepathically communicated information package often concerning the fate of the earth (Mack, 1994, p26). Occasionally, abductees discover physical phenomenon that accompany abductions. Mack points out that although abductees are sure the “cuts, scars, scoop marks and small fresh ulcers that appear on their bodies after their experiences are related to the physical procedures performed on the ships, these lesions are usually too trivial by themselves to be medically significant” (ibid.,p27). Mack also discusses another frequent claim in the abductee experience: implants. MIT physicist David Pritchard has analyzed the make up of an implant, finding it to be a twisted fibre consisting of carbon, silicon, oxygen and trace elements (ibid., p.27).

Mack, in looking toward a theory to explain the abduction phenomenon, suggests that it must account for “five basic dimensions.” These are:

1. The high degree of consistency of detailed abduction accounts, reported with emotion appropriate to actual experiences told by apparently reliable observers.
2. The absence of psychiatric illness or other apparent psychological or emotional factors that could account for what is being reported.
3. The physical changes and lesions affecting the bodies of the experiencers, which follow no evident psychodynamic pattern.
4. The association with UFOs witnessed independently by others while abductions are taking place.
5. The reports of abductions by children as young as two or three years of age (ibid.,pp28-29).

Mack contends that no conventional theory has thus far come close to accounting for the basic features and these five dimensions of the abduction phenomenon. For Mack, “the ultimate source of these experiences remains a mystery” (ibid.,p.398).

Alongside his work on the alien abduction phenomenon, Mack became affiliated with the school of Transpersonal psychology, a movement founded in the late 1960s by Abraham Maslow and Stanislav Grof. Known sometimes as the ‘fourth force’ in psychology, after Behavioural, Psychoanalytic, and Humanist psychology, the Transpersonal school recognizes the validity of non-ordinary states of consciousness. Grof, in his 2008 article, “A Brief History of Transpersonal Psychology,” elaborates on what transpersonal psychology is, seeing its genesis as an effort at correcting “the ethnocentric and cognicentric bias of mainstream psychiatry and psychology” (2008, p6). For Grof, the dominant materialistic sciences, originating in the West, have sidelined, denigrated, and pathologized various non-ordinary states of consciousness. Mack’s view on the transpersonal and on non-ordinary states points towards a way to understand abduction claims as neither imaginary nor literal but in a domain that includes aspects of both. Writing the forward to *Paths Beyond the Ego: The Transpersonal Vision* (1993), he elaborates:

In the transpersonal universe or universes, we seek to know our worlds close up, relying on feeling and contemplation, as well as observation and reason, to gain information about a range of possible realities. In this universe we take subjectivity for granted and depend on direct experience, intuition, and imagination for discoveries about the inner and outer worlds. A transpersonal epistemology appreciates the necessity of ordinary states of consciousness for mapping the terrain of the physical universe, but non-ordinary states are seen as powerful means of extending our knowledge beyond the four dimensions of the Newtonian/Einsteinian universe (Mack, 1993, p. xii).

This important distinction makes clear that transpersonal psychology does not supplant, discard or compete with the traditional schools of psychology and science but facilitates

an extension of understanding beyond their self-prescribed limits and capacities. In this approach, transpersonal psychology can be considered part of the postmodern turn, in that it values openness, ambiguity, multiple ways of knowing, and moving beyond empirical science to listen to diverse, often excluded voices. Transpersonal psychology can thus help us accommodate the highly non-ordinary nature of the alien abduction claim. It calls for, in Mack's words, "an expansion of our notions of reality, rather than the 'jamming' of 'data into existing categories' that some critics would have us do" (Mack, 1994, p.xii).

7. The Explanatory Hypotheses and an Anthropological Framework

Mack and the Transpersonal school, with its conception of a multiverse, are thus aligned with the Inter-dimensional Hypothesis (IDH) for UFOs and alien encounters. This theory posits that UFOs and aliens are not space faring visitors, but forms and beings belonging to a domain separate from but coextensive with (and occasionally impinging on) our own. The ETH, discussed earlier and advocated by Donderi and Jacobs, argues that UFOs are strictly physical though highly advanced technological craft, and that based on the evidence and testimony accrued so far, they should be construed as a threat. The Psycho-Social Hypothesis (PSH) views both UFOs and abductions as an entirely subjective and collective mythology. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, in his book *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (1959) sees UFOs as a modern myth for the technological era and thus advocates PSH over ETH. However, while PSH may account for *some* individual claims, it is the weakest hypothesis in that it fails to account for the well-documented physical aspects of the

phenomenon. However, Jung was writing during a time period where authoritative data about the phenomenon was unavailable, outside sensational headlines in the press. Ironically, Jung's psychological theories of an archetypal realm and synchronicity were a strong influence on the Transpersonal school and provide a conceptual framework for IDH.

Perhaps the strongest proponent of IDH and *the* leading expert on UFOs is Jacques Vallée, an astrophysicist and computer scientist who has published twelve books on the UFO phenomenon. Vallée suggests that IDH is stronger than ETH in that it best fits the available data on UFOs and abduction claims. In his book, *Dimensions: A Casebook of Alien Contact* (1988) he argues that ETH "is not good enough, because it is not strange enough to explain the facts." (Vallée, p140) He argues instead that the UFO phenomenon represents evidence for other dimensions beyond space-time. IDH would explain some of the anomalies in UFO flight characteristics such as extreme speeds, shape mutability, and sudden appearance or disappearance. IDH would appear to reconcile the strictly objective framework of ETH and the entirely subjective framework of PSH. For Vallée, IDH transcends the binary view that UFOs must be either real or subjective, by extrapolating that UFOs "are constructed both *as physical craft* (a fact that has long appeared to me undeniable) *and as psychic devices* whose exact properties remain to be defined." (Vallée, 1988, p143) IDH can account better for many aspects of the abduction phenomenon such as inter-subjectivity, quasi-physicality, movement through solid objects, and missing time. Astrophysics and quantum science already theorize multiple dimensions and calculate that physical matter as we know it comprises

only 4.9% of the reality we inhabit – the other 95.1% being a combination of what is currently termed Dark Matter and Dark Energy.

We turn to anthropology and shamanism for a theory that may help us conceptualize Vallée’s inter-dimensional hypothesis. Michael Harner, regarded as the world’s foremost authority on shamanism, argues in his 1980 book *The Way of the Shaman*, that the Ordinary State of Consciousness (OSC) and the Shamanic State of Consciousness (SSC) are distinct from each other and incommensurable with each other, meaning one cannot assess with the validating tools of OSC an event that occurs in SSC.

Dragons, griffins, and other animals that would be considered “mythical” by us in the OSC are “real” in the SSC. The idea that there are “mythical” animals is a useful and valid construct in OSC life, but superfluous and irrelevant in SSC experience. Conversely, a person in the SSC may perceive the experiences of OSC to be illusory in SSC terms. Both are right, as viewed from their own particular states of consciousness (Harner, 1980, p.xxii).

The advantage of the shaman is in his being able to move between different states, with consciousness as the vehicle of inter-dimensional transport. Harner also recounts in his book that in shamanic practices encounters with alien beings are routine. Mack, himself interviewed a Zulu healer named Credo Mutwa who claimed to have been abducted by humanoid beings, whom he calls the *mantindane*, on multiple occasions. Mutwa comments that white people in South Africa call these beings “aliens”

We don’t call them that. They are part of us, part of our lives. The *mantindane* are solvers of great problems in whatever bloody world they live in. Why aren’t scientists testing these things, instead of saying it’s all nonsense? Instead of saying that [abduction experiencers] are all mad (Mack, 1999, p.214-215)?

Conclusion

In this paper I have contextualized the history of the UFO phenomenon in the belief that the presentation of the actual data as documented in the extant scholarly research and government and military reports will serve to expose the taboo concerning

its study as a political rather than scientific prohibition. As we have seen, in recent decades a shift has occurred in the way governments deal with the UFO problem, with the conspicuous exception of the United States, which still intends at the political level to ignore the problem, perhaps in the hopes that it will go away. The UFO problem has not gone away, and as Donderi observes with the post-1980 sightings, it has grown in scale and in proximity, flying ‘low, big, and slow’ over populated cities. Wendt and Duval’s political theory of the UFO presents a strong argument to explain why the world’s leading superpower still clings to the taboo despite formal studies occurring in numerous countries, and despite the increasing intrusions of UFOs into its airspace, representing at the very least an aviation safety hazard.

The abduction studies of John E. Mack and the conceptual framework of Transpersonal psychology have generated invaluable data on this traumatic and transformative experience by eschewing the convenient route of pathologizing the experiencer. The various explanatory hypotheses that have arisen, particularly ETH, PSH, and IDH, point towards future directions of study that would involve input from multiple disciplines, and the prospect of integrating insights into a more comprehensive understanding of this strange phenomenon. In agreement with Wendt and Duvall, I argue for resistance to the taboo through ‘militant agnosticism,’ meaning we simply cannot at this stage determine the nature of this phenomenon, but it is imperative that we systematically and openly study it. The UFO phenomenon (along with the related question of alien abduction) traverses multiple disciplines such as political science, history, psychology, folklore, cultural studies, astrophysics, quantum science, and anthropology. As we build a scientific community around an international and

interdisciplinary field of UFOlogy, we can begin to systematically study the larger patterns. A coordinated international effort would work towards a joint definition of the UFO problem, agreement on core objectives, role clarification and negotiation, and developing a project model that coordinates the main research objective with various subprojects (such as crop circle and cattle mutilation phenomena). The US UFO taboo can no longer sustain itself in an era of continuing disclosure by others countries. The US could take the lead in an interdisciplinary study conducted globally and strategically to ensure correlated inputs, progressive sharing, and interactive cross-testing, yielding a far more comprehensive understanding of what is possibly the most profound mystery our civilization faces.

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