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# The Affect of the Impossible: UAP and the Deterritorialization of Knowledge

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## Introduction

For over seventy years, UFOs—now styled “Unidentified Aerospace or Anomalous Phenomena” or UAP—have presented a unique problem for thought. It is not merely a scientific puzzle to be solved but a limit-experience for our regimes of knowledge, what we can call a persistent and uncomfortable “excessive remainder” that conventional science dismisses as error and popular culture consumes as spectacle. This paper enters the impasse between sterile skepticism and credulous belief—both equally overdetermined due to the UFO’s long-established place in popular culture—to offer a different path. Given the acknowledgement by both the Federal government and more recently NASA, the subject seems to be emerging already from this impasse as a pressing object for serious study, despite its culturally and socially overdetermined status. Working from within this recent turn towards mainstream acceptance (a turn that possibly parallels a similar turn towards official scientific acceptance for meteorites during the late eighteenth century), this paper attempts to intervene early in this process, where acceptance is still ambivalent and indeterminate, and put forward the promise of a future science—something that can serve as an antidote to both conspiracy and speculation, the twin factors that have historically stymied serious, consistent and generational (empirical) engagement with the UFO phenomenon. We offer this in an effort to provide an opening for a rationalism of the uncanny.

To do this, and in light of the fact that the UFO is a subject that nevertheless remains culturally, socially and politically overdetermined and therefore immensely difficult to penetrate convincingly with serious analysis and theory, we will develop a radically empiricist framework that is already motivated by a prior theoretical pivot away from metaphysics, but—perhaps paradoxically—towards ontology. We call the framework, consequently, “Existential Empiricism” because of this ontological pivot. Its foundational gesture is to distinguish between two modes of philosophical inquiry. The first we will call *classical metaphysics*: the act of positing abstract, static structures of being in an effort to explain and understand being-as-a-whole. Classical empiricism sought to end or curtail this activity; we do not. The criticism rather is that the metaphysical, at least in its classical forms, operated from a philosophy of identity and representation, which seeks to secure explanatory foundations by the positing of these static structures by which to identify specific orders of being. The way out therefore is not to avoid or

end metaphysics, but to offer a metaphysic that escapes the philosophical traps of identity and representation; thus (to anticipate) we will offer a Spinozean alternative: the “monism” of Spinoza as read (somewhat controversially) by Deleuze through the lens of his philosophy of difference. It is this more fundamental standpoint of “difference-in-itself” that leads us to distinguish the classical metaphysical mode of inquiry from something else, a second we will call *ontology*; but, we define this familiar term here in a specific, *genetic* sense: the study of the activity of thought itself as it responds to the affective movement of being.

This ontological pivot, inspired by the Maimon-Deleuze critique of Kant, allows us to focus on the *generative* moments through which the identities and categories of metaphysics are produced. It is an attempt to grasp the creativity of nature (the essence of science) before it is captured and neutralized by representation. We recognize that there is nothing “wrong” with “doing metaphysics,” which it had been the objective of the classical empiricist traditions of the past to show, i.e., they sought to *eliminate metaphysics altogether* (recall Hume’s famously dark dictum, advocating the consignment of metaphysical treatises “to the flames”). Indeed, even Kant sought to eliminate the classical form by demonstrating that its truth claims could not be maintained, just because the scope of ‘reason’ which it presupposed was illegitimate—with the result being simply that Kant only shifted the problem elsewhere. Working from the more profound critique of the Maimon-Deleuze line of thought, we simply show that once the truth claims of classical metaphysics are specified in more practical, applied terms—that classical metaphysics (even since at least Thales) was oriented towards providing explanations and understandings in a generally scientific register, and therefore were effectively circumscribed by what new vistas and eventually (i.e., during the transformative period of the Scientific Revolution) what new technological possibilities it disclosed—the task becomes not the elimination of metaphysics as such, but rather its creative expansion to enable more and more comprehensive explanations (and understandings) through increasingly more robust responses to the creative ground out of which springs the creativity of nature itself (thus closing the loop, the intimacy of thought and being). To be *affectively* related to nature means to grasp (or even participate with) the openings, shiftings, dislocations—the differences—disclosed by nature, or what Spinoza theorized as “infinite substance” under the formula “Deus *siva* Natura” and what Deleuze would formulate later as the paradoxical equation “monism = pluralism”. Achieving this pivot to the more profound ontological genesis of thought and experience requires precisely the critique of Kant first offered by Maimon with his philosophy of difference—the theme that becomes central for Deleuze centuries later.

This “ontological” approach is necessary because the UAP, as a sublime object (in the Kantian sense, as we explain) arrests our normal cognitive functions. In the sublime moment, nature surprises and suspends the categories and forms of intuition, and hence the ground of expectation that is the essence of induction. The aesthetic takes over in this creative moment; science is supplanted by art. The inductive projection of the past onto the future is shattered, creating an opening for the genuinely new. It is in this opening that we can articulate the kind of radical Enlightenment “rationalism” that Spinoza could not yet himself articulate, but which we, in our

century of deep space science, AI, genomics, and science fiction in the Anthropocene, now can—and can do justice to. And it is where the two radical Enlightenment philosophies—of Kant and Spinoza—converge.

This paper will deploy this method on two distinct but interconnected planes. First, on the Plane of Affect, we will analyze the UAP as a deterritorializing vector—a political and social object whose presence, independent of its empirical resolution, already has material consequences for our world. Second, on the Plane of Empiricism, we will engage the UAP as a problematizing machine that forces the creation of a new (“Continental”) philosophy of science, of which we intend here to supply but one possible example. Ultimately, by taking the uncanny seriously, this paper aims to use the UAP problem as a lever to argue for a more integrated *Wissenschaft*, a holistic science—frequently written about but rarely specified—that is capable of engaging the full spectrum of reality, including the weird.

## **Part I: The Plane of Affect: The UAP as a Deterritorializing Vector**

### **1. Deterritorializing the Capitalist Machine**

The modern political-economic order is a vast territorial machine, one whose foundational codes can be summarized under the name “petro-capitalism.” This societal arrangement, or assemblage, is predicated on what has been called a “Promethean” stance toward nature, an inheritance of the Scientific Revolution that views the material world as a standing reserve of resources to be (somewhat violently) liberated through combustion (Hadot 2006). Its entire operation relies on two false but ideologically necessary principles: first, that there exists an effectively endless supply of energy inputs for the industrial system; and second, that there exists an unlimited sink for the waste produced by the conversion of that energy into work. Our global society, in effect, runs on a series of highly sophisticated and manageable fires—a technology of controlled explosion that is fundamentally extractive and destructive. Even the pinnacle of energy generation technology—the nuclear reactor—is little more than a sophisticated tea kettle: a source of heat for boiling water in order to turn a turbine. Put differently, our technologies are layered in a way that the foundations and basic dependencies are still thoroughly ancient, despite the ideology of ‘progress’ that seeks to obscure those dependencies. Our current technological infrastructure is still very much about destroying and consuming something (fuel) to produce heat, in order to do work. This, then, is the dominant territory, the set of codes that structure our reality; they define the material limits of the possible.

Into this territory, the UAP arrives as a powerful affective object. In the philosophical tradition of Spinoza and Deleuze, an **affect** is not a personal feeling or emotion, but a pre-personal intensity, a capacity to affect and be affected that corresponds to an increase or decrease in a body’s power to act (Massumi 1987; Deleuze and Guattari 1987). On this plane of analysis, which examines the UAP’s social and political effects, its empirical status is secondary to its function as a signifier. The structure of its reported phenomenology—its consistent description across decades of

accounts—suggests radically non-interactive technological modalities that are of independent significance to the phenomenon’s final empirical resolution. The consistent reports of silent, high-velocity movement without exhaust or thermal effects introduce an “impossible” alternative into the cultural imagination (for recent sober-minded analyses, see Coumbe 2022 and Powell 2024).

This is how the UAP crashes the anthropocene party, so to speak. To borrow a concept from the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the UAP functions as a vector of *detritorialization*—a force that causes a system to escape its own organizing principles and codes (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). The very idea of a non-combustion, potentially non-extractive or nondestructive technology of energy creation and harnessment generates what they call “lines of flight”—pathways of thought and desire that break away from the dominant territory. It reveals the radical contingency of our entire Promethean system. The UAP, as a symbol, forces a confrontation with the fact that the violent antagonism between fuel and product, energy and matter, is not a metaphysical necessity but a contingent technological choice.

This is why its ultimate origin is, for this analysis, irrelevant. It doesn’t matter whether even all UAP are nothing but the fantasies, hoaxes, or socially-spun misperceptions of a gullible few. The cultural fascination with these impossible objects stumbles upon the fatal flaw in the petro-capitalist order, offering a critique from another register altogether. Even if the classic UFO “believer” thinks that the intelligences behind the phenomena can provide a salvific moment for humanity, they may be right for the wrong reasons. The UAP does not need to save us; simply by existing as a potent symbol in our collective consciousness, it produces a powerful collective affect of ontological vertigo—the dizzying realization that the axioms of our world are not the only axioms possible, and that our destructive path is not the only path available.

What complicates this analysis, however, is the patently obvious fact that this supposed impossibility—the UAP as a noninteractive, nondestructive technological “other” relative to the dominant technoscientific system—is already overdetermined in the popular imagination by science fiction, which itself seems to function independently as a powerful imaginary, a space within which our collective sociopolitical and cultural dreams, fantasies and nightmares are safely externalized as entertainment. It is where, in a sense, the future technoscientific-political order is first imagined, and later realized, so that this imaginary functions as an actual material horizon inverting future and present, melting the one into the other. This is precisely why we must distinguish carefully our two planes of analysis, since it is as we shift to the empirical level, and overcome the epistemological challenges faced by the mostly forensic evidence for the specific empirical reality of the UAP, where the sociopolitical and cultural affect reaches beyond the imaginary per se. If UAP are in the main taken seriously as empirically ‘real’ objects (a thesis the Department of Defense in 2021 and NASA in 2023 have both publicly accepted), and they have the evidently “impossible” characteristics documented time and again in the literature on the subject (a thesis that DOD and NASA won’t accept without a scientifically sound evidentiary foundation establishing such—which both argue is needed and should be funded), then there is

actual trouble for the entire petro-capitalist political-economic machine—trouble best avoided through the dissemblances over alleged evidence for UAP being truly, inexplicably anomalous, as we will now see. In other words, we must be careful that the typical gesture of academic-critical deconstruction does not itself serve to dissemble on an object that, in fact, is deeply disturbing in its implications, which the sociopolitical and cultural imaginary (through for example the mechanism of fiction) has served to normalize and therefore obscure its disturbing core. Academic critique also functions within the machine, as its social and political agent (something, we argue, that can only be escaped through an *empiricism of the phenomena*—an example of which we offer here).

## 2. Deterritorializing the State Machine

If petro-capitalism is the machine that organizes our material world, the modern State is the machine that organizes our political reality. Its primary code, its foundational axiom, is *anthropocentric sovereignty*—the presupposition that humans, and humans alone, possess the capacity and authority for self-governance. As the political theorists Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall have argued in their seminal paper on the UFO “taboo”, this is the bedrock of modern rule; anything that challenges it would challenge the foundations of modern rule itself (Wendt and Duvall 2008). The State machine functions to maintain this territory, coding the world in terms of a clear binary between the human sovereign and a passive, non-agentive nature.

The UAP confronts this machine as what we might call (thinking ahead to Kant) a “sublime” object, an encounter that threatens to shatter its core programming. We can now re-read Wendt and Duvall’s use of the concepts “ontological shock” (which they get from theologian Paul Tillich) and “authoritative taboo” through this lens. The taboo is not a simple political calculation; it is the State machine’s desperate, almost instinctual attempt to manage a sublime affect—a powerful, pre-conceptual feeling or force—that it cannot code within its existing framework. The State, as an apparatus of security, is faced with a phenomenon that is radically other and technologically superior, rendering its own claims to power impotent. The “ontological shock,” then, is the name Wendt and Duvall give for this sublime affect at the political level—the collective feeling of ontological insecurity that erupts when the foundational code of human exclusivity is threatened with erasure.

It is this powerful affect that deterritorializes the State. As we established previously, deterritorialization is a process by which a system escapes its own organizing codes. The UAP, as an idea and a corresponding empirical reality shielded by the science fictional imaginarium, introduces a non-human term into the political equation that cannot be assimilated, scrambling the codes of governance, security, and the social contract. The State’s legitimacy, predicated on its ability to guarantee the safety of its citizens, is nullified not by a physical attack, but by the mere possibility of an unassimilable and superior ‘other’ signalled by the empirically real UAP that cannot actually be explained—thus the State must explain UAP away, or else recode them within its security apparatus as a potential “threat.” This latter move is a classic example of

**securitization**, the process by which state actors frame an issue as an existential threat to justify extraordinary measures, a process now well-documented in the emerging political science scholarship on UAP (see, for example, Krame *et al.* 2024).

This process of deterritorialization, however, does not leave a void. A system thrown into chaos will seek a new organization, a process Deleuze and Guattari call *reterritorialization*. The political vacuum created by this affective disruption forces a chaotic realignment of political thought. This process can be mapped, we argue, using the political cartography of Bruno Latour. In his analysis of the climate crisis, Latour shows that the old political axis of the Local versus the Global has been superseded by a conflict between two new “attractors”: the “Terrestrial,” which calls for a re-engagement with a finite Earth, and the “Out-of-This-World,” an elite fantasy of escape from global problems (Latour 2018). The UAP’s sublime intrusion acts as an accelerant, intensifying the struggle between these nascent political territories and demonstrating its real-world power to reshape the very landscape of political possibility. But in this context, even, UAP remain profoundly, and significantly, ambiguous: as symbol of a new technoscientific possibility (and hence a new political-economic order configured around it), UAP suggest an out-of-this-world arriving (literally and figuratively) right here in this one, bringing the outer within, back down to Earth. Yet, their apparently impossible dynamics would make escape from Earth a simple matter, opening forth the whole wide expanse of the universe as the final frontier and culmination of the spirit of exploration—and conquest—that emerged in force during the Commercial Revolution, leading to the very technoscientific system now at the heart of our current political-economic order. To a certain extent, then, even if UAP are independently ‘real’ empirical objects capable of these impossible technoscientific feats of flight and movement, *they are us*: what we have perhaps wanted to be, but which, in its ‘real’ form, is in fact both dream and nightmare—an object that crashes the party.

## Part II: The Plane of Empiricism: The UAP as a Problematizing Machine

### 3. A Critical Theory of Science: The Spectrum of Anomaly

To transition from the plane of social affect to the plane of empirical analysis requires a methodology capable of handling the UAP’s uniquely problematic data set. A crucial first step is to recognize that what we have is not, strictly speaking, data on UAP themselves, but rather (so far at least) data derived from *reports of UAP*. The entire subject has, to date, existed almost exclusively within the ineliminable context of what philosophers of science would call **historical** or more simply **forensic science**.

Drawing on the work of Carol Cleland, we must therefore distinguish between two modes of scientific inquiry. The first is **experimental science**, which operates through controlled, repeatable experiments. The second is **historical science** (a category that includes fields like geology and cosmology, and forensic science proper), which seeks a common cause that can best explain existing traces from a past event. This distinction is critical because it reveals the epistemic loop



that has paralyzed UAP studies when it tries to turn empirical. Skeptics demand proof that meets the standards of experimental science, yet the vast existing body of forensic evidence that would justify such a science being set up and providing that evidence is dismissed for not being experimental. The paradigm case of this error is the infamous Condon Study conducted at the University of Colorado in the late 1960s. Commissioned by the U.S. Air Force to provide a definitive scientific judgment on UFOs, the project ultimately used a forensic study of past cases (or a forensic follow-up for more recent ones) to dismiss a subject that required a new experimental science, concluding—somewhat predictably—that “nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge” (Condon 1969). This conclusion, based on the misapplication of evidentiary standards, effectively shut down mainstream scientific inquiry for decades (a fact that later proved to be somewhat disingenuous).

*Existential Empiricism* breaks this loop by correctly identifying the UAP problem, at this stage, as a forensic one. It respects the function of forensic evidence not as definitive proof, but as *indicative evidence* whose aim is to motivate the establishment of the stricter science that is required to produce the definitive evidence. The goal is to identify patterns of anomaly so persistent that they justify a new experimental science (or at least the establishment of an observational science that can capture the relevant definitive data)—a procedure common in the history of science. For example, it is the standard procedure in medical forensics, where case reports from untrained experts about an alleged disease (forensic evidence) motivate the appropriately-framed scientific study that goes looking for it (Vandenbroucke 2001). Similarly, as the sociologist of science Ron Westrum has detailed, reports of “stones falling from the sky” were initially dismissed because of the social status of the observers, yet their provisional acceptance ultimately led to the scientific breakthrough of meteoritics (Westrum 1978).

With this context established, we can outline our evidential sorting process: All reports of UAP can be divided into those containing primarily technologically mediated data (instrument readings) and those presenting unmediated experiential data (witness narratives). For both streams, we apply a rigorous filter of conventional explanations (instrument error, hoax, fantasy, etc.). What is left we might call the “excessive remainder”: the subset of data that not only lacks a conventional explanation but actively contradicts our conventional frameworks—at least as far as the phenomenology in the reports would *indicate*, which indicative evidence then leads to the proper scientific research, etc. This is the direction evidently being taken by some researchers today, as we see for example with the *Galileo Project*, which gets its name precisely from the Galileo controversy (discussed below).

Nevertheless, there are few professional bodies devoted to doing this compilation and systematic sorting of UAP cases, and fewer still that are sanctioned by national governments. One of these is the long-standing French organization called “GEIPAN” which works with the national police to gather and then, when merited, follow up on UAP/UFO reports. GEIPAN has a fairly sophisticated software system designed to sort cases down to this residuum that, despite there being enough data, nevertheless remain unexplained (and hence merit the stronger label

“unexplainable”); these are the more interesting “D” cases according to the GEIPAN system. In the U.S., the so-called “All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office” or AARO, set up to take and examine UAP reports, presumably has something like this system in place; although, unlike GEIPAN, which operates under CNES—the French-equivalent of NASA—AARO operates explicitly within the U.S. national security apparatus, and so is bound by military, national security and political calculations, not by a purely scientific mandate (of course we recognize that there in fact can be no such clear-cut distinction as the scientific is also socially and politically mediated; the point here is simply that for GEIPAN, UAP aren’t a threat but an empirical object of interest that might be of relevance for the national security state; for AARO, all UAP are potentially evidence of a threat to national security and are therefore principally evaluated as such, i.e., as a potential emergent adversarial state technology threatening the current U.S. world strategic military advantage).

This “excessive remainder” is the sublime data that forces a crisis in our scientific frameworks. The philosophy of identity and representation, which underpins much of scientific practice, attempts to manage this crisis through tools like Bayesian inference. Bayesian logic, by its very structure, always weights the known, tested, and familiar more highly than the unfamiliar and unexpected. It is a powerful tool for refining knowledge within an established paradigm, but it is a trap when confronted with a true anomaly; it systematically overdetermines the future with the past, preventing the new from arising except as a highly unlikely exception. In this connection, it is a useful exercise in the social studies of science (STS) to consider that, on strictly Bayesian grounds, Galileo lost the argument against the clerics of the time, who were justified in not taking his alleged observational evidence seriously—there was, for example, no theoretical understanding of his new instrument, the telescope, so its evidential significance was rationally inaccessible to the intellectual authorities of the time.

Existential Empiricism proposes a “critical theory of science” that moves from representation to genesis. Such is, we claim, effectively in operation each time in science innovations are attempted—not all of which, of course, are guaranteed to be successful. Galileo was operating from a disruptive critical theory of science, a standpoint of the genesis of new concepts and categories (as we saw in his internal critique of the Aristotelian view of the motionlessness of Earth which introduced *perspectival relativity*—a concept that originated in the world of art during the Renaissance); whereas the clerics were simply committed to a representation of reality by means of the accepted categories and systems of the time. Furthermore, our empiricism reconceptualizes ‘measurement’: it is not the passive recording of reality, but an active, creative act—a “choice of basis vector” in an abstract state space. Galileo’s introduction of perspectival relativity was not just a new theory; it was a change in the very representational space, an alteration of the epistemological criteria of evaluation. This alteration *is* the act of measurement as we have defined it: a creative choice of a new basis vector that makes a new world of data possible. An anomaly reveals the limits of the current basis choice. A “royal science,” to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term, discards the anomaly to protect the existing basis (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). A “nomadic science,” which we practice here, *follows the anomaly*. It treats the “excessive remainder” not as



error, but as the sublime data that demands the invention of a new conceptual basis—a new “paradigm,” to use the language of Thomas Kuhn. This move is risky, but then that is the path of scientific or intellectual innovation: *to hazard the new*.

#### 4. Articulating the Weird

This methodology allows us to now turn to the most challenging data within that “excessive remainder”: the unmediated experiential narratives of “close encounters,” alleged interactions with non-human entities, and reports of “paranormal” occurrences that are seemingly unrelated to the specifically “physical” manifestations of UAP. This is, as it were, the Achilles Heel of science, for “experience” is something about which it has had the most difficulty, often eliminating it in favor of its “neural correlates” (a problem known in philosophy of mind as the “explanatory gap” or the “hard problem of consciousness”; see Levine 1983 and Chalmers 1995 for the classic formulations of the problem). It is science’s “blind spot,” as astrobiologist Adam Frank and his colleagues have recently articulated (Frank, Gleiser, and Thompson 2024).

For what we will call “classical ufology”—the decades-long forensic project of chasing cold cases—these experiential stories have always posed a seemingly intractable problem. The foundational work here is that of the folklorist Thomas E. Bullard, whose comparative analysis of abduction narratives revealed a persistent, recurring structure (Bullard 2010). This finding presents a dilemma: the powerful folkloric patterns seem to support a purely psycho-social explanation, yet Bullard himself concludes that a “genuinely mysterious phenomenon” seems to exist outside the myth. To make this concrete, consider two of the most persistent episodes in Bullard’s eight-part structure: the “Examination,” in which abductees report quasi-medical procedures with a bizarre focus on their reproductive systems, and the “Theophany,” a subsequent phase where the terror of the examination gives way to a profound, often mystical or spiritual experience of oneness with the universe (Bullard 2010).

*Existential Empiricism* breaks this deadlock by reframing the question. We propose that a ‘veridical’ anomalous experience—meaning not that it corresponds to a pre-existing fact, but that it is a genuine, irreducible encounter with difference, not a product of pure fantasy or hoax—is the engine of the story. Such an encounter, which shatters the subject’s common-sense reality, is a moment of profound deterritorialization. It is a version of what the theologian Paul Tillich, in his *Systematic Theology*, once called the moment of profound “ontological shock”—the generative heart of the religious encounter with the divine (hence why a substantial subset of “experiencers” report on their UAP encounters as having religious or spiritual significance: indeed, this is the effect of the uncanny, a dislocation in one’s ontological grounding). The experience is formless, traumatic, and pre-linguistic. It remains the traumatic core which even academic scholarship cannot adequately face, over which theory has struggled ever since Kant’s “thing-in-itself”—a horizon of pre-theoretical being that, as thinkers like Slavoj Žižek have explored, ultimately destabilizes the main concepts deployed in theory today (see Žižek 2006).

Faced with this void, the subject is compelled to give it form. This is a process of *reterritorialization*, which can be understood psychoanalytically as the subject's attempt to suture the traumatic tear in the symbolic order caused by the encounter. The subject reaches for the nearest and most powerful explanatory patterns available in their cultural environment—what we can call a “dictionary for the sublime.” This dictionary is filled with the archetypal forms culture has developed to code uncanny encounters: angels, demons, fairies, and, in our techno-scientific age, extraterrestrials. The specific structure of these articulations is also inflected psychoanalytically, as the subject's choice from this repository is shaped by their own psychic structure (thus why, despite its ontological significance, the encounter is *always* amenable to a psychoanalytic or psychological intervention, independently of the specific etiology of the event as an empirical object to be explained more precisely). This solves the causal arrow problem: the weird is productive of the story, not the other way around. The folkloric patterns are not proof of fantasy; they are the recurring narrative structures that culture provides to articulate a recurring, real, but uncanny experience.

## 5. The Bionic Assemblage

The analysis of the “excessive remainder” forces us to the edge of our conceptual maps. The recurring forensic evidence points toward a phenomenology that transgresses our most fundamental modern dichotomies: machine versus organism, culture versus nature. To proceed, we must engage in a speculative but philosophically grounded act of concept creation.

On the Plane of Affect, the concept for UAP of a “bionic assemblage” (for example) can function as a powerfully disruptive symbolic event, a traumatic encounter with what the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan called “the Real”—that which resists symbolization and shatters our established reality (Lacan 2006). However, when we shift to the Plane of Empiricism, the concept is no longer merely a cultural symbol; it becomes the name for the sublime object that (internally) disrupts the existing order of scientific knowledge. It is the new “measurement basis” we are forced to create in direct response to the aesthetic encounter with the weird.

To articulate this concept, and deploy it as an illustrative example of what our method suggests, we turn to the work of the philosopher of technology David Channell. In *The Vital Machine*, Channell argues that to overcome the machine/organism dichotomy, we need a new “root metaphor”: the “bionic,” a third option where machines are given organic qualities and organisms are supplied with engineered natures (Channell 1991). The “bionic assemblage” is the concept we build from this foundation. This conceptual leap is justified by the recurring patterns in the forensic data: reports of craft that appear to change shape, bifurcate like cells, and demonstrate a kind of non-interactive grace that seems more biological than mechanical.

From this new basis, we can more carefully (and potentially more rigorously) speculate on the physics implied. If modern propulsion is inherently dualistic and “Promethean”—requiring the violent, external combustion of fuel to move inert matter—the phenomenology of the UAP

suggests a “technology of immanence.” This would be a technology where matter is its own source of energy, perhaps through the manipulation of the strong nuclear force (at present, only one fundamental interaction, the electromagnetic, is technologically controllable, and it led to a profound reorganization of human society; we can only imagine what technological control over the strong nuclear force would imply for human society).

These speculations into the specific empirical character of UAP would require, therefore, a new metaphysics to ground them, for with the pivot to the ontological—the fundamental gesture of our *existential* empiricism—we require not an eliminative stance towards metaphysics but rather its generalization: the overcoming of its classical forms, trapped as they are between the seemingly opposed endpoints of materialism (everything is matter) and idealism (everything is mind). We turn, then, to the metaphysics of the Spinoza of Deleuze: “monism = pluralism.” Following the development of this metaphysic by thinkers like Harald Atmanspacher, we posit a psychophysically neutral “base” from which both mind and matter emerge (Atmanspacher and Fach 2013). This provides, in principle, descriptive room for the sort of mind-matter correlations suggested by the truly “weird” UAP reports. Since our empiricism, in the Jamesean spirit of “radical empiricism,” requires us to do nothing that would stand in the way of the actual texture of experience, we must accept these reports as veridical if no other explanation is forthcoming—something now licensed and guided by our pivot to the ontological standpoint of *difference*. Recognizing the narrative layer clears the way to the discovery of mind-matter relationships that might otherwise be lost as valid data. We are also in principle free to treat the “meaning” layer (traditionally given over to the humanities to deal with as mere “qualitative” data, i.e., mere grist for a hermeneutical mill that does not have a reality beyond the cultural and linguistic levels) not as a mere epiphenomenal extra, but rather as a substantial component of the metaphysical structure of reality itself. Indeed, we can now treat such as a kind of “quantitative” data *in a higher representational state space*, one sufficiently rich enough to capture the whole space of mind-matter or psychophysical interactions: matter *and* meanings at once. (This gives us, finally, a more precise sense of the sort of *Wissenschaft* to which we are oriented.)

The final step is to respect a “correspondence principle.” As articulated by Niels Bohr in the development of quantum theory, this is the requirement that a new, potentially more general theory must reproduce the results of (or at least be compatible with) the older, established theory in the domains where the old theory was known to be valid (Bohr 1920). Our framework, therefore, does not seek to invalidate existing science, but to expand it, providing a new basis that can account for the excessive remainder while still explaining the phenomena described by our current models. Although not necessarily a requirement, it is nevertheless a regulative ideal that can further constrain our space of speculative experimentation.

## Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the UAP on two distinct but interconnected planes. On the Plane of

Affect, we have seen how the UAP functions as a sublime object whose presence in the cultural imagination acts as a powerful vector of deterritorialization. Independent of its empirical reality, the very idea of the UAP scrambles the codes of our dominant political-economic assemblages, producing a collective affect of ontological vertigo that destabilizes the territories of both petro-capitalism and the modern State. It is a force that is already reshaping our political present.

On the Plane of Empiricism, we have engaged the UAP as a problematizing machine that forces a crisis in our scientific and philosophical frameworks. By developing the methodology of *Existential Empiricism*, we have shown how to move beyond the sterile binary of naive belief and dismissive skepticism. This method allows us to treat the full spectrum of anomalous forensic evidence not as noise to be filtered out, but as an excessive remainder that indicates the limits of our current knowledge. The sublime encounter with this “weird” data is not a failure of science, but the very engine that compels the creation of new concepts, such as the “bionic assemblage,” capable of thinking the impossible.

The bridge between these two planes is the critical theory of science that this paper has sought to enact. This is the mechanism by which the raw, chaotic energy of a cultural affect can be channeled into a rigorous and creative philosophical concept. It is a process of transformation: the political anxiety and cultural fascination provoked by the UAP (Part I) are not ends in themselves, but must be given form and direction by a new philosophical and scientific practice (Part II) that is adequate to the challenge they represent.

The ultimate critical intervention of this project, therefore, is to argue that the UAP, as a sublime object, does more than just challenge our politics or our science; it challenges the very divisions between them. The aesthetic encounter with the “impossible” reveals the rigid, historical boundaries between science (the pursuit of the true), art (the creation of the new), and even religion (the engagement with the uncanny) to be contingent territories. At their most vital and creative moments, these are not separate domains but different styles of a single, fundamental philosophical activity from which these epistemes derive: the attempt to create concepts in response to a sublime encounter with difference. The paper thus concludes not with a call for just a new science of UAP, but a new *Wissenschaft*—a rigorous, creative, and comprehensive science capable of engaging the full, weird spectrum of reality.

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