

The Extraterrestrial in US Culture

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This dissertation provides a cultural analysis of the figure of the extraterrestrial in US culture. The sites through which the extraterrestrial appears -- spiritualism, so-called “space brother” religions, unidentified flying objects, and alien abduction -- are understood as elements of an ongoing displaced utopian imaginary. This mode of utopian thought is characterized by recourse to figures of radical alterity (spirits of the dead, “ascended masters,” and the gray) as agents of radical social change; by its homologies with contemporaneous political currents; and through its invocation of trance states for counsel from the various others imagined as primary agents of change. Ultimately, the dissertation argues that the extraterrestrial functions as the locus both for the resolution of tensions between the spiritual and the material and for the projection of a perfected subject into a utopian future.

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Introduction

A STUDY IN GRAY

The commanding cultural presence of the outer-space alien and the UFO is attested to both by the number of individuals claiming to have been abducted by aliens (estimates based on a 1992 Roper poll ranging from 4 to 33 million) and the proliferation of books, articles, films, television programs and ephemera treating the phenomena.¹ Public fascination with the UFO and the alien has cycled on and off since the 1950's. *Books in Print* currently lists 73 titles under the heading "Alien Abduction" and 754 under the heading "Unidentified Flying Object." Compare this to the 200 titles in print under the heading "Richard Nixon." Jodi Dean points out that

by the mid-nineties the abduction narrative is established enough for *The New York Times Magazine* to satirize abductee meetings and put "World leader in alien abductions" at number four on a list of "What's Right With America." *The New Yorker* can publish alien abduction cartoons, secure that readers will get the joke.²

The primary goal of this dissertation is to assay a history of the contemporary phenomenon of alien abduction and the figure of the gray (the alien type most frequently cited as abductor). In doing so I will be telling not only the story of the alien presence in American culture but also the stories caught up and carried in the nexus of those tales. Close examination of communication between human and Other reveals much about the shifting relations between rationality and irrationality, science and religion, self and other. The narratives that spin out the details of contact between humans and extraterrestrials speak to more personal questions as well—the stability of self, the vagaries of mortality, the nature of the links between self and cosmos. Stories of contact with otherworldly beings are vastly interesting in and of themselves,

¹ The Roper Organization, *Unusual Personal Experiences*, (New York: Roper, 1992).

² Jodi Dean, "The Familiarity of Strangeness: Aliens, Citizens, and Abduction" in *Theory and Event* V.1#2 http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v001/1.2dean.html, 2 (accessed November 3, 2005).

both in their rich and bizarre detail and the shifts they exhibit over time. Their reverberations along multiple lines of association make them even more arresting. By way of introduction to the extended discussion of these tales that comprises the heart of this dissertation, I will discuss a series of interrelated matters: the nature of genealogy as historical enterprise; the driving dialectic of the peculiar history traced by this dissertation; and the links between the figure of the extraterrestrial and utopian thought.

As to the historical enterprise—I look to Foucault, and particularly to his essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” as a cautionary influence.³ My understanding of genealogy dictates that one write a history of the present rather than a history of the past. This operative distinction captures something essential of the approach. A history of the past imagines the present as somehow predestined. It is “a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development.”⁴ One recent and much ballyhooed example of such a history is Frances Fukuyama’s 1992 *The End of History and the Last Man*. In his book, Fukuyama argues that liberal democracy is the end of the line—the end result toward which all “history,” “understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process” has led.⁵ It is this sense, of history as singular, coherent and evolutionary, that genealogy as a practice seeks to challenge. Genealogy opposes this tidy vision by viewing the passage of events as characterized by multiplicity, division and uneven change. The first of these terms, multiplicity, opposes the sense of singularity espoused by traditional historiography, and addresses, among other historical matters, the question of origin. While Foucault does deploy the term “singularity” in the aforementioned essay, he does so not to describe the overall *process* of history, but rather the

³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 76-100.

⁴ Foucault, 86-87.

⁵ Frances Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

events that make up that process. The focus on the singularity of the event troubles the coherence of history understood as linear and progressive and gestures instead at the messiness of history as lived experience.

Foucault points to Paul Ree, famously the stepping off point for Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, as exemplifying the tendency to imagine historical origins as singular, as *Ursprungen*. "[I]t is obvious that Paul Ree was wrong to follow the English tendency in describing the history of morality in terms of linear development—in reducing its entire history and genesis to an exclusive concern for utility."⁶ Here we see both the tendency toward singularity and the tendency toward reading effect as cause. In terms of singularity, Ree's hypothesis imagines moral structures as emerging from a single cause—that of a concern and desire for utility. Nietzsche, and Foucault after him, sees morality as emerging from a multiplicity of forces in contention. Morality emerges not out of conscious decisions in aid of some concrete goal but rather out of protracted struggle, shifts in power, mistakes and misunderstandings.

As to the conflation of cause and effect—this is a recurring tendency in traditional historiography. Nietzsche launches his polemic in *Genealogy of Morals* by revisiting a critique of his friend Paul Ree's *The Origin of Moral Emotion*. Ree puts forward the argument—shared by the Utilitarian tradition of Mill and Spencer—that "good" actions engender favorable consequences, and thus morals are useful or utilitarian. This contemporary understanding of morals is then in turn read back onto the past. If morals are currently understood as utilitarian then their origins must lie in utility. Thus utility, an effect of interpretation and a long uneven historical process, is read as cause. This fundamental anachronism, current understandings read onto past events, is what underwrites traditional historiography's search for a *singular* cause.

⁶ Foucault, 76.

Fukuyama also describes the historical process as “coherent.” While singularity speaks to traditional historiographies’ desire for tidy and recognizable *origins*, coherence speaks more to a desire for tidiness in the unfolding of the historical *process* itself. Events unfolding over time draw a clear linear narrative. History à la Fukuyama moves in an orderly and linear fashion across time toward some pre-determined goal. History describes a solipsism wherein present understandings determine the understanding of past events and past events in turn determine the present. As Foucault argues, “[w]e want historians to confirm that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities.”⁷ In the Nietzschean and Foucauldian sense of genealogy, history moves unevenly, in fits and starts. It draws not a linear narrative, but one characterized by a multiplicity of cul-de-sacs, detours and dead-ends—division versus coherence. The present is based not upon “profound intentions and immutable necessities,” but upon struggle, shifting meanings and allegiances, and accident. In genealogy the present is not evolutionary or predetermined but fundamentally contingent.

Understood as a critical tool, genealogy functions to disrupt totalizing narratives. The implicit (and often explicit) telos of traditional historical narratives projects current imperatives onto past events and realities. Universalizing current understandings of the self, the human and the relation between the latter two and the cosmos—reproducing what Bataille would call the tyranny of the same. Genealogy, through its attendance to the multiplicity of origins and the incoherent and contingent nature of the historical process undermines and potentially destroys that sameness. As Foucault would have it, “where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogy sets out to study the beginning—numberless beginnings...”⁸ Foucault suggests here that the practices of traditional history, as opposed to

⁷ Foucault, 89.

⁸ Foucault, 81.

genealogy, indicate, and are in fact an extension of, the self's craving for identity. But "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation."⁹ Thus through disrupting totalizing narratives of past human experience we might disrupt the very self—a disruption which runs throughout the narratives investigated within this dissertation and emerges most forcefully in the final chapter.

Thinking about historical narrative as an attempt to rescue a sense of integration from the confused welter of lived experience captures something fundamental about the desire inherent in the writing and telling of history and in narrative itself. We tell ourselves and each other stories about our lives and about the world that make sense of the relationship between self and Other. It is through articulating and re-articulating that relationship that we maintain a sense of an integrated and separate self. The articulation that occurs at the level of social or historical narrative is of a different order but serves similar purposes. The conceit of linear progress in historical narrative serves to delineate self from Other in a variety of ways, with the Other almost always appearing in a negative register. The present "historical reality" is rendered separate from the past. We have learned our lessons and moved on. We are no longer the nasty brutes that we once were, but are altogether smarter, more capable and more civilized. History also serves to shore up a clear sense of identity by proposing a series of tensions with various spatially and racially located Others- west versus east, first world versus third, white versus non-white and so on down the line.

History in its traditional mode is structured by the desire for the integrated and delineable self. Psychoanalysis imagines the entry into the world of language, culture and adulthood as defined by loss. The integrated self that must be constructed for successful entry into what Lacan calls the Symbolic emerges at the cost of losing the states of undifferentiation, wholeness

⁹ Foucault, 95.

and belonging that are native to the world of the infant. The subject that emerges to replace that infantile entity has certain powers that offset that loss. But those powers, the powers inherent in language, supposed self-determination and independence are dependent upon the maintenance of a clear sense of self, a sense that is always under siege. The desire for integration seeks a final and lasting assurance of the self's existence.

One primary modality through which we seek that assurance is narrative. The series of narratives that comprise the heart of this document are particularly ripe for the kind of intervention offered by genealogy. The narratives that precede and inform the tales of alien abduction, and the tales of abductions themselves, all of which continue to circulate through contemporary American culture, are totalizing narratives. The stories of ongoing communication in America between humans and aliens of differing kinds are all concerned with questions of ultimate origins and destinies, questions fundamentally concerned with the nature of self and the relation between the human and the cosmos. While it is tempting to read the series of stories that make up the ensuing chapters as a progression--serial tales of wonder that lead inevitably to the terror of current abduction tales--instead I present a series of linked yet discrete scenarios--a simultaneously episodic *and* serial movement. Foucault writes of this tendency in genealogy, arguing that in tracking recurring tendencies, "it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution, but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles."¹⁰ The story I will relate is not one of the *Ursprung*, a clearly delineable origin, but rather that of an ongoing circulation of a series of key tropes, examined within particular historical moments. The articulation of these tropes over time is driven in part by a particular dialectic--a struggle between two distinct yet convergent dynamics--a dialectic we shall soon turn to.

¹⁰ Foucault, 76.

I want to be particularly clear that I do not understand my project as a *pure* genealogy. The relation between my approach and that articulated by Foucault is assuredly *impure*. Mine is an approach that recognizes the importance of that model's critique and incorporates some of its insights while recognizing its excesses. Whereas Foucault in his tendency toward hyperbole wanted to jettison continuity in favor of discontinuity, I argue that effective historical narrative must account for *both*. It must be both continuous *and* discontinuous, both serial *and* episodic. The model that Foucault presented in response to the problematic nature of traditional historiography in some ways fell into the primary trap of the controversialist—the obverse imagined as solution to the problems of the model under attack. While I agree with much of Foucault's appropriation of Nietzschean genealogy, I feel the most effective response to the problems of traditional historiography is more measured than the inversion he suggests. An effective response must recognize the value of tracking continuities while not imagining that the present state of affairs is somehow predestined. Let us simply say that this project is a history *informed by* genealogical critique. With that said, let us move on to a discussion of the dialectic that drives the continuous *and* discontinuous appearances of the Other that comprise the heart of this dissertation, the dialectic of the material and the ethereal.

MATERIAL/ETHEREAL

One of the primary historical narratives attached to the rise of “Modernity” is the story of rationalization and disenchantment. Most famously articulated by German sociologist Max Weber, the process described by these paired terms is one in which the sacred is increasingly systematized and/or displaced by rational systems. As Lewis Coser parsed it, “The world of

modernity, Weber stressed over and over again, has been deserted by the gods.”¹¹ The rise of governmental bureaucracy, the systematization of banking, law, medicine, and science and the industrialization of the production process are all clear trajectories in nineteenth century America and all spoke to an increasing dominance of rational systems.¹² But running alongside and, in some ways, counter to this tendency was an effort to insert the sacred into this increasingly dominant rationalist worldview.

The notion of “re-enchantment” is common coin amongst postmodernists. It constitutes a recurring element in the checklist used to delineate the postmodern condition. Weariness with and increasing skepticism with rational systems of control lend themselves to the reemergence of magical thinking and the relaxation of evidentiary standards, giving renewed play to faith, dream, intuition, and other non-rational faculties. So the story goes. However, it is debatable whether such a worldview ever fully quit the scene. The linked narratives that comprise this dissertation tell part of the story of how the “irrational” *survived* the process of rationalization. In the context of US culture in the latter half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the countervailing force to rationalization and the rising hegemony of the positivist worldview is not so much *re-enchantment* as it is a kind of neo-enchantment—a notion that requires some explanation. The implied argument of the term neo-enchantment is that rather than a story in which the sacred and/or irrational disappears or goes into hiding and then comes back (*re-enchantment*), it would be more appropriate to tell a story in which the sacred and/or irrational undergoes a change in state or kind, in order to adapt to current conditions—a new enchantment, re-tooled for the needs of the day. I should note here that *both* notions—the reemergence of the

¹¹ Lewis Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Social and Historical Context* (New York: Harcourt, 1977) 23.

¹² For a classic overview of the professionalization of law and medicine in the U.S., see Perry Miller, *Life of the Mind in America* (New York: Harcourt, 1965).

irrational, and the emergence of a new kind of irrationalism--are problematic. The former is problematic in that the irrational never really went away—it was simply dethroned. The latter is problematic for more complex reasons, which I will now elaborate.

In telling the story of rationalization, it is tempting to proceed, following the tendencies of traditional historiography, both with the understanding that the *positivist* mode of science was somehow pre-destined to triumph and with the misapprehension that it fully embodied the tenor and tendency of scientific endeavor in the nineteenth century. Positivism or logical positivism is, strictly speaking, native to the first half of the twentieth century and the work of the Vienna Circle.¹³ But the principles codified by logical positivism had long been operative. One commonly accepted locus in the formation of these principles that dates back to the beginnings of the previous century is the work of sociologist August Comte. Positivism at its heart is a philosophy of science that dictates certain standards of evidence. In a positivist framework, the data used to support a theory must be *verifiable and/or falsifiable*—ideally through direct observation or experience. Evidence that fails such a standard is *a priori* inadmissible. Thus matters of spirit, in that they are largely based on faith, intuition and other non-empirical faculties, fall outside the realm of serious consideration. In the extreme case of what is sometimes called *verificationism* statements concerning the empirically unverifiable would be denied even the status of meaningful utterance.¹⁴ With the aforementioned understanding that positivism can somehow be equated with scientific practice in the nineteenth century, it is easy to argue that a “new” sacred worldview arises (neo-enchantment) to meet the challenge of a system of thought—positivism—that seeks to remove the sacred from any serious consideration.

¹³ Richard A. Fumerton, “Logical Positivism” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995) 445-446.

¹⁴ Gordon Marshall, “Vienna Circle” in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Gordon Marshall, (New York: Oxford University, 1994) 556.

While positivism would emerge as the dominant mode of scientific thought, and for that matter as the dominant mode of thought in jurisprudence, policy and most other arenas of public importance, it did not and does not exhaust the possibilities or actualities of scientific thought at that time. Science coming into the nineteenth century still had a variety of ties to mysticism and a magical worldview, whether through the echoes of alchemical practice or through the ideas of Romantic Natural Science. Positivism was one among a set of competing strands that included a “transcendental trend influenced by Kant, and a more speculative trend shaped by Schelling and Hegel.”¹⁵ Links between science and the world of spirit were still present in the scientific discourses of the nineteenth century, and indeed are still present today. So to speak of attempts to align the world of science and the world of spirit as a “new” endeavor is in some ways misleading. Be that as it may, it is reasonable to argue that over the latter half of the nineteenth century positivism as a worldview was in ascendancy and discourses concerning the world of spirit were increasingly articulated in a fashion that recognized this ascendancy. Thus we return to the dialectic promised at the close of the previous section. On the one hand we have a worldview in ascendancy that has no place for metaphysics. On the other we have a tendency to “materialize the ethereal”—attempting to frame spiritual matters in such a way that they could maintain a presence within the emergent worldview of positivism. This tendency, as we shall see, recurs throughout the cases discussed within this dissertation.

Positivism, while at its core a philosophy of science, was also a broader social and intellectual current. I noted earlier that the work of August Comte is a generally acknowledged source of the positivist tradition. Comte was centrally concerned with questions of social engineering. The understanding was that the rules of evidence and theory building as applicable

¹⁵ Dietrich von Engelhardt, “Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism” in *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, ed. Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 101.

in the world of matter were also equally applicable in the social world. Thus social realities could be observed, mapped, analyzed and corrected. Here we see positivism align with another key modality of nineteenth century thought, the ideal of illimitable social progress. The sense that a social utopia, given the correct application of tools and efforts, was all but inevitable was an abiding myth of the epoch. It is the vision of utopia that constitutes the third leitmotif of this dissertation and it is to it that we now turn.

THE INAPPROPRIATE/D OTHER

Frederic Jameson points out in his essay "*The Seeds of Time*" that in order to truly envision the utopian one must summon the capacity to imagine humans as something radically different than what they are at present.¹⁶ His point is that our shared understandings of what it means to be human are in many ways constitutive of the very social structures that the utopian impulse wishes to transform. To radically re-imagine society is to radically re-imagine the human. In her essay "*The Promise of Monsters*," Donna Haraway draws the reader's attention to the importance of "inappropriate/ d others" in imagining what she describes as a post-human future; "To be inappropriate/ d is not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives."¹⁷ Haraway argues that in order to envision a future that constitutes a radical departure from the present, it is crucial to both shift the perception of what counts as an agent and to seek out narrative structures that take us "elsewhere."

This dissertation explores a particular history of radical alterity in American culture—a history that emerges over time at the confluence of the utopian imaginary and ideologies of communication. Each of the moments and movements examined coalesce around some spectral

¹⁶ Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University, 1994).

¹⁷ Donna Haraway, "The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 299.

figure that serves as a medium between the present and some vision of a world transformed: the dead, the so-called “ascended master,” and the extraterrestrial. While each of the aforementioned figures carry with them a more or less religious discourse they are each understood as occupying a *physical* plane. Each serves as a secular omen of millennium. The first moment I examine is American Spiritualism in the mid nineteenth century. The Spiritualist movement presented a range of “dislocated” actors and narratives, actors and narratives that fell outside of available taxonomies. The central figure of alterity in Spiritualist discourse exhibits obvious links to Haraway’s post-human Other. The dead are literally post-human. They are what we become when we shed our human forms. Their systematic entry into communication with the living troubles the clear taxonomic distinction between living and dead. Spiritualism also transgressed established boundaries in the case of gender. While women in the movement remained inside the domestic sphere in the sense that the *séance* took place in the parlor, Spiritualism afforded women positions of power *outside* the domestic sphere as well. Through engagement in national and international movements, public performance and lectures, women were able to take on public roles in a culture that consistently relegated them to the domestic sphere. Further cleaving to Haraway’s vision of the monstrous, the narrative structures that emerge from Spiritualism do indeed take us “elsewhere” – the elsewhere in question being the afterlife. Spiritualism is but the first example of a series of movements to be discussed, all of which offer a vision of the post-human.

That said this first entry into my genealogy of radical alterity in American culture is perhaps the least troubling in terms of taxonomy. While communicating directly with the dead ran against some prevailing notions of the nineteenth century, the dead themselves had been long known as potential interlocutors. While they were post-human, they still had clear links to the

human. The heaven foretold by the deceased was a vision of order triumphant – one in which the human traits then most admired achieve dominance. Communication with the dead was definitely uncanny, but the dead’s message often merely confirmed what the living already held to be true. By the 1960’s, and in the movement toward alien abduction, the actors involved and the future envisioned become increasingly estranged. The alien interlocutors had become so strange that they were difficult to recognize even as sentient beings. The future they foretold became increasingly difficult to fathom, not representing some clearly desired potential utopia, but rather an occluded, frighteningly strange future. While there is an ongoing struggle on the part of believers to read earlier narrative structures and understandings of agency onto abduction phenomena, there is a basic misfit between those structures and understandings and the nature of the phenomenon as reported by abductees (or “experiencers” as they now prefer to be called – a telling effort to rescue some sense of agency). This increasing estrangement mirrors both a creeping sense of powerlessness and of alienation from the possibilities of communication and the human condition itself and heightens the complexity in a scenario that in many ways constitutes the center of this dissertation—communication across lines of difference.

With this sense of estrangement in mind, I argue that these various historical moments, or articulations, are not merely disparate iterations of alterity but are linked in series. While alien abduction is very much of the moment and there are things about the discourse of abduction that differ markedly from the earlier articulations, there are also clear lines of thematic and symbolic continuity that run through each “dream” up to the present. Furthermore, there is a line of development in which the central actors of these dreams become more alien over time. Beginning with Spiritualism, the actors were the dead. While they were uncanny inasmuch as they speak from beyond the grave, these actors were recognizably human. One of the main

sources of Spiritualism, Swedenborg, stressed how very much the afterlife resembled the world of the living. In the case of Theosophy and much of contactee culture, the actors were so-called ascended masters – humans become demi-gods. These were no mere mortals passed beyond the veil, but creatures now angelic in stature, residing in a space between God and man.

Of course, there were alien contacts within contactee culture. But while they came from other planets, they looked like beautiful humans and spoke perfect English. These “aliens” communicated freely and openly with their human contacts. In the case of abduction and its central actor, the gray, the scenario offers a creature whose point of origin is some unknown planet or plane and whose resemblance to humans is tenuous at best. Furthermore, their mode of communication is coercive, highly secretive and their message often obscure. This change over time, which will be treated more fully over the full course of the dissertation, might be viewed as one in which the Other centrally enfigured by displaced utopian dreams over time becomes stranger or more alien. When these dreams are read specifically as displaced utopian desire however, this change might just as readily be construed as increased alienation from the possibility of radical social change. As we shall see in the closing chapter, the emergence of abduction points less to an alienation from utopian possibilities than to a more complex, subtle and profound alienation from self.

I should be clear that I am not attempting to draw out a narrative of evenly paced, progressive estrangement. The goal of this document is merely to chart a series of moments in a history of utopian thought that remains largely unmapped. As discussed in the first section of this introduction, I intend to track the genealogy of the contemporary phenomena of abduction. This particular genealogy holds no claim to exhaustiveness or definitive status. It is merely one

potential story of how we have arrived at a social moment during which otherwise normal people claim to have been abducted by creatures from outer space.

DREAM, MYTH, UTOPIA

The forms of social estrangement found herein, unlike other expressions of social alienation across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, tend to not prescribe any concrete revolutionary program or call on organized socio-political action as a motive force for social change. Yet they are concerned with social change nonetheless, social change of the most sweeping kind. They envision changes that involve massive restructurings of society, global shifts in priorities, even actual geographical/geological changes. Each of the articulations discussed, while archetypal, are also clear, if displaced, expressions of the socio-historical moment of which they are part. So while each articulation shares commonalities, each also utilizes symbols that serve to condense and displace the concerns of the historical moment to which it is native. Following Freud's writing on dream work in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, I use the term "condensation" to describe the process through which latent or implied dream content is compressed into manifest form—the process of metaphor.¹⁸ The narrative of any dream is extremely dense metaphorically. Condensation often generates hybrid forms in which the attributes of a variety of figures are collapsed into one. Displacement is the process via which latent dream content is consigned to the margins of the dream itself—the process of metonymy. Thus the import of a dream is not generally found in its central narrative thrust but in its details. I argue that the mechanisms of condensation and displacement operate not only at the level of the individual psyche but at the level of discourse as well. At the level of discourse, the dream's analogue is *myth*.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Oxford University, 1999).

The series of moments and discourses discussed herein belong both to the realm of dream and the realm of myth. Northrop Frye's comments on myth clearly call up the mechanism of condensation when he notes that myth functions in "a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body."¹⁹ This sense of collapsed/collapsible identity will be familiar to anyone who has ever vividly recalled a dream. A figure walking next to you might first be your mother and in the next moment a friend and then yourself. You may converse with a person whose visage is utterly unknown to you who nonetheless you recognize as a friend – a friend who in waking life looks nothing like the figure in your dream. Objects are unstable, as in early animation, and might change at any given moment from one thing to another. The telephone in your hand is a banana is a knife is a parakeet. This sort of fungible identity recurs throughout the cases discussed in this dissertation. One clear example is the spiritualist medium. The medium becomes another person entirely through entry into a trance state, transforming temporarily into a puppet for some spectral interlocutor. The medium exhibits the human body and mind as fundamentally plastic – a key motif in imagining radical social transformation. As Jameson suggests, it is only if the human as such is susceptible to fundamental transformation that utopia is approachable as a reality.

Also residing in the realm of dream, trance recurs as a motif throughout the dissertation. From the earliest moment discussed, that of mesmerism, through the latest, alien abduction, trance is central. From the somnambulant state induced by mesmeric "passes" to the trance states induced by alien abductors and hypnotherapists – the trance state is a key element in these mythic imaginings of utopia. The trance state is, like so much in and about the discourses under discussion, liminal in nature. It is a state between waking and sleeping. These incursions of the

¹⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1957) 130.

fantastic into everyday life constitute a series of waking dreams. The utopian imaginary is in and of itself already society dreaming of its future. With the spectral personae that populate Spiritualism et al., the sense of waking dream is even more pronounced. The utopian ideal is displaced social desire in that it reads its desired state of affairs onto the future. In that the term itself, means literally “no place,” it communicates a sense of its own impossibility. The mythic utopian is trebly displaced in that it shares the aforementioned traits of the utopian and imagines social transformation as carried out by agents who are radically outside the society that is to be reformed. Those agents exist not only outside society, but outside the very plane of reality in which that society resides.

Dreams at the level of the social might best be understood as myth. Northrop Frye defines myth as constituting a realm “near or at the conceivable limits of desire.”²⁰ Freud shows his beard again here in that myth functions, like dream, as wish fulfillment. Frye further suggests in *The Anatomy of Criticism* that myth is generally pre-occupied with the “apocalyptic” and the “demonic”. These terms respectively correspond to a given culture’s vision of heaven and hell. Thus we have a form that consistently addresses that which a given culture most strongly desires both in the positive sense (the apocalyptic mode) and negative (the demonic). In more secular terms, or in those terms favored by Jameson and Haraway, one could readily argue that visions of heaven and hell are read as terrestrial utopia and dystopia. Thus myth tells a tale of the limits of human desire vis-à-vis the lived environment. Mythic discourses communicate idealized visions of the future both good and bad.

Northrop Frye’s co-presence with Haraway and Jameson might appear incongruous, but his analysis of myth is quite useful for the purpose of this project. The sense of the monstrous conveyed by Haraway indicates a kind of impossibility. The monstrous is that which defies

²⁰ Frye, 36.

restful comprehension. It straddles understood categories in ways that move out the logic of either/or and into the logic of both/and. Jameson points out particular links between utopian discourse and the monstrous and suggests that visions of the monstrous are visions of humanity transformed. Frye focuses the sense of impossibility indicated by Haraway. For Frye, the mythic constitutes a space that allows for and even invites the co-presence of opposing forms. The apocalyptic and the demonic both reside in the same narrative fold. Throughout the articulations treated herein this violation of the law of non-contradiction, a thing cannot be both itself and its opposite, appears repeatedly.

Returning to our earlier discussion of the desire implicit in traditional historiography, we should pause here and compare the desire implicit in the utopian impulse. Following Foucault, the desire driving the sense of history articulated by such writers as Fukuyama is the desire for the stable and recognizable self. The utopian impulse is informed instead by a desire for the Real, a desire that aligns with Foucault's proposed genealogical dynamic, in which "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation."²¹ The state out of which the infant emerges to take on the characteristics of the individual is the Real. It is a state of non-differentiation, of primary narcissism. In Lacan's estimation, the world of the infant is ruled by need and the whole of that world exists to meet that need in all its various forms. The Lacanian understanding of desire holds that all desire is ultimately a desire to return to this state of undifferentiated bliss.²² All utopian imaginings speak to the desire for the endless fulfillment of need. Tales of a bygone Golden Age, tales of the Land

²¹ Foucault, 95.

²² Klages, Mary, "Jacques Lacan," University of Colorado, <http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/lacan.html> (accessed June 1, 2005); Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" in *Critical Theory Since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee; University of Florida, 1986) 734-737; Jacques-Alain Miller, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II : The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955* (New York: Norton, 1991)

of Cockaigne, visions of paradise, all speak to this cessation of want. Implicit in this vision is a return to a state that precedes the self, a return to the Real. Each of the moments discussed in the ensuing chapters are concerned with this return. Spiritualism, Theosophy, and the various American modalities of communication between the human and the Other that follow from those two earlier moments all rearticulate matters of spirit in a fashion more amenable to the emergent dominance of positivism. All do so in a way that summons forth visions of a society perfected. And all do so in way that troubles the stability of self.

CHAPTERS

The first chapter treats Spiritualism and its formal precedents – Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, and the Shakers as well as examining Theosophy. Spiritualism, Theosophy and their precedents collectively establish a set of understandings and practices concerning communication with the radically Other. Through an examination of the links between these movements, this chapter will enumerate and analyze the aforementioned precedents as well as provide an analysis of the utopian visions that undergird each of the movements. In the cases of Spiritualism and Theosophy (which are the clearest predecessors of the discourses of the extraterrestrial so central to the twentieth century displaced utopian imaginary) the analysis will focus on a series of concerns, each of which will be treated in turn by the antecedent chapters. The first of these is the nature of the otherworldly interlocutors native to each movement: the dead in the case of Spiritualism and the ascended masters in the case of Theosophy. The chapter examines how these figures are imagined, what messages they convey and how both the former and the latter mirror contemporary fears and desires concerning social change and basic questions of communication.

The second chapter examines the emergence of displaced utopian dreams that position extraterrestrials as key interlocutors from 1930-1960. The space brothers take the place of the dead and ascended masters as central figure of alterity in the movements examined in this chapter. So-called space brother religions extend the understandings and practices of the nineteenth century movements previously discussed into the twentieth century. The messages carried by the space brothers are initially very similar to those carried by their spectral predecessors; what changes is the form of the messenger. The chapter examines the implications of this shift, addressing what, aside from the obvious appeal of novelty, other significance there is in the turn toward outer space as point of origin for privileged figures of alterity. The chapter proceeds via an examination of some of the key “contactees,” their interstellar tutors, and their followers.

Chapter three examines the arrival of the flying saucer in the years following Kenneth Arnold’s famed 1947 sighting. Of particular interest in this chapter is the emergence of what becomes known as “ufology.” An examination of this “science” in the offing constitutes the center of the chapter. In terms of the ongoing tension between the positivist hegemony and the process of neo-enchantment, ufology constitutes a moment where the latter attempts to wholly adopt the standards of the former. The arrival of the unidentified flying *object* on the scene both provided the occasion for an adoption of strictly empirical standards and marked a moment of exhaustion in the modern attempt to materialize the ethereal.

Chapter four examines the emergence of abduction. With the change to abduction as primary mode of contact between human and extraterrestrial, we see both a shift in the central figure of alterity (with a movement toward the contemporary “gray” aliens as key interlocutor) and the mode of communication. While contactees generally communicated with their

extraterrestrial teachers via trance states or voluntary journeys aboard the latter's vessels, abductees are taken from their cars and bedrooms, against their will and subjected to terrifying ordeals. Chapter four focuses on the case of Betty and Barney Hill (the first widely known and discussed case of abduction) and the basic abduction scenario and examines the question of how such a horrific scenario can possibly be read as utopian. Given the nightmarish nature of alien abduction as described by its ostensible victims it is hard to imagine it as a process that leads toward the transcendence of need. The interpretive work that links horror and utopia comprises the latter portion of this closing chapter.

Genealogy tells the history of the present. But given that ruminations on the Other are simultaneously workings through of contemporary social fears and desires, my account attends to the situatedness of each iteration of alien-human communication as well as to its implications for the current case of alien abduction. This project is concerned centrally with analyzing different cultural moments in an ongoing history of communication between the human and the radically Other, from Mesmerism and Spiritualism, through Space Brother religions and alien abductions. The *stories* that recount and surround these instances of communication constitute the basic object of analysis for this project—an analysis I hope will yield insight into our own shifting understandings of the self, the utopian and the Other. There are many stories and many moments that might begin such a project. Let us begin with one.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, creatures and craft from outer space have intermittently fascinated America. Space Brothers, flying saucers and alien abductions have all occupied the public imagination—manifesting simultaneously as lived experience, popular culture and “mass hysteria.” In examining this fascination in the light of the socio-historical moments to which it belonged one can readily find various worldly fears and desires subtending the *phantasmagorie* of little green men and fleetingly glimpsed interstellar craft. Flying saucers as harbingers of the communist menace, as displaced fears of the atom’s power unleashed—visions of alien abduction and the engineering of a human-alien hybrid race as indicative of misgivings concerning emergent bio-technologies and the specter of the post-human—the fantasy of the alien has clear, contemporary, social referents. Even so, the apparently topical nature of the “extraterrestrial” potentially masks its more perennial character. It is only in a broader historical and cultural context that the full resonance of the contemporary extraterrestrial emerges. That broader context is the primary concern of this chapter. In terms of genealogy, this chapter concerns itself with earlier appearances of the tropes that later coalesce around abduction and the gray.

The familiar alien of the second half of the twentieth century arrived via the “flying saucer” of the immediate post-war period and its attendant science fiction analogue, ending its passage across the intervening 50 years in the form of the “gray,” that stalwart of alien abduction lore, whose popular presence is marked at one end by Spielberg’s *Close Encounters* and at the

other by the popular television program, *X-Files*. But that trajectory does not emerge *ex nihilo*, nor is it inaugurated by the cessation of hostilities in the Second World War—rather, it is part of a broader arc that has much to tell us about shifting discourses of race, gender, science, technè, religion and the utopian imagination. The extraterrestrial native to the past half century in America is one in a series of figures of alterity that inhabit the displaced utopian imaginary. Intersecting the more traditionally political utopian impulse, the displaced utopian imaginary envisions a world transformed not by revolution or direct political action but rather through the agency of otherworldly beings—beings that always already reside in the “no-place” denoted by “utopia.” The imagined location of that “no-place” of origin shifts over time. The aliens of the late twentieth century hail from the far-flung reaches of star systems like zeta-reticuli. Earlier visitors were ostensibly native to the less exotic climes of Venus and Mars. Those aliens native to the previous century, the point of our imminent departure, emerged from more traditional realms of alterity such as heaven, the astral plane and the Far East (home to the “celestial” vs. the terrestrial). It is in these latter spheres that we will find the home of two key figures of alterity—the dead and the ascended master—figures that serve as the key interlocutors for modern Spiritualism and Theosophy respectively. These two figures both serve as the extraterrestrials of their day and provide some of the basic attributes that come to define the e.t. of the late twentieth century. The movements of which these figures are emblematic are, in turn, nineteenth century exemplars of the displaced utopian imaginary.

One central theme that runs throughout these iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary is *communication*. Throughout modernity, the dream of utopia consistently depends upon the perfection of communication; between individuals and groups, across space and time, between humans and their environment, and between humans and the cosmos. In the modern

sense this dream of perfected communication manifests as the desire for the collation and broad dissemination of information. The impulse of Diderot's *Encyclopedie* and its ongoing resonance capture the centrality of this desire in the Enlightenment vision. The building of database and network continue to occupy a central role in the will toward rational perfection, though the faith in such efforts as necessary and sufficient has eroded considerably. In the nineteenth century such faith remained intact. As I argue elsewhere, the emergent middle classes (what Richard Ohmann refers to as the professional managerial class) of the time drew fundamental links between perfected communication and reform.²³ Social ills were based largely on ignorance, so the logic goes, and the free flow of information and discourse was thought to meliorate those ills. Open lines of communication were central to the vision of a rational culture, a culture that had no place for mystification.

This raises the question: how could a movement like modern Spiritualism, a movement centrally concerned with the affairs of the afterlife, align itself with such a rational vision? Or as prominent New York attorney George Templeton Strong queried,

What would I have said six years ago to anybody who predicted that before the enlightened nineteenth century was ended hundreds of thousands of people in this country would believe themselves able to communicate daily with the ghosts of their grandfathers? - that ex-judges of the Supreme Court, senators, clergymen, professors of physical sciences, should be lecturing and writing books of the new treasures of all this, and that others among the steadiest and most conservative of my acquaintances should acknowledge that they look on the subject with distrust and dread, as a visible manifestation of diabolic agency?²⁴

The above quote, taken from Strong's diaries, captures the sense of dismay felt by many of his contemporaries regarding the massive popularity of modern Spiritualism in America.

What are we to make of the emergence, in the context of a socio-historical moment that

²³ Mark Harrison, "Sensationalism, Objectivity, and Reform in Turn-of-the-Century America" in *Turning the Century*, ed. Carol Stabile (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000) 55-74.; Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (London: Verso, 1996).

²⁴ R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

valorized rational progress and empirical proofs, of a widely shared set of beliefs and practices that center on communication with the dead? The obvious response is to class the movement as an atavistic response to the increasingly dominant tenets of positivism. Daniel Pick addresses a parallel interpretation in his study of mesmerism. "Mesmerism has long raised an interpretive dilemma for historians: is it best seen as a late-flourishing example from a vanishing world of 'folk' credulity? Is it convincing to argue that, in so far as mesmerism endured into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has been as a 'survival' of some primitive or at least pre-modern 'mentality'?"²⁵ In this chapter I will argue that far from constituting a merely atavistic reaction to the scientific ethos, Spiritualism was in many ways in communication with that ethos. As a movement and discourse, it took the mission of rational progress to its utopian limits.²⁶

In terms of the linkages between the alpha and omega of this dissertation, Spiritualism and alien abduction, the varied grotesques of the abduction mythos do not emerge from a vacuum. The narrative structures and group dynamics that encode the extraterrestrial as a figure of utopian potential often stem from nineteenth century precedent. As we shall see in later chapters, nineteenth century American religious movements play a central role in structuring the ethos and mythos of twentieth century saucer culture. Spiritualism and Theosophy, in particular, provide both structure and content for contactee culture (the subject of the ensuing chapter) and the latter's later elaboration in the form of alien abduction. An examination of these movements not only provides a cultural and semiotic context for the rise of the extraterrestrial in America but also is of interest in its own right. The movements in question function as loci of the displaced utopian imaginary — loci that draw upon the cosmos as a source of utopian potential. In short, such movements function as illustrations of the utopian imaginary in the mythic register. As we shall see, said moments shade over, in ways both direct and indirect, into more traditional

²⁵ Daniel Pick, *Svengali's Web: The Alien Enchanter in Modern Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 51.

²⁶ See John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

political registers as well.

This chapter will first treat the emergence of Spiritualism from the earlier precedents of vitalism, hypnotism, Swedenborgianism and the Shakers, the latter two of which are centrally concerned with communing with spiritual intelligences. These are the most obvious formal precedents for Spiritualism, though of course there are other earlier instances of the communing of humans with the spirit world. Spiritualism “has a nebulous ancestry of magnetic somnambules, witch ridden children, and ecstatic nuns.”²⁷ While the chapter does directly address the first element of this list in its discussion of Mesmerism, it does not address the latter two. Podmore’s characterization of Spiritualism’s ancestry as *nebulous* captures a recurring characteristic of all of the movements examined in this project. The word nebulous derives from the astronomical term for a cluster of stars that when seen from a distance has the appearance of a cloud or mist—defying articulation. At any given historical point there are myriad ways that one might trace the antecedents and consequents of Mesmerism or Spiritualism or Space Brother religions. The roots and fruits of communication between humans and Otherworldly beings are in a word, over determined. Any narrative that attempts to track the course of this line of communication over time will be by necessity partial and in most ways a function of the story that the writer wishes to tell.

After examining some of the precedents of Spiritualism, the chapter will then examine the rise of Spiritualism proper and the interface between the contemporary politics of reform and Spiritualism, both in general and in the specific case of feminism. The final section on the movement will interrogate the ways in which the dead are imagined as actors in the discourse of Spiritualism. Lastly, I will briefly discuss the rise of the so-called “western guru” in Theosophy and the advent of the “ascended master” as a central trope in the nexus of alien-human communication. Through this series of investigations, we will both observe the emergence of a peculiar sort of utopian politics, one that exhibits desires consonant with rational reform while

²⁷ Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1902) 361.

simultaneously involving a kind of secular messianism, and articulate a series of central understandings that will continue to inform the displaced utopian imaginary in the twentieth century.

VITAL FORCE AND THE SOMNAMBULE

Spiritualism's roots are disparate. To track its emergence, we must first examine the movement's pre-history. One clear precursor lies in the tradition of vitalism as pursued by such practitioners as Franz Mesmer. While Mesmerism per se was not a spiritualist practice, Mesmerism as a social force bore striking parallels to the later modern Spiritualist movement and certain elements of its practice would recur in the later context of Spiritualism. Cultural critic Stefan Zweig notes that "In a word the power evoked by Mesmer burst the boundaries of its proper sphere, the sphere of medical science, and filled the whole of France with a dangerous and infectious fluid. There was a sort of collective frenzy, or universal hysteria. Everyone suffered from mesmeromania."²⁸ In Zweig's estimation, the public reception of Mesmerism anticipated the later enthusiasm over Spiritualism. Mesmer's work also functioned as a kind of leitmotif throughout nineteenth century thinking about the human body and vital force. His conception of the body as a conductor of an electrical fluid informed the philosophy and practices of the séance room as well as providing the basis of that most prevalent of Victorian nervous maladies, neurasthenia. Daniel Pick points out a final parallel in his study of modern enchantments, *Svengali's Web*. "Around the time of the French Revolution, the analogy drawn between unhealthy blockages of fluid in the body and noxious effects of patronage and privilege in society became strident... Unjust legislation was likened to a disruption of the atmosphere and hence of human health; obstacles to social harmony were compared with the dangers of obstructions to the circulation and equilibrium of magnetic forces."²⁹ As we shall see, Spiritualism served as metaphor and bedfellow of the radical politics of its day as well.

²⁸ Pick, 59.

²⁹ Pick, 52.

In the late eighteenth century, Mesmer pursued investigations into the circulation of vital force through the human form. Citing its similarity to the more commonly known force of ferromagnetism, Mesmer dubbed this vital force animal magnetism (Mesmer used both forms of magnetism in his therapy). While using conventional magnets to affect cures earlier in his career, Mesmer found that curative powers flowed not only from the magnets but also from the hands and nervous system of the operator - curative powers which Mesmer attributed to animal magnetism, a force that he argued permeated the universe in a fashion similar to the parallel “substance,” ether. One can see an alignment with the scientific understandings of the day in both the combination and comparison of ferromagnetism with animal magnetism and the connections drawn between the latter and the “ether.” The term “ether” itself represents a common ground between science and matters cosmic. As Hyslop argues in *Science and a Future Life*, “It is scientific and sane to say *ether*, but not to say *spirit*.”³⁰ Hence in partial answer to Pick’s query as to whether mesmerism should be understood as atavistic, I would argue instead that it illustrates an ongoing rapprochement between science and more spiritual realms. As we shall see, this rapprochement would continue into the nineteenth century, with the world of spirit increasingly aligning itself with the world of science.

The primary element of mesmerism that was to pass on to Spiritualism was the practice of hypnotism, or the induction of a trance state. Mesmer had made his reputation as healer, manipulating animal magnetism via the passage of his hands over the patient’s body. His name was to become equivalent to the practice of hypnotism via the neologism “mesmerism” despite the fact that the practice of Mesmer himself did not involve the induction of somnambulant states. To understand the source of this confusion, we must turn to the work of one of Mesmer’s many students. The first recorded instance of hypnotism is credited to one Marquis de Puységur (1751-1825), who a few weeks previous to the event had paid Mesmer to share some of the secrets of his trade. Puységur took it upon himself to apply his new skills in aid of suffering

³⁰ James H. Hyslop, *Science and a Future Life* (Boston: Herbert B. Turner, 1905) 82.

servants in his household. After relieving his gamekeeper's wife and steward's daughter of toothaches, on the evening of May 4, 1784, he brought his powers to bear on a local peasant, Victor, who suffered from pleurisy. Employing standard gestures - the passage of hands (or a wand, or magnets) in front of the subject's face and behind his head, accompanied by the intense gaze of the operator - Puységur found to his surprise, that after ten minutes of such induction his subject had fallen asleep in his arms. Upon falling asleep, Victor began to pursue a somnambulant discourse on some matters that currently troubled him. The Marquis feared that this focus on current woes would mitigate the curative powers he was struggling to magnetically transfer. Puységur suggested that Victor think of something more pleasant, following which his subject, in turn, mimed his participation in a shooting match and began to dance in time to a tune that the Marquis "sang mentally."³¹ Victor danced for an hour and then was quieted and awoken by Puységur. On the following day Victor professed to feel much better, but could recall nothing of his somnambulant experience.

Puységur's practice, which, as we shall see, was to prove more influential in the spread of Mesmerism than the work of Mesmer himself, constituted both an extension and modification of his teacher's methods. The Marquis' work was continuous with that of Mesmer in that its primary focus was on the curative powers of animal magnetism. It departed from Mesmer in a number of ways. Puységur disposed of the *baquet*, so central to the performances in which the Viennese healer had impressed his powers upon his fashionable Parisian patients. The *baquet* was a wooden tub filled with iron filings, water and numerous bottles of "magnetized" water. Protruding from the tub was a series of iron rods which could be applied to the afflicted parts of the supplicant. The therapies pursued by Puységur required no such accoutrements but depended solely upon the primal energies of *magnétisme animal* accompanied by, as the legend on the title page of his first book proclaimed, *croyez et veillez* (belief and will).

It is interesting to note that the latter formulation tidily captures the continuum (albeit in

³¹ Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972) 2.

inverted form) along which the understanding of hypnotism was to move in its passage from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. As we shall see, hypnotism places a key role in the discourse of alien abduction. As late as the nineteenth century, the power invested in the invocation of a somnambulant state was decidedly skewed toward the hypnotist. It was an exertion of will that put the subject into a “magnetic” trance. Over the course of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the understanding shifted toward the other end of the continuum. James Braid (1795-1860), a Manchester surgeon who used mesmerism in his practice, and who coined the now more common term “hypnotism,” held that the successful induction of trance state depended solely upon the subject’s belief. It was through the work of Braid and the elaboration of that work in France by the Nancy School that the foundations of modern hypnotism emerged.

A second way that Puységur’s work departed from that of his Viennese teacher was in the somnambulant state itself. The cures provided by Mesmer were consistently preceded by the patient entering into a convulsive fit or *crise*. Mesmer considered the *crise* an integral part of his curative process, but Puységur was appalled by such “hellish convulsions” and pursued a method purged of this distasteful element.³² Replacing the *crise*, whether through design or accident, was the taciturn and utterly plastic state of “magnetic” trance. The opposition between the uncontrollable fit of muscular spasm that characterized the *crise* and the pliant, restful state of Puységur’s trance could not be more pronounced. In part, the shift away from the *crise* is notable because of the ways in which it rendered Mesmerism more palatable to an American sensibility. The mechanisms of *crise* and release strongly suggest sexual parallels and Mesmer “freely admitted employing a corps of young men to apply ‘subtle pressures upon the breasts with the fingertips’ and to place their hands ‘in the neighborhood of the most sensitive parts of the body’” when treating his predominantly upper-middle class female clients. “Mesmer epitomized

³² Brown, 2.

American fantasies of the godless Enlightened rogue.”³³ Mesmerism needed to be stripped of this taint of continental libertinism for it to find a willing American constituency. It was in its more acceptable manifestation as hypnotism and in the latter’s ultimate adoption by Spiritualism that it would do so.

Following the work of Puységur, French researches into the uses of animal magnetism pursued primarily therapeutic goals. By 1825 French magnetists had observed all of the primary effects of hypnotism recognized by the current understanding of the process: hypnotic analgesia and anesthesia, posthypnotic suggestion, hypnotic catalepsy, as well as positive and negative hallucinations.³⁴ Along with the curative powers of the magnetic trance however, certain secondary effects continued to occur. In the case of Victor, Puységur was struck in further iterations of his experiment by the marked difference between his subjects' personality, intelligence and demeanor in a waking state and the same components of personality in the trance state. Victor, who according to the Marquis was quite a dullard, became under hypnosis a man about whom Puységur observed, “I have met no one more profound, wiser or more clear-sighted than he.”³⁵ While one wonders how much of this transformation might have been based upon a momentary abeyance of the traditional subaltern strategy of “playing dumb,” the magnification of intellect and knowledge in the trance state is commonly noted in the literature of mesmerism and Spiritualism. Victor’s apparent increase in intelligence might be viewed as part of what came to be called “higher phenomena.” These so-called higher phenomena included telepathy, medical clairvoyance (the ability to diagnose illness and prescribe treatment via “second sight”), traveling clairvoyance (which has come to be known as “astral projection,” or “remote viewing” in the language of military intelligence), seeing while blindfolded and *rapport* or “community of sensation” in which the subject experiences the stimuli encountered by the hypnotist. A picture emerges from this catalogue of higher phenomena of a state of

³³ Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) 61.

³⁴ Brown; Alan Gauld, “Mesmer” in *Man, Myth and Magic: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Supernatural*, ed. Richard Cavendish (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1970) 1815-1817.

³⁵ Brown, 3.

consciousness that is highly mobile, able to pierce through veils opaque to waking consciousness and subject to direct communion with other entities. It is not surprising that along with the aforementioned abilities, subjects under mesmerism sometimes also claimed to communicate with angelic entities and the spirits of the dead. The discourses that emerge through and about communication with such entities, understood primarily as angels and the spirits of the dead (roles dealt with by some commentators and practitioners as interchangeable) are fundamentally influenced by the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg, to whom we now turn.

SWEDENBORG AND THE SWEET HEREAFTER

In 1788, a Stockholm scholarly society engaged in the study of animal magnetism prepared a report for a French sister society in which examples of otherworldly communication were described.³⁶ Frederica Hauffe, “the Seeress of Prevorst,” was the subject of a book published by her physician in 1829. Later books detailing the spectral communiqués received by somnambules include A. Cahagnet’s *Arcnaes de la vie future dévoilés* (1847-8) and Dr. J. Haddock’s *Somnolism and Psycheism* (1849), both prepared by students of a man whose teachings and person were to become central elements in the doctrines of Spiritualism, and is often recognized as the first contactee, Emmanuel Swedenborg.³⁷ While the French and English generally pursued the therapeutic capacities of mesmerism (the two aforementioned works standing as notable exceptions), the German and Swedish magnetists were centrally concerned with the occult aspects of somnambulism—the previously discussed higher phenomena. The teachings of Swedenborg were central to this line of inquiry.

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), son of a Lutheran Bishop and professor, was a respected scientist and practical engineer prior to his emergence as a philosopher whose primary

³⁶ Brown.

³⁷ J. Gordon Melton, “The Contactees: A Survey” in *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York, 1995) 1-13.

concern was the spirit world. Before the publication of his first religious text, *Worship and the Love of God*, Swedenborg had published formative works on cosmology, anatomy, mineralogy and metaphysics as well as developing weapons and a system for the overland transportation of boats. At the age of 59, Swedenborg resigned his post as Special Assessor to the Royal College of Mines and retired to a life of contemplation, study and communion with the world of spirits. We see again, in the example of Swedenborg's oeuvre, a simultaneity of science and the world of spirit rather than some clear split between. As I discussed in the introduction, this overlap between science and metaphysics was more the rule than the exception up through the eighteenth century.

Swedenborg's method of communication with residents of the other world was not always that of the trance medium - he sometimes entered into communion with his spiritual interlocutors in a fully conscious state - holding conversations with others present in the room while conversing with the spirits. "In the midst of company I have sometimes spoken with spirits and with those who were about me ... At such times they could think no otherwise than that I was occupied with my own thoughts." He would enter into a light trance state when transcribing the words of angels, which is how he consistently referred to the dead. For Swedenborg, there were no angels aside from humans who had passed on to the Other Side. This is a central element in the dynamic of demystification recurring throughout his works. The angels of Swedenborg, humans passed through to the Other side, stand in marked contrast to the terrible beings of Milton and the Old Testament. Most of Swedenborg's writings were prepared in this state of light trance. Swedenborg had cultivated the ability to pass into a trance state through shallow breathing starting with his boyhood practice of holding his breath during morning and evening prayers: "My respiration was so formed by the Lord that I could respire inwardly for a considerable time without the aid of external air ... in order that I may be with spirits and speak with them." "When heaven was opened to me and I was able to converse with spirits, I sometimes scarcely breathed by inspiration at all and merely drew in enough air to keep

up the process of thinking”.³⁸

Swedenborg did not simply speak with the spirits but was taken by them to other planes of existence and to other planets (the latter travels being recorded most notably in a treatise with the typically ungainly eighteenth century title - *Concerning Earths in the Solar World, Which Are Called Planets; and Concerning Earths in the Starry Heavens; and Concerning Their Inhabitants; and Likewise Concerning the Spirits and Angels There from Things Seen and Heard*). During his travels, Swedenborg was to gather the knowledge which he would expound upon through thousands of pages of Latin prose - prose which profoundly influenced a variety of movements and individuals (including Baudelaire, Coleridge, Emerson, Blake, Henry James and C.S. Pierce). On these journeys in which he not merely spoke with spirits but moved among them, Swedenborg would enter into a deeper trance state, sometimes for days at a time. The messages Swedenborg returned with are centrally concerned with the potential redemption of humanity and its forward movement toward a utopian society. As Melton points out, Swedenborg’s works appeared in the midst of a century heavily populated by narratives of the “fantastic voyage.”³⁹ Such narratives used the conceit of a journey to some remote land to set up a comparison wherein the traveler's homeland is held up against some discovered ideal society. Swedenborg departs from this tradition in that his utopian ideals are ostensibly drawn not from his imagination but from the worlds that in “fact” exist beyond our own—a precedent repeated throughout the various moments detailed within these pages, displacing imagination and faith with direct observation.

Central to Swedenborgian doctrine was the assertion that humans were created to exist simultaneously on the spiritual and material planes, a conception central to Spiritualist belief. While many, if not most, humans had lost their ability to recognize and articulate their existence on the spiritual plane, this did not change the fundamental fact that the two levels of existence were and are inextricably intertwined and recursive. Swedenborg’s goal was to establish

³⁸ Brown, 55.

³⁹ Melton.

ongoing communication between terrestrial and spiritual existence, a goal abetted in part by his contention that the step from one to the other was not so precipitous as was generally understood. Humans changed very little in their passage from this world to the next. Within heaven one found houses, communities and governments. One encountered people going about their day-to-day business. The first plane of the afterlife was so similar to earth that decedents often found it hard to believe that they were dead.⁴⁰ Swedenborg's philosophy also accounted for a hell. Once entering the vestibular area that comprised the first phase of life after death, each of the dearly departed was called upon to assess his or her own character and then assign themselves to heaven or hell, a rational procedure versus becoming subject to the judgment of an all-knowing God. As in the Swedenborgian heaven, hell constituted a sort of extension of earthly existence, where one was free to pursue whatever vices one had cultivated previously with the sole caveat that if a resident's licentiousness exceeded that which she had practiced on earth, she was subject to a beating from her fellow hellions. Upon entering the afterlife, one continued to strive toward perfection, unless you had chosen hell, in which case perfection was out of question. The heaven one passed into after death was but the first of seven. The seventh heaven consisted of absorption into God. Thus the spirit of progress continued on after death, a conceit with clear appeal to practitioners of nineteenth century Spiritualism in America, and dovetailing neatly with other narratives of progress such as Social Darwinism and Manifest Destiny, narratives with the utmost faith in an inevitable historical progress toward perfection. That faith in coming perfection was extended to the spiritual as well as material world. "There is a march of progress in spiritual unfolding."⁴¹ Communication with the dead would come to be understood in the context of Spiritualism as evidence of that progress.

Swedenborg occupied a central place in the pantheon of Spiritualism. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle put it in the first volume of his *History of Spiritualism* (a document which, as

⁴⁰ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

⁴¹ Lucy McDowell Milburn, *The Classic of Spiritism* (New York: The Dacrow Company, 1922) 2.

rumor - and irony - would have it, was largely ghost-written) “In point of fact, every spiritualist should honour Swedenborg, and his bust should be in every Spiritualist temple, as being the first and greatest of modern mediums.”⁴² John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida Colony, went so far as to call Spiritualism “Swedenborgianism americanized.”⁴³ Swedenborg’s role in Spiritualism is explained in part by his capacity as medium and his claim to the knowledge that humanity did in fact persist after death and was eager to communicate information about the nature and status of the afterlife. In addition to exhibiting the ability to commune with the dead, a key “higher phenomenon,” Swedenborg was also famed for his “traveling clairvoyance.” As well as traveling throughout the solar system and the halls of heaven, he was also known to extend his consciousness across terrestrial space. A particularly celebrated case, which was related by philosopher Immanuel Kant, involved the Stockholm fire of 1759. While attending a dinner in Göteborg, Swedenborg several times retired to the garden returning with reports of the fire that was taking place some 280 miles away.⁴⁴ This is one among many stories illustrating the seer’s ostensible abilities in “remote viewing.”

Swedenborg thus established, via his practice and writings, some of the basic tenets of Spiritualism. The first of these was that the world of the living and the world thereafter were always already in communication and that such communication rightly constituted a central concern of spiritual practice. To access said communication, one had merely too enter into a trance state. This trance state allowed not only for communication with spiritual entities but also for astral travel and a heightened capacity for healing. The trance state as received via Swedenborg and mesmeric practice, especially in its implications of passivity, was to be of central importance to Spiritualism as well as to the variants of human-alien communication that followed in its wake. To commune with the world of Spirit one had to open oneself to it—a fundamentally feminine posture. A further element of Swedenborg’s philosophy that would

⁴² Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism* (New York: Arno Press, 1975) 21.

⁴³ Howard Kerr, *Mediums, and Spirit Rappers and Roaring Radicals: Spiritualism in American Literature, 1850-1900* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1972) 10.

⁴⁴ Brown.

centrally inform Spiritualism was his rather homely vision of Heaven. The sense that the dead maintained much of their humanity in their heavenly existence did much to demystify and desanctify traditional ideas of the afterlife—an integral dynamic in the crafting of a “new” enchantment for a rational age. It also minimized the gap between humanity’s current state and its hoped for perfection. Angels residing in the utopian afterlife were wholly recognizable and comprehensible in Swedenborg’s scheme. “After the dissolution of the body, a man’s spirit appears in the spiritual world in the human form altogether as in the natural world.”⁴⁵ This sense of the dead’s humanity closed the gap between this world and the next, putting one in communication with the other. Swedenborg *bypassed God* in his explorations of the afterlife. His line of communication led directly to the dead, or as he called them, the angels. Unlike prayer, a unidirectional mode of communication, with no promise of return, Swedenborg’s inquiries were subject to the receipt of direct reply—a shift that anticipated the replacement of the uncertainty of written correspondence and its twin displacements of time and space with the near and actual simultaneity of telegraphy and telephony. This strong sense of the close continuity of life and life after death and the familiarity of the dead, the immediacy of the exchange between living and dead and the fact that one could readily recognize oneself in the dead’s comportment, would be both key to Spiritualism’s popular success and instrumental in its demise. All the aforementioned traits also contributed to aligning the world of spirit and the world of the observable.

Furthermore, Swedenborg’s status as a man of science, his presentation of his findings in ponderous Latin prose and the quotidian nature of his descriptions of the afterlife all lent a patina of scientific respectability to his spectral perambulations. His assessment of the afterlife was based not upon faith, or wisdom received by holy writ, but rather via experimentation, direct observation and experience—all aligning with sound empirical practice. In this sense, Swedenborg’s was a Modern faith and constituted an early moment of neo-enchantment. The

⁴⁵ Epes Sargent, *The Scientific Basis of Spiritualism* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1881) 370.

sense that Swedenborg's researches were a form of natural science was carried through into Mesmerism and Spiritualism and was key in how the latter practices were understood as in keeping with their time rather than wholly as anachronisms. Myers draws our attention to this rapprochement and its incipient links to the utopian in a passage from *Human Personality*.

Bacon foresaw the gradual victory of observation and experiment—the triumph of actual analysed fact—in every department of human study;—in every department save one. The realm of 'Divine things' he left to Authority and Faith. I here urge that that great exemption need no longer be made. I claim that there now exists an incipient method of getting this Divine knowledge also, with the same certainty, the same calm assurance, with which we make our steady progress in the knowledge of terrene things. The authority of creeds and Churches will thus be replaced by the authority of observation and experiment. The impulse of faith will resolve itself into a reasoned and resolute imagination, bent upon raising even higher than now the highest ideals of man.⁴⁶

The religious concerns of Mesmerism, Swedenborgianism and Spiritualism were understood not as supernatural but as part of the progressive revelation of the natural world to human understanding. The Swede's writings and its consequents promised nothing less than a rational comprehension of the Spirit.

THE SHAKING QUAKERS AND MESMERISM IN AMERICA

Through the nineteenth century, American culture was, in many ways, a European culture. The advent of Spiritualism proper (generally understood as beginning with the 1848 public debut of the Fox sisters) had one American precursor: the "Shakers." Founded in Manchester, England in the mid-eighteenth century by Ann Lee, the United Society of Believers was derisively referred to as the "shaking Quakers" in reference to the ecstatic dancing that was a central part of their worship. Following years of harassment in Manchester, the group moved to America and settled in Niskayuna (later called Watervliet), near Albany, New York, in 1776. Their commitment to pacifism, their abhorrence of sexual union as the source of humans' estrangement from God,

⁴⁶ Frederic W. H. Myers, Volume two of *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1904) 279.

their obedience to a female leader and their highly demonstrative style of worship - involving ecstatic dance, xenoglossy and divine revelation - did not endear them to their neighbors.

The Shakers were no strangers to communication with the spirit world. “Mother Ann” was subject to visionary communication with Christ (of whom she claimed to be the female embodiment) as well as angels and earlier Shaker founders who had passed on and she often communicated with her followers after her own death in 1784. As further evidence of the precedence of such spectral communication, the congregation as a whole was subject to ecstatic behaviors that bore all the earmarks of possession. But it was the period of 1837-1847, alternately known as the New Era, Mother Ann’s Second Appearing or Mother’s Work that led Shaker Elder Frederick W. Evans (who converted after experiencing a fiery vision which showed him emerging whole but for the loss of his genitals) to claim that Spiritualism had begun with the Shakers.⁴⁷ It was during this period that the group experienced a highly intense period of spiritual communication.

On August 16, 1837, a group of three young girls in Watervliet fell trembling to the ground - singing songs in unknown languages (more recalling the *crise* of Mesmer than the somnambulism of Puységur). Upon emerging from their trance, the three claimed to have been visited by the Spirit of Mother Ann, following which visitation they undertook a heavenly journey guided by angels. Following this incident the Society of Believers entered into a ten year period of intensive communication with the spirit world during which Believers in all the Shaker communities became “instruments” (*werkzeugen*), communicating with, aside from Mother Ann, “Jesus, Mary Magdalene, St. Paul, Columbus, George Washington, Napoleon, Queens Isabella and Elizabeth I, Alexander the Great, William Penn, The Marquis de Lafayette, martyred saints, biblical figures, Indians, Chinese, Arabs, Negroes and Mohammed. Native American Spirit controls were especially popular, causing the medium to whoop, dance and smoke the peace pipe.”⁴⁸ This cohort of celebrity dead was soon to make itself known to the

⁴⁷ Guiley.

⁴⁸ Guiley, 539.

Spiritualist movement, whose mediums often spoke with great figures of the past (Swedenborg and Benjamin Franklin were especially vocal) as well as the spirits of various exoticised Others.

The messages carried to the Shakers by the dead were generally of two kinds, a typology later reflected within Spiritualism with some minor variations. The spirits generally conveyed words of comfort and concern to individuals or provided broader moral exhortations and a general prodding to return to stricter Shaker ideals. Spiritual communiqués became a standard element of Shaker practice, a fact made emblematic by the establishment of “Holy Hills of Zion” or “Sacred Squares” within Shaker communities. These squares were to be placed atop the highest hill within a given community and it was there that twice a year, spring and fall, the Shakers were to commune and feast with the spirits in what were called “Mountain Meetings.”

The Shakers also anticipated Spiritualism via the importance of women to their creed and mission. The Shakers held that God was both mother and father—an androgynous figure nicely captured by Frederick W. Evan’s emergence from the holy fire sans genitalia. The structure of the church itself called for both male and female leaders and Ann Lee was believed to be the “Second Appearing of Christ in female form”.⁴⁹ You will also recall that the period of Mother Ann’s Second Appearance was inaugurated by three young girls in Watervliet, illustrating the precept that it would be a feminine force that would lead the world into the “new era”. As we shall see, women played a central role in the discourse and practices of Spiritualism as well. Feminine leadership is a commonplace throughout the cases examined herein. Even when female leadership is absent, the feminine maintains a strong presence in the prevalence of non-rational modes of perception and the generally passive ethos of giving oneself over to the cosmos. Though the situation is not as simple as a displacement of the masculine by the feminine. In communication with the Other, gender is often troubled as a *category*. The female Christ of the Shakers, Evans shorn of his genitals by holy fire, young girls as key spiritual interlocutors—all

⁴⁹ For a full discussion of the role of women in Shakerism, see Marjorie Proctor-Smith, “‘In the Line of the Female’: Shakerism and Feminism,” in *Women’s Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

speak to a muddying and displacement of gender norms and invoke the excluded middle, *both* man *and* woman. In writing on Spiritualism and mediumship, William Danmar went so far as to claim that “the few materializing mediums who were men were close to being true hermaphrodites” and that furthermore, “Hermaphroditism is the principle of the world.”⁵⁰ Blavatsky argued that “Esotericism ignores both sexes.”⁵¹ This troubling of gender in turn troubles the identity of the subject. Gender, along with race, religion, age, occupation and nationality, is a key element in defining self. Asked to identify themselves with three descriptors, most people would include gender in that short list. I am a white, male writer. The collapse of a clear gender binary is one step toward the Foucauldian dissipation of self.

Catherine Wessinger refers to the “often noted connection between women’s religious leadership and spirit possession” (1993 2).⁵² Spirit possession, or shamanism, has historically allowed women, and other marginalized populations, to strongly express opinions and to offer advice without disturbing social standards that hold women as inferior and thus not acceptable as sources of either. When a person is possessed it is not they who offer opinion or advice but rather the tutelary spirit who occupies them. Depending on the time and place, this spirit might be part of a pantheon of divine entities, an ancestor or a famed historical personage. It is the credibility and prestige of the informing spirit that is taken into account when weighing the value of a medium’s utterance.

The shaman’s capacity as bridge between the world of humans and that of the spirits makes her valuable to her community and grants her a kind of power that transforms her weakness into a source of social prestige. This “weakness” is key, for shamans are classically afflicted. Eliade notes that in the Siberian tradition “the youth who is called to be a shaman attracts attention by his strange behaviour; for example, he seeks solitude, becomes absent

⁵⁰ William Danmar, *Modern Nirvanaism* (Jamaica, New York: William Danmar, 1920) 24, 26.

⁵¹ Besham, 199.

⁵² Catherine Wessinger, “Introduction: Going Beyond and Retaining Charisma: Women’s Leadership in Marginal Religions” in *Women’s Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 2; See Wessinger, fn 3, for list of sources noting this connection.

mind, loves to roam in the woods or unfrequented places, has visions and sings in his sleep.”⁵³

The tendency toward illness and erratic behavior commonly attributed to the shaman often recalls (or more accurately, foretells) the neurasthenia and hysteria so closely associated with nineteenth century ideals of femininity. It was the very (in)capacities assigned by the Victorian cult of true womanhood—somatic weakness, passivity, painful levels of sensitivity—that made the woman of the nineteenth century an ideal medium. In turn, mediumship provided a venue in which women put those ostensibly domestic capacities to public use.

The non-traditional religious sphere in general has historically allowed women freedom of movement and the potential for socially recognized power. I qualify religious with “non-traditional” for the obvious reason that *traditional* Judeo-Christian religious structures, with their established hierarchies, strongly favor male leadership—most often to the extent that female leadership is expressly forbidden. Outside these established hierarchies it is often the case that religious leadership is primarily a function of charisma, a quality just as readily held by a woman as by a man. In the context of the nineteenth century, American culture provided an especially favorable ground for the establishment of female power in the religious sphere. The histories of Shakerism, Spiritualism, Christian Science, Revivalism and New Thought all attest to this.

Wessinger notes that

The ideology of true womanhood, which said that woman’s place was in the home, began to be used to justify women’s activity and society. Women began to pray, testify, and even preach before “promiscuous” gatherings of men and women, and women actively strove to convert friends, children and husbands. Women took seriously their mission as their culture’s guardians of morality and began to extend that mission into the outer world.⁵⁴

It is notable that Shakerism, one of the clearest American precursors to Spiritualism, was more religious in nature than the “scientific” precedents of the Anglo and European contexts discussed previously. One of the central dynamics that recurs throughout this and the ensuing

⁵³ Mircea Eliade, “Shaman,” in *Man, Myth and Magic: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the Supernatural*, ed. Richard Cavendish (New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1970) 2546-2547.

⁵⁴ Wessinger, 10.

chapters is the effort to frame spiritual matters in materialist terms. Shakerism is a notable element in the field of influences that spawned American Spiritualism because the former had no pretense to scientific validity. In fact, with its recurrence of visions, spirit possession, ecstatic dance and xenoglossy, Shakerism more squarely captures the forces that threaten to dissolve the promised stability of the scientific ethos.

The practice of mesmerism in the Anglo and European contexts *was* pursued as science. Medical mesmerism in Great Britain had come under sustained attack by the medical community and thus its practitioners had been forced to refine their methods, both of practice and research, and the arguments they proffered in defense of mesmerism. In the U.S. context, there was considerably less resistance and mesmerism developed simultaneously as an applied “science” and as an entertainment, spawning a generation of itinerant mesmerists, beginning with the 1836 Boston lectures of Charles Poyen, who served to popularize the method. Medicine in the United States was still relatively disorganized both as profession and science. Mesmerism and the nascent Spiritualism of Swedenborg and the Shakers were ultimately to come together as Spiritualism, a “spiritual science” peculiarly American in its combination of science, religion, commerce and popular entertainment.

This combination was far from unprecedented in American culture. The revivalist culture that spread across America beginning in the first two decades of the nineteenth century was nothing if not theatrical. Revivalism’s traveling tent show, dramatic tales of conversion and fire and brimstone preaching appealed to what sociologist Colin Campbell refers to as “the other Protestant Ethic,” in which strong emotion is understood as a form of grace. As Jackson Lears notes, Calvinism bequeathed to American culture a religious sensibility that imagined the gap

between humans and God as unthinkable vast.⁵⁵ The “other Protestant ethic” strives to close that gap with the spark of divinely inspired emotion and the theater of the revival was calculated to generate that very spark. Spiritualism strove to close the gap with the opening of a line of direct communication between heaven and earth. As Spiritualist author E.J. Schellhous would later put it, “By means of persistent efforts of the dwellers in the spirit world, who realize the great need of true enlightenment, the world of mankind is now blessed with the glorious assurance that the shining highway between mortals and the spirit world is now open.”⁵⁶

A theatrical style similar to that of revivalism was to be found in the medicine show, with its emphasis on the spiel and the dramatic testimonial. As Lears argues, the medicine show managed to convert the style and impulse of the revivalist tent show to materialist ends. The product testimonial mirrored the conversion narrative, spinning tales of the immediate and radical transformation of self. The style of oratory employed by peddlers often recalled that of the revivalist preacher. This parallel did not go un-remarked-upon by commentators of the day. As conservative writer Phillip Schaff observed in 1844, “Every theological vagabond and peddler may drive his bungling trade, without passport or license, and sell his false wares at pleasure.”⁵⁷ Spiritualism was to draw upon the traditions of dramatic oratory embellished by revivalism and the peddler of nostrums, placing elements of the American carnivalesque in the context of rational progress and thus combining two central and opposing strands of American culture.

⁵⁵ Lears.

⁵⁶ W.W. Aber. “A Guide to Mediumship: Given by a Delegation from the Star Circle of the Spirit World: W.W. Aber being the medium for the Materialized Spirits who produced it; Evidenced by the Sworn Testimony of the Circle who Furnished the Conditions,” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward. (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 5.

⁵⁷ Lears, 57.

As noted, American Mesmerism was composed simultaneously of those interested in the pursuit of scientific mesmerism, such as the aforementioned Poyen and those who functioned more as traveling entertainers. One of the latter was J. Stanley Grimes, who worked as a traveling mesmerist and phrenologist. Phrenology, a science concerned with analyzing the character and various faculties of a given individual through examining the shape of that individual's skull, had by this time combined with mesmerism in the form of "phrenomagnetism." In exhibitions of phrenomagnetism, the various faculties of a somnambule were activated by touching the corresponding portion of their skull - thus dramatic displays of affection might be elicited by the mesmerist touching the "amative" center on their subject's head. Grimes, with his 1843 visit to Poughkeepsie, was to bring one of the leading lights of American Spiritualism, Andrew Jackson Davis, into the fold.

THE JOHN THE BAPTIST OF SPIRITUALISM

The following description of Andrew Jackson Davis nicely illustrates a commonplace of Spiritualism - the correlation between mediumship and somatic delicacy (as well as social marginality). "As a boy Davis was sickly and nervous, a sleepwalker and prey to irrational fears of death and hellfire. He was nearsighted, narrow-breasted, and awkward in his movements. At schools he was called 'gumpy' and 'sleepyhead' by his classmates, 'blockhead' by his teacher, 'dummy' by his sister Eliza."⁵⁸ It was in the final year of the Shaker's "New Era" (1847) that Andrew Jackson Davis' *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations and a Voice to Mankind* was first published. Davis, the so-called John the Baptist of Spiritualism, was to become a key figure in American Spiritualism and his book a bible of sorts for the movement. Following J. Stanley Grimes' visit, during which Davis was first mesmerized, Poughkeepsie citizens began their own local pursuit of the discipline. Among those who engaged in these

⁵⁸ Brown, 85.

researches was a tailor by the name of Levingston, who conducted his research with a variety of young local boys, the most gifted of whom appeared to be Davis. Under Levingston's ministrations Davis discovered that the trance state rendered the human body transparent to his eyes, thus granting him the power to render medical diagnoses.

In 1844 Davis experienced a spiritual epiphany, in which he claimed to have "flown," while in a trance state, some forty miles out of Poughkeepsie into the Catskills. Awakening in the mountains, Davis was met by Swedenborg and Galen who had materialized from beyond the veil for the purpose of illuminating the young man. Following this experience Davis began to travel as a speaker and practitioner of entranced diagnosis. Davis' fame as a medical mesmerist quickly spread through upstate New York. His ostensible medical abilities were quite similar to those exhibited by many earlier mesmerized practitioners. When presented with a patient, Davis could readily "see" the organs of the latter, each standing out with its own special luminosity, which allowed him to diagnose the patients' illnesses. In the provision of these diagnoses, he sometimes combined traveling clairvoyance with his medical expertise, traveling out of state via his astral body to conduct an examination at the behest of a third party. After successfully demonstrating his powers of medical diagnosis while mesmerized, Davis began traveling broadly within the U.S. in 1845 and presenting entranced lectures on his Harmonial Philosophy in which spirits held forth through Davis on questions of cosmology, life after death and spiritual hygiene. His interest in presenting such lectures followed from a series of visions which began shortly after his acquaintance with Levingston, visions in which he conversed with numerous departed spirits, including Christ, Swedenborg and Galen. It was this ongoing communication with the dead and/or ascended that allowed Davis to expound his emergent philosophy, a philosophy that was to receive extended treatment in the aforementioned *Principles of Nature*.

Principles was a key element in Davis' notoriety. The book, along with Davis' public performances, clearly exemplifies one of the key elements of the Spiritualist movement. It is quite easy to focus upon the physical proofs of Spiritualism as the thing that captured the imagination of the American public. After all, this is clearly the case - floating objects,

instruments that play themselves, tables which alternately are too heavy to lift or which float into the air seemingly of their own accord - all of these phenomena continually played out in parlors around the country throughout the heyday of Spiritualism. But it was arguably the knowledge purveyed by the medium that constituted the main attraction, knowledge that emerged not from the mind of the medium but from some “beyond.” More particularly, the attraction was (and is) to revealed prophetic knowledge that tapped worlds beyond the reach of rational cognition. In the case of Swedenborg, the knowledge pertained to the nature of the afterlife and the relationship between that life and the present one. Swedenborg placed mortal life into a universal and infinite context. It is no coincidence that his earlier scientific works were concerned with questions of geology and cosmology - probing the deep pasts of the earth and the universe. Davis also dealt both with questions of the after life as well as with questions of terrestrial and stellar origins.

There are a number of reasons for this parallel, one being the clear influence of Swedenborg on Davis (Swedenborg was, after all, one of Davis’ primary spiritual interlocutors). Another reason would be market oriented. There was an established audience both within the U.S. and abroad for treatises on ultimate origins. Such ruminations were common in both popular science and theology. At a more general or textual level, Swedenborg and Davis’ work is consonant with a temporal collapse that runs through both the nineteenth century movements under discussion in this chapter and the later developments around the UFO and the extraterrestrial. Spiritualism, Theosophy and discourses of the extraterrestrial are concerned with ultimate questions, one set of which concerns the origins of humankind and the earth itself. In addition, the displaced utopian imaginary concerns itself with an attendant series of questions on the ultimate fate of humankind and its terrestrial home. Any attempt to grapple with questions of human *destiny* must deal both with the puzzle of ontology and that of teleology. For given the model of destiny, origin contains and implies outcome. The displaced utopian imaginary is thus engaged both with the ancient and the far-flung future. This engagement follows both from the fact that such questions of origin and destiny are perennial human

concerns and from the fact that the Others that figure so centrally in the displaced utopian are anachronistic in the most literal sense - simultaneously residents of past, present and the future. The dead, ascended masters and aliens transcend time as it is experienced by mortal humans, exhibiting that most coveted of traits—immortality. Under the guise of the eternal such temporal markers as “past” and “future” are merely that, “markers,” with no value except as abstractions. The displaced utopian imaginary reveals the ultimate origins and fate of humankind to its believers. Furthermore, it does so through the agency of beings that exist outside of time. In these senses, Spiritualism as discourse promises the collapse of time, putting past, present and future all into communication.

One might recall that as a complement to this collapse of time, the so-called “higher phenomena” of mesmerism - phenomena that were exhibited under the guise of Spiritualism as well - included “traveling clairvoyance.” The latter term implies the ability to report back information (most commonly visual information) that originates from a geographically distant source. Swedenborg’s report of the Stockholm fire—an event that he viewed from a distance of 280 miles—is one example of this. Other examples are legion in the literature of Mesmerism and Spiritualism. One commonly reported application of traveling clairvoyance is the diagnosis of illness from afar, often with the subject of diagnosis being unknown to the medium. As Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes in his chapter on Davis, “Prophet of a New Revelation”,

Davis’s ministrations were not confined to those who were in his presence, but his soul or etheric body could be liberated by the magnetic manipulation of his employer [Levingston], and could be sent forth like a carrier pigeon with the certainty that it would come home again bearing any desired information. Apart from the humanitarian mission on which it was usually engaged it would sometimes roam at will, and he has described in wonderful passages how he would see a translucent earth beneath him, with the great veins of mineral beds shining through like masses of molten metal, each with its own fiery radiance.⁵⁹

Thus, in addition to the collapse of time a central component in the powerful appeal of Spiritualism was the collapse of *space*. Together, this collapse of time and of space embodies

⁵⁹ Doyle, 44-45.

one of the central desires of the displaced utopian imaginary—the dream of perfect communication. It should be noted that in the context of the nineteenth century, such a collapse was not always understood as salutary. It was also read as a sign of impending disaster. There is a clear tension within the dream of perfect communication. The integration of disparate times and places feeds the desire for the integration of self just as it feeds the desire for coherence and continuity so prevalent in traditional historiography. Such integration operates from a position of mastery, invoking the scholar with the whole of the world at his fingertips and the all-seeing god. Yet the tendency toward collapse—not merely putting past and present, here and there, into communication, but moving them toward or into a state of *co-presence*—contains the seeds of disintegration, speaking more to Foucault’s understanding of genealogy’s function—the dissipation of self. The promised collapse of time and space greatly troubled the consistency of selfhood. After all, the individual is located in time and space and it is this situatedness that allows for the clear demarcation between self and other. The threatened collapse of these two primary coordinates lends itself to the dissolution of clear boundaries of self. In turn, a vision of the self scattered into the broader context of the cosmos speaks to the heart of Lacanian desire, the return to the undifferentiated.

SPIRITUALISM, SUPERSTITION AND MOLECULAR TRUTHS

The displaced utopian imaginary is prophetic in the sense that discourses centered on mythic figures constitute imaginary spaces in which a given culture might “try on” potential futures. The attentive reader will recall that the central hallmark of the mythic is the co-presence of supposedly irreconcilable opposites. Recall Fryes’s gloss on myth, where he describes it as “a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body.” In the case of Spiritualism there were multiple instances of the co-presence of supposedly irreconcilable states. The medium existed

simultaneously in the world of the living and the world of the dead, creating reciprocity between two realms that the rational imagination holds to be mutually exclusive. The communication of spirits described a figure that is both dead and alive. Knowledge obtained from the spirit world indicated an intelligence residing simultaneously in both the past and the present. The faculty of traveling clairvoyance presented the impossible state of bilocality—the medium existed not only simultaneously in the world of the living and the world of the dead, but simultaneously in Poughkeepsie and Cleveland (one would be hard-pressed to say which is more shocking). Clearly Spiritualism was, among other things, a discourse of the mythic. So what of Spiritualism as an unconscious futurology? What are the emergent socio-cultural fears and desires expressed through Spiritualism? One way of addressing this question is through an examination of the relation between Spiritualism and the reform politics of its day.

American culture of the mid-nineteenth century was broadly concerned with questions of progress—mastery over the social and natural worlds. In terms of the discourse around technology, the trope of mastery is apparent in contemporary discussions of both the telegraph and the railroad. Also contemporary to the official arrival of Spiritualism on the American scene was the increasing circulation of the term Manifest Destiny. Coined in the July-August 1845 issue of the *Democratic Review* by editor John L. O' Sullivan, the term clearly spoke to a desire to populate and tame the American continent.⁶⁰ Discoveries in basic physics, the emergent institutionalization of medicine, revolutions against the old order in Western Europe, the emergence of a militant abolitionist movement and the beginnings of the first wave of American feminism all supported a sense that mastery over the physical and social world was imminent and the result of this mastery would be perfection. The dead spoke of the perfectibility of

⁶⁰ “Manifest Destiny” in *Concise Dictionary of American History*, ed. Wayne Andrews (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962). Of course the doctrine of Manifest Destiny was later extended beyond American shores, perhaps most notably in the annexations of Hawaii and the Philippines.

terrestrial life. Thus Spiritualism as a mythic discourse allowed for a displaced discussion of emergent social issues, but its connections to reform were not solely displaced. There were more direct links as well.

Philosopher and essayist Orestes Brownson declaimed in his 1854 romance *The Spirit-Rapper: An Autobiography* that reform, as the spirit of the age, was populated by “seers and seeresses, enthusiasts and fanatics, socialists and communists, abolitionists and anti-hangmen, radicals and women’s-rights men of both sexes.”⁶¹ The connections between Spiritualism, feminism and the various reform movements of the nineteenth century are varied and complex. As noted in the beginning of this chapter, it would be easy to dismissively classify Spiritualism as a last gasp of Foucault’s Renaissance episteme, some atavistic current running counter to the beliefs and aspirations of the day. There are certainly reasons for drawing this conclusion. As R. Laurence Moore points out, spirit messages often “portrayed the universe as an interrelated and mutually responsive system where distant events in the macrocosmic arena of space determined what happened in the microcosmic world of man.”⁶² This understood link, “as above, so below” is a central tenet of the hermetic tradition, elements of which were carried over into Spiritualism via the teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg. Thus Spiritualism demonstrably subscribed to pre- or early-modern intellectual traditions. While Spiritualism as a movement and philosophy consistently maintained an interest in matters which were traditionally linked with the “occult” and its world view often drew from the wells of hermeticism, Spiritualism strove to distance itself from the occult and align its ethos with the rational, progressive spirit of its day.

According to one central Spiritualist Journal, the *Banner of Light*,

Occultism is the old, old story...Establish a system of religion or philosophy invested with this; place it in the keeping of a priesthood or brotherhood claiming to hold secrets

⁶¹ Kerr, 84.

⁶² Moore, 232.

which God has revealed to them and withheld to everybody else, but a knowledge of which at the same time is requisite for the salvation of all, substantiating their claims by the working of divine ‘miracles’ or occult ‘wonders’ and you have the power that has in all past times held mankind in mental bondage and consequent physical slavery.⁶³

Similarly, Professor W.M. Lockwood’s *The Molecular Hypothesis of Nature* speaks eloquently to the links between the ethos of Spiritualism and the spirit of rational progress.⁶⁴ While the text is from a relatively late moment in American Spiritualism (1895) it nonetheless captures some of the basic tenets of the movement. Professor Lockwood floridly intoned throughout on the scientific basis of Spiritualism and the new era that the knowledge gained through contact with spirit world would inaugurate. Spiritualism was not an investigation of the “supernatural,” it was merely “the effort to extend the boundary line of scientific verification into the domain of the ‘Unknown Country’.”⁶⁵ The good professor consistently decried the bugaboos of both superstition and faith. “Human love bids civilization arise from the suppliant attitude of faith, and walk erect in the sunshine of natural progression.”⁶⁶ “Science is loudly knocking at the portals of thought, demanding that reason dethrone superstition, unlock the shackles of bigotry, and bid humanity rise from the slavery of fanaticism into the domain of liberty and truth.”⁶⁷ That Spiritualism bypassed faith was a truism of the movement. Spiritualism or the “spiritual

⁶³ Review of *The Occult World*, by A.P. Sinnett, *Banner of Light*, June 3 (1882).

⁶⁴ Many of the sources on Spiritualism discussed in this chapter will be unfamiliar to non-specialists, so a brief note on their context and import is in order. The focus, in terms of the texts I use for analysis, is on primary sources. More specifically, I am especially interested in examining texts that operate from a position of belief and emerge out of the Spiritualist milieu. A number of them come out of a two volume collection, edited by religious studies scholar Gary Ward. Ward’s stated goal in his compilation of texts is to outline the basic parameters of Spiritualism as movement and philosophy. The texts are presented in facsimile form. I sought out further texts to provide additional examples of the tendencies that emerged out of my analysis of the texts collected by Ward. I chose some because of their mention in the key secondary literature on Spiritualism and some because they were included in the university collections that constituted my basic research pool. All of them share a common desire, emerging from a position of belief, to unravel the mysteries of communication between the living and the dead.

⁶⁵ W.M Lockwood. “The Molecular Hypothesis of Nature: The Relation of its Principles to Continued Existence and to the Philosophy of Spiritualism,” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward. (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 4.

⁶⁶ Lockwood, 4.

⁶⁷ Lockwood, 26.

science” was based on empirical evidence. It was the observable phenomena that emerged via the medium that constituted the only proofs in the Spiritualist religion.

While there was some level of concordance between Christianity and various branches of the Spiritualist movement—Robert Dale Owen, founder of New Harmony, understood it as his mission to “establish Spiritualism as an intellectually and socially respectable adjunct of Protestant Christianity”—the anti-supernatural doctrine of Spiritualism sometimes lent itself to an anti-Christian stance.⁶⁸ Such is clearly the case with Lockwood.

There’s a new day of dawn coming, ushered in by scientific research. It will *demonstrate* that life continues beyond the changing phenomena of plasmatic existence ... And when it comes—as it will—the theories and speculations of theism will be crushed beneath the weight of accumulated scientific testimony, that demonstrates the pernicious character of these ancient platitudes, which exist only by constant abuse of the imagination. In that day of dawn the idols of the garden of Eden, the gods incestuous and incarnate, the sacrificial atonement, the cannibalistic and pagan ceremony of drinking a fetich Savior’s blood and eating his body, will disappear with the advancement of a higher mental civilization.⁶⁹

Spiritualists were often specifically opposed to the perceived stifling of spiritual exploration by the Church, which had nothing to offer but “a lot of stale phrases from the dark ages.”⁷⁰ Clearly there was more than a hint of anti-Catholicism and anti-clericism to all of these misgivings.

Lucy Milburn wrote of how “the teachings of Jesus have been hedged about with dogmas and theological treatises, and the theologians have raised a mighty wall about the Garden of God, so that many of his dear loving children do not as yet see the far country.”⁷¹ So often the target of attack was the obscurantist effect of orthodoxy rather than religion or Christianity per se.

Nonetheless, Spiritualism was often derided as resolutely anti-religious. Oliver Wendell Holmes

⁶⁸ Kerr, 113.

⁶⁹ Lockwood, 16.

⁷⁰ Danmar, n.p.

⁷¹ Milburn, vii.

assessed the Fox sisters as the “Nemeses of the pulpit.”⁷² Spiritualism was further disparaged as a debasement and literalization of the spiritual world, what Emerson referred to as “the rat hole of revelation.”⁷³ The *New York Times* condemned Spiritualism for its “subversion of all respect and devotion to the only true faith,” while Washington’s *National Intelligencer* said of it that

However absurd and despicable it may appear to men of sound reason and resolute conviction, it is spreading itself like a pestilence through our borders, carrying with it the madness of infidelity [Spiritualism was often associated and even equated with Free Love], of sensuous materialism if not actual atheism, and distracting the minds of the nervous, the feeble-witted, and the timid into actual insanity.⁷⁴

Note the language of dissipation, boundary crossing and madness, all pointing to Spiritualism as a force of disintegration. We see here again the fundamental tension of Spiritualist practice. At the same time as it promises a new integration—of science and religion, of the dead and the living, of past and future—it threatens dissipation by that very integration of mutually exclusive spheres.

In *Ghostwriting Modernity*, Helen Sword writes of ways “in which mediums and communicating spirits unsettle seemingly stable ontological—or, as Jacques Derrida would have it, ‘hauntological’—boundaries between self and other, absence and presence, materiality and spirituality, life and death.”⁷⁵ Sword’s basic argument is that one can see the seeds of a postmodern/poststructural sensibility in the communication between humans and spirits—what Basham refers to as “these Victorian psychic puzzles, with their intricate clues and endless mirrorings.”⁷⁶ This is another way of imagining the fundamental tension or dialectic present throughout the genealogy drawn by this project. The ascendancy of positivism and its efforts to

⁷² Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Professor at the Breakfast Table” *Atlantic Monthly* 3 (January 1859): 90.

⁷³ Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2000) 5.

⁷⁴ Moore, 28.

⁷⁵ Sword, xi.

⁷⁶ Diana Basham, *The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (New York: New York University, 1992) 119.

exclude the Divine from allowable public discourse versus Spiritualism's attempts to rearticulate matters of spirit in material form is the version of the dialectic sketched in the introduction and tracked throughout this chapter. This move to align matters of spirit with the materialist ethos speaks to a desire for integration and clarity. Yet this very alignment injects instability into the materialist vision, creating linkages between supposedly irreconcilable spheres that disrupt the ontological verities of the materialist universe—illustrating a dynamic tension also of central concern. Combined with Sword's observations on the ghostly as incipiently postmodern, these two approaches to the dynamics of Spiritualism in the nineteenth century—positivism v. neo-enchantment & integration v. disintegration—present a picture of the destabilization of History sought by Foucault's genealogy. Sword goes so far as to say that “communication with the dead is always, on some level, a repudiation of history.”⁷⁷ Spiritualism was both a recrudescence and re-articulation of magical thought, both an elaboration and deconstruction of an ascendant positivism—simultaneously exemplary of a vestigial mode of thought and a modernist ethos, simultaneously an exemplar of modernism and a harbinger of its disintegration.

Lockwood's articulation of Spiritualism clearly positioned it as a force of integration and clarity, aligning him with a positivist ethos. Lockwood placed himself and the cause of Spiritualism in combat with superstition and any notions of the “supernatural.” Such things as communication with the dead and the various “higher faculties” associated with mediumship were to be understood as wholly consistent with natural law and thus explainable, denying positivism of its other and maintaining a space for spiritual matters in allowable discourse. In his attempts to explain the phenomena of Spiritualism he followed a path well trod by writers before him – arguing that spiritualist phenomena are merely extensions of the principles utilized by then current media: photography, telegraphy, phonography and telephony. Through the discussion of

⁷⁷ Sword, 47.

each in turn Lockwood elaborated his central conception of the “molecular character and reciprocal relations of nature’s energies.”⁷⁸ This expostulation was put to use in support of his basic contention captured in the book’s opening salvo, directed “TO THE WORLD’S THINKERS”:

The value of the term MOLECULAR introducing our theme, will readily be accepted when it is understood that all cosmic energies, whether considered as physical, electrical or magnetic, have their co-relation and affinity expressed under the name molecular; and if we shall be able to demonstrate that all mental and psychic action, is also the result of molecular change and impression, and that these activities belong to the list of nature’s co-related energies; if we succeed in extending the boundary line of these related factors, we hope to be able to furnish the explanatory key to psychic phenomena, both ancient and modern, and to establish the truth of intelligent communication between the realms of life visible and invisible, upon the postulate of ordinary thought transference – the postulate of molecular induction.⁷⁹

It is this postulate of molecular induction, so Lockwood argued, that rendered both the contemporary technological wonders of telegraphy, telephony et al. and the psychic manifestations of Spiritualism explicable. In short, the conclusion that he reached was that “all social intercourse, all thought transference, whether by vocal speech, by telephone, by physical or mental telegraphy, is molecular in the character of its transmission and its mode of impress.”⁸⁰ Again we see the implicit tension within Spiritualism’s attempt to articulate the world of spirit in an empirical frame. While Lockwood’s molecular hypothesis constructs such a frame, its implications lead to Frye’s world of total metaphor—a world in which, at the molecular level, all is in communication and thus all part of one great body.

One clearly emergent trend in the time of Spiritualism’s height of popularity was the development of communication technologies.⁸¹ The mythic state of bilocality was exhibited

⁷⁸ Lockwood, 17.

⁷⁹ Lockwood, 1.

⁸⁰ Lockwood, 49.

⁸¹ See Peters; Sconce.

both by the Spiritualist medium and the new medium of telegraphy. While the potential for an electrical system had been demonstrated by a variety of scientists as early as 1753, it was 1844 when Samuel B. Morse sent the first message on the trial telegraphy line he had persuaded the U.S. congress to fund.⁸² While this was not, strictly speaking, the first telegraphic message, it has come to symbolize the birth of practical telegraphy. The content of the message further indicates the link between matters spiritual and technological - "What hath God wrought?" Spiritualists went so far as to refer to the method of communication used by the dead as the "spiritual telegraph" (which was also the name of one of the main Spiritualist journals), suggesting that the latter was "an actual technology of the afterlife, one invented by scientific geniuses in the world of the dead for the explicit purpose of instructing the land of the living in the principles of utopian reform."⁸³

Aside from the ostensibly technical aspects of Lockwood's "molecular hypothesis" the parallels drawn between the then emergent generation of technology and the phenomena of Spiritualism have a number of implications for our current discussion. One is the suggestion offered by technological advances to the popular imagination that humankind was in an age in which knowledge, technology and progress were poised to extend themselves to the very limits of the universe. Spiritualism understood itself as one element of progress' march to total knowledge. Progress, in turn, was understood as "man's conscious ego" moving onward to a comprehension of "more and more of infinitude."⁸⁴ In a world where "a whisper may be heard across the continent," why should communication across the boundary of life and death be seen

⁶⁰ For a concise and cogent discussion of the technical development of telegraphy, see Steven Lubar, *InfoCulture: The Smithsonian Book of Information Age Inventions* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993).

⁶¹ Sconce, 12.

⁸⁴ Lockwood, 12.

as miraculous or supernatural?⁸⁵ The process of the séance was understood as technical. By touching their feet the circle of sitters formed a “battery.” This notion of the battery was suggested by Spiritualist literature not as metaphor but as a literal reality. Physical manifestations of spirits were understood as being comprised of chemical and energetic components derived from the bodies of the medium and the sitters. These components were gathered and assembled by a “spirit chemist.” Spiritualism was viewed as rationally explicable in the same terms as electronic and chemical media.

A second implication of the consistent parallels drawn between Spiritualism and communication technologies revolves around the issue of communication itself. In Lockwood’s hypothesis, all things were linked via molecular affinities. This linkage was a (pseudo) scientific way of invoking the hermetic (as well as Judeo-Christian) truism that the world of spirit and the world of matter were inextricably linked, “as above, so below.” In the context of Spiritualism and a culture gripped by a vision of boundless progress, this truism took on a new resonance. Communication technologies made explicit and operationalized the sense that everything was linked, was in *communication*, with everything else. They were explicit applications of an implicit truth. With this understanding in mind, that individual communication technologies were piece-meal embodiments of the living web that connected everything in the universe, a certain sense of telos emerged. Each new communication technology moved humankind closer to a state of *perfect communication*, a state in which the implicit links that bind all become manifest. And as John Peters points out so effectively in *Speaking Into the Air*, perfect communication is equated with perfect harmony. Given the anti-dogmatic bent of Spiritualism and its parallels to emergent communication technologies, one can see why Spiritualism

⁸⁵ Lockwood, 19.

understood itself not as running counter to the currents of its day but rather as wholly in keeping with them.

SPIRITUALIST UTOPIA AND THE NEW WOMAN

In his “molecular hypothesis,” Lockwood envisions the emergence of a “higher mental civilization” as the end result of rational progress. The vision of perfect human brotherhood that would ostensibly accompany such mental advances was a central concern of Spiritualism. Of course the notion of progress engaged more short-term concerns as well and it is in the short-term that we find the links between Spiritualism and reform, links that were often ones of affiliation.

Before the Civil War, spiritualists gained their most influential defenders from men and women who managed to support the rappers with the same enthusiasm they supported Fourierism, temperance, antislavery, health reform, and women’s rights. Horace Greeley’s *Tribune*, viewed by many as a radical newspaper, quite appropriately gave the Fox sisters their first big publicity break. Concurrently, almost all the prominent abolitionists fell under the spell of Spiritualism. William Lloyd Garrison, Joshua Giddings, Benjamin Wade, Henry Wright, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson probably held more common ground on the subject of spirit rappings than on the tactics of combating slavery. Lydia Maria Child, Robert Dale Owen, Adin Ballou, Lorenzo Fowler, and John Edmonds were only some of the other public figures associated with various other causes who saw a clear relationship between Spiritualism and the cause of “practical” reform.⁸⁶

Gary Ward notes that, “Many within Spiritualism became known, not only for advocating fair treatment of Indians, but also for advocating prison reform, abolition of capital punishment, higher wages for workers, trade unions, and equality of the sexes.”⁸⁷ The overall tenor of Spiritualism speaks to a coming social order in which “the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, trusting that the one God who opened the heavens for rain, who is daily opening the

⁸⁶ Moore, 71.

⁸⁷ Gary Ward, “Introduction,” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 4.

hearts of men to help their brothers, will lighten their minds so that the giants of ignorance and self-aggrandizement will be slain, and over their graves will be placed the words, “Light and Love.”⁸⁸ The spirits themselves were champions of reform. One of the most popular Spiritualist texts of mid-century, Judge John Worth Edmonds’ and George Dexter’s *Spiritualism*, was largely made up of “long didactic messages from Bacon and Swedenborg on the subject of progress.”⁸⁹

The displaced utopian imaginary was ultimately less concerned with concrete political movements than it is with the utopian per se. In the end, it depended upon the power of some Other and/or the transformative power of death to bring about its looked for utopian ends. However, to take form, it must draw upon the political understandings of its day, thus we see Spiritualism’s affiliations with the various modalities through which radical change was imagined at the time. One wing of progressive reform that Spiritualism evinced a special connection to was feminism. As Jeffrey Sconce notes, Spiritualism “provided one of the first and most important forums for women’s voices to enter the public sphere... While in a state of mediumistic trance, these women were able to comment (through the ‘telegraphic’ voices of the dead) on a variety of contemporary social issues of concern to women, including marital equality, reproductive rights, and universal suffrage.”⁹⁰ The idea that they merely spoke at the spirits’ behest allowed for a freedom of expression generally forbidden to women of the time. In a very real sense, the voices from beyond that sought to guide America were the voices of the American woman. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Frances Willard were all interested in Spiritualism, but never publicly identified themselves as adherents.⁹¹ Spiritualists

⁸⁸ Milburn, 4.

⁸⁹ Moore, 22.

⁹⁰ Sconce, 12.

⁹¹ Moore.

and the spirits themselves both provided vocal support. The Pseudonymous Fred Folio's *Lucy Boston; or, Women's Rights and Spiritualism, Illustrating the Follies and Delusions of the Nineteenth Century* makes explicit in its very title the understanding that Spiritualism and feminism were fundamentally linked. The central conceit of Folio's novel concerned "a conspiracy of female spirits to extend the rule of women to earth through Spiritualism—the Fox sisters having been controlled for this purpose."⁹² Feminism was a popular cause amongst spirits. The spirit of John Quincy Adams proclaimed that "In every work and reform whose united object is to correct the evils existing in society...should woman be allowed to labor by the side of man. God created her on an equality with him, and endowed her with the same glorious rights and privileges, the same capabilities and powers, to advance His Infinite Kingdom."⁹³

In terms of the freedoms that it allowed women in a society that generally granted them no rights; the role of the medium is perhaps the strongest link between feminism and Spiritualism. As will become clear below, the role of medium was particularly well fitted to women of the nineteenth century given the understanding of the feminine ideal that was operative at the time.⁹⁴ It was so well fitted in fact that the general public perception of mediumship as a profession (Emerson actually listed it among new American professions) was that it was primarily female even though demographically mediumship was roughly evenly divided between men and women.⁹⁵ The earliest mediums, including the Fox sisters were teenage girls. Anne Braude suggests that people found spirit

messages most convincing when they came through figures like the Fox sisters: untrained, unlettered teenage girls. These figures epitomized the ideal feminine characteristics of the Victorian period: purity, passivity and domesticity. Untainted by

⁹² Kerr, 90.

⁹³ Josiah Brigham, *Twelve Messages from the Spirit of John Quincy Adams through Joseph D. Stiles, Medium, to Josiah Brigham* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1859) 348-349.

⁹⁴ See Braude.

⁹⁵ See Moore.

the corrupting influence of the world beyond the home—or even by the sexual contact implied in marriage—teenage girls were believed to make good mediums because their own characters were not powerful enough to interfere with an external intelligence’s use of their bodies.⁹⁶

A Guide to Mediumship suggested that prospective mediums should exhibit a “peculiar sensitiveness” and a “sympathetic passivity of mind.” A “positive state of mind is to be avoided.”⁹⁷ The Reverend E.W. Sprague contended in *Spirit Mediumship: Its Various Phases* that “sensitive and mediumistic people do strange things at times and they themselves are sometimes puzzled to understand why they do them.”⁹⁸ The picture of the medium that emerges from Spiritualist texts is that of the classic nineteenth century woman, more specifically that of the female neurasthenic: weak, passive, subject to fits of hysteria and depression, highly impressionable. Thus, as Braude argues, “Spiritualism made the delicate constitution and nervous excitability commonly attributed to femininity a qualification for religious leadership.”⁹⁹

Mediumship took the weak and passive qualities attributed to women and placed them in a *public* context. It provided an entrée to women for positions of religious leadership and for the public expression of opinion. While many séances took place in a domestic setting, the advent of trance speaking created a venue for public speech by women.¹⁰⁰ Trance speakers were the first substantial group of women to speak consistently in public. The fact that the trance speaker was controlled by a spirit helped to place her outside social and religious strictures against women speaking in public thus creating an opportunity for public address that was otherwise denied. For you see, it was not the woman that was speaking but rather the spirit. This displacement of responsibility lent itself to a variety of uses by female mediums.

⁹⁶ Braude, 56-57.

⁹⁷ Aber, 5, 8.

⁹⁸ Reverend E.W. Sprague, “Spirit Mediumship: Its Various Phases. How Developed, and Safely Practiced. A Compendium of Psychic Science. For Séances, Circles and Individual Use. The Medium’s Companion and Guide,” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 28.

⁹⁹ Braude, 57.

¹⁰⁰ See Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992).

The identification of mediumship with women and the masculine “nature” of public speech cast the medium as a sort of hybrid figure in terms of gender, recalling the ambiguity so central to myth. “Men could become mediums, but only if they showed the feminine characteristics that would disqualify them for more traditional forms of leadership.”¹⁰¹ The attentive reader will recall that, in his treatise on *Modern Nirvanaism*, William Danmar went so far as to claim that “the few materializing mediums who were men were close to being true hermaphrodites.” Humorist Mortimer Thompson referred to mediums as “crack-brained masculine women or addle-headed feminine men.”¹⁰² Women were allowed, or allowed themselves, to exhibit a variety of masculine behaviors when controlled by spirits. One Mrs. Cecil M. Cook, a noted medium of her day, provided some examples of the benefits of spirit control in her autobiography, *How I Discovered my Mediumship*. In describing her cloyingly named spirit control, “Feetheart” (a little “Indian maiden” with an apparent lisp), Mrs. Cook said of her spirit friend, “She will control me on the street, in a restaurant or in a store, and she says what she thinks. Her thoughts are most pronounced on subjects.”¹⁰³ Mrs. Cook describes her earliest phase as a medium at the age of six, during which she would cause spirit voices to emerge through a hole of the stove-pipe in her family home. At the time she suffered from the fear and derision of her neighbors who assumed that she was mad, in league with the devil, or both.

No matter what these busybodies said about me and my gift, they recognized that the Voices, coming so audibly through the stovepipe-hole, told the truth. They told it a trifle unmercifully at times, when defending me. But — for all that, it was the truth, and very early in my earth-life, I found that so few people care to hear the truth.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Braude, 58.

¹⁰² Kerr, 35.

¹⁰³ Mrs. Cecil M. Cook, “How I Discovered my Mediumship” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 53.

¹⁰⁴ Cook, 29.

All manner of proscribed activities were pursued by female mediums at the behest of their spirit controls. Spirits often authorized divorce for their controllees. As Moore articulates it, “one may ...suggest that in the personalities of the spirits trance mediums found outlets for unexpressed and inexpressible desires. If a spirit control kept throwing the medium’s wedding ring away, the medium could with all sincerity disclaim responsibility.”¹⁰⁵ Moore further recounts of female mediums

how time and again under the influence of their spirit controls, they turned into swearing sailors, strong Indian braves, or oversexed male suitors. G. Stanley Hall...observed with reference to mediums: ‘Such tender and delicate girls often feel themselves possessed by some rugged, potent and often uncouth male spirit, and delight to swagger in diction and manner.’¹⁰⁶

But even with all the lines of affiliation between Spiritualism and reform and the clear statements of support for reform offered by spiritualist practitioners as well as the spirits themselves, the progressive nature of Spiritualism was highly problematic. The line “robbing the poor of all happiness this side the grave” gestures toward one source of the problem. While Spiritualism concerned itself with the politics of the day, its primary concern was with life after death. The vision of the after-life brought back by spiritual interlocutors was one of plenty. The social problems that were legion on this side of the veil seemed to vanish on the other. As much energy and enthusiasm as Spiritualist practitioners might muster for progressive causes, it must have seemed something of a moot point given the promise of pie in the sky.

A further problem stems from the links between Spiritualism, Christian Science and the New Thought in general. Spiritualist belief, like Christian Science, held that correct thought insures good health. As the Reverend E. W. Sprague puts it in *Spirit Mediumship*, “The mind may build up or tear down the body. Right thinking generates health vibrations; wrong thinking

¹⁰⁵ Moore, 112.

¹⁰⁶ Moore, 111.

creates inharmonious vibrations resulting in sickness...”¹⁰⁷ This connection between attitude and well-being is shared amongst all “harmonial” religions, defined by Sydney Ahlstrom as “those forms of piety and belief in which spiritual composure, physical health, and even economic well-being are understood to flow from a person’s rapport with the cosmos.”¹⁰⁸ This emphasis on perfect alignment with the universe as primary goal brings again to the fore the underlying desire of Spiritualism, and in fact all forms of the displaced utopian imaginary – perfect communication. The broader implication of harmonial thought was that, to a large extent, mental activity generates reality. Thus Ella Wheeler Wilcox could claim “We build our futures by the shape of our desires, and not by acts.”¹⁰⁹ This general sensibility should be familiar to any student of new age thought. The implications of this sort of magical thinking for traditional political action are clear enough. If the correction of one’s own relation to the cosmos is sufficient to bring about change, then proceeding through protest, organization and direct struggle becomes superfluous. The belief that one can change the world via desire and belief is a key principle in the displaced utopian imaginary.

A third, related problem concerning Spiritualism’s ostensibly radical politics stemmed from the sense of inevitability that attends all forms of millennialism. At the very inception of the movement, the Fox sisters’ spirit band (mediums generally were attended not by a sole spiritual interlocutor, as with contemporary “channelers” but by a whole coterie, referred to *ensemble* as a “spirit band”) relayed that “You must proclaim these truths to world. This is the

¹⁰⁷ Sprague, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Ellwood and Catherine Wessinger, “The Feminism of ‘Universal Brotherhood’: Women in the Theosophical Movement,” in *Women’s Leadership in Marginal Religions: Explorations Outside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 75.

¹⁰⁹ Bowman, 36.

dawn of a new era, and you must not try to conceal it any longer.”¹¹⁰ Spiritualists and the spirits themselves would continue speak of the dawning of a New Era throughout the age of modern Spiritualism. The expectation attendant to this “dawn,” not unlike the expectations attached to broader cultural notions of evolutionary progress, was that humankind was inevitably moving onward and upward on a predestined path to perfection. As Moore points out, Spiritualists were a little too dependent on the notion that change would be driven by the natural unfolding of the spirit.¹¹¹ They believed that a spirit of social harmony would emerge naturally. This sense of predestination combined with an emphasis on personal spiritual development as a key motive force in achieving social justice rendered Spiritualism ineffective as a political movement. In addition, given that the core teachings of the movement emerged from spirit communications and the fact that the conveyance of those messages occurred via media that were characterized primarily by their passivity, one might readily argue that Spiritualism was highly dependent on personnel and processes outside of their control. As Adin Ballou critically observed, spiritualists were awaiting “Some wonderful and unparalleled event to be brought about mainly by spirits for the regeneration and harmonization of the world.”¹¹² This kind of passivity is central to the displaced utopian imaginary. While holding to utopian ideals the structure of such an imaginary consistently places the agency for bringing about such a utopia outside the human.

¹¹⁰ Paul McArthur, “Text Book Ritual, Valuable Data and Selected Poems for Public Workers in the Organized Movement of Modern Spiritualism,” in *Spiritualism II: The Movement*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland Press, 1990), 24.

¹¹¹ Moore.

¹¹² Neil Lehman, “The Life of John Murray Spear, Spiritualism and Reform in Antebellum America (Ph.D. diss., Ohio University, 1973) 184.

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL INTERLOCUTORS

The dependence upon spiritual agency exhibited by Spiritualism's utopian politics gives rise to the question of how these spirits were understood by the movement's participants. Over time, the spectral interlocutors that inhabit each successive moment discussed within this dissertation become increasingly estranged. Spiritualism's status as an early moment of neo-enchantment correlates to the relative familiarity of the Others who constituted its primary agents. This was primarily a result of the level of confidence inherent in nineteenth century modernity. While those creatures who existed between man and perfection or man and God had in earlier instances (e.g. the angels of Medieval Europe) been terrifying to behold and would again assume a terrible form in the case of alien abduction, the sense, so prevalent in the nineteenth century, that humanity was on the brink of perfection, cast the spectral interlocutors of the displaced utopian imaginary in a form wholly comprehensible, even homely. My argument is not that the understood intermediaries between humanity and perfection had in some un-named past been fully comprehensible and then entered a downward spiral into inscrutability, culminating in alien abduction. Rather, my tale of the displaced utopian imaginary begins at a high point of disenchantment and then tracks the *re*-estrangement of that middle figure. Beginning with Swedenborg's observations of the very familiar contours of heaven—spirits wore clothes, lived in houses, and pursued careers—spiritualists tended to view spirits as being very *human*. While spirits are uncanny, they maintained enough of their previous humanity that they were more like humans than different. As to their material needs, one spirit responded to a querent's difficulty over whether spirits were clothed or not as follows.

Beloved One: There *are* spheres or locations in Spirit realms, those *nearest* Earth, whose inhabitants would experience the emotion called *Shame* were they unclothed; these people wear garments of more or less density. The *lower* the person is in spirituelle [sic]

qualities the coarser and heavier the substance; the more highly developed being robed in *ethereal* or gauze-like texture.

Clothing in realms where it is worn—and there are spheres encircling spheres out in the immensity of space—is not woven by loom and manufactured by aid of machinery, or even by the seamstresses’ art; the substance, in all but the lower spheres, is gathered from the atmosphere, from flowers, from all the forms of animate life, by the will of the Spirit, and magnetically treated until it grows into such shape, beauty and perfection as the artisan designs; the art of such production is taught in the schools, even the Kindergarten babies learn to concentrate, gather material from the air and flowers, and fashion it into sweets, toys and ornaments; while older classes acquire skill in creating substance and fashioning from it their own garments, homes, or appointments, as they choose. A Soul can go on with such study, design and workmanship until he or she becomes as a very God in power.¹¹³

Thus we see a vision of the afterlife in which the individual strove toward the perfection and powers of a god yet maintained a striking level of familiarity—carrying over to the other side shame, the basic need for food and shelter and a love of beauty. They lived in houses over there, albeit created from flowers and air, and they had children and schools. This stability of the human form speaks to Spiritualism and neo-enchantment as a force of integration. Rather than assuming some dramatically new form or dispensing with form altogether, the clearly delineable self survived the passage to the other side of the veil—a passage into perfection fulfilling the desire for the maintenance and reaffirmation of the subject, warding off the “old dread, so hard to charm away, lest in the vast and wandering air the homeless Animula might lose its identity, that eternal form would no longer divide eternal soul from all beside.”¹¹⁴ While so many elements of spiritualist practice and belief spoke to the disintegration of self, one of its central obsessions and tenets of belief was, as the title of Frederic W. H. Myer’s *magnum opus* so aptly articulated, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*.

¹¹³ James H. Fletcher, “Letters from Astrea: In Spirit Life to Astrala in Earth Life also from Spirit John Pierpont through Mrs. Mary T. Langley, Psychic Amanuensis and others,” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 41-42.

¹¹⁴ Hyslop, 89.

¹¹⁵ Aber, 15.

¹¹⁶ Moore, 47-48.

Constant reminders of the fallibility of spirits further underlined their intrinsic humanity. *A Guide to Mediumship: Dictated by a Materialized Spirit; Through the Mediumship of W.W. Aber* admonishes the would be medium to “Remember, there are many spirits in the spirit world who are not as wise as yourself, and you can teach them many things they do not know.”¹¹⁵ This sentiment was echoed by one Dr. Charles Main, who opined “many in the spirit are below even our level, both intellectually and morally.”¹¹⁶ Main went so far as to offer daily lectures on moral improvement to interested spirits. The Reverend E.W. Sprague, in keeping with Main’s apparent philosophy informed his readers “so-called evil spirits are only undeveloped spirits...If crude, undeveloped, and seemingly evil-disposed spirits manifest, no one should be alarmed; they should be treated kindly, words of encouragement should be spoken to them. They should never be driven away, but we should try to help them.”¹¹⁷ Frank Podmore argued that “if there are spirits at all, to trust them on the same terms as we trust our fellow-mortals would be our only practicable policy.”¹¹⁸ The Spiritualist injunctions against superstition and blind faith combined with the fervent desire for the survival of individual personality find their logical corollary in noting the potential foibles and unreliability of spirits. Moore notes both the “constant emphasis placed on the fallibility of spirit messages” and Judge John Edmonds’ charitable reading of that fallibility— “A perfect revelation, he argued, would leave the human mind with nothing further to do. It ‘would come to us “with authority” and we should be encouraged to render obedience and not judgment’.”¹¹⁹

Mediums tended to talk about their spirit guides/controllers as if they were friends. Mrs. Cecil Cook describes each of her spirit controls in turn. “Bright face came—a child in spirit, as

¹¹⁷ Sprague, 35, 38.

¹¹⁸ Podmore, 357.

¹¹⁹ Moore, 48.

full of mischief as any child in the flesh... Bright face was a person to count on. She caught insincerity the moment it entered my séance-room...I am informed that the tests she plied to some of those doubters, rather raked into their questionable pasts, and made them uneasy.”¹²⁰

“Pat loves to talk to everybody in the séance-room, and to be talked to. He is sociable...Retaining all of his Irish wit, he says many humorous things, and this humor helps people ‘loosen up’.”¹²¹ “Pink Rose is not with us ever to jest. She is serious, thoughtful.”¹²²

Mrs. Cook went on to describe the rest of her spirit band, each in terms as personal and as *human* as those just described. The displaced utopian imaginary, like the utopian imaginary more generally generates visions of the future. The future projected by Spiritualism sent its adherents back an image of themselves that was wholly recognizable. Contours of individual personality remained, as did the familiar needs of food, clothing and shelter. As we move more toward the present we shall find that these projected futures become more and more alien and frightening—scenarios in which our future selves become increasingly unrecognizable, ultimately frustrating the desire for integration and lending themselves instead to a return to the Real.

FROM SPIRITUALISM TO THEOSOPHY: THE RISE OF THE ASCENDED MASTER

Spiritualism speaks to the desire for mastery by directing its attentions to what might be considered *the* central “imperfection” incumbent in the human form - mortality. The assertion of the existence of a clearly verifiable afterlife—one in which individual integrity is maintained—is no less than an assertion of immortality. Immortality, in turn, is an obvious limit case for

¹²⁰ Cook, 38.

¹²¹ Cook, 41.

¹²² Cook, 48.

ongoing attempts to achieve full mastery over the vagaries of nature. Establishing an ongoing communication between the “living” and those in the afterlife constitutes a bid for an immortality that serves the immediate interests of the living. The “scientifically” established existence of an afterlife does provide a salve for mortal dread but the afterlife is only *useful* to the present if the abyss between living and dead is bridged. With that bridge in place, humans still in their mortal coil can learn from the dead and extract services from them. The dead become a resource, used to locate lost objects and as a comfort to the bereaved. J.M. Peebles’ pamphlet entitled *The Practical of Spiritualism: a Biographical Sketch of Abraham Jones, and Historical Description of his Oil-Well Discoveries in Pleasantville, Pa., through Spirit Direction* apparently consisted, according to his biographer, of a happy blending of the spiritual with the practical, demonstration that the spiritual philosophy is destined to open up the hidden wealth of earth in mines, oils, gases, plants, jewels, and be, in the hands of inventors and mechanics, the science and rule of new improvements in human industries.¹²³

Communications from the dead varied. Along with messages from the beyond that spoke to the distant past and the life to come after death, spirits offered more banal observations. James Russell Lowell referred to spirit rapping (in which sitters or the medium would cycle through the alphabet and spirits would respond in negation or affirmation with raps, thus slowly spelling out messages) as an ungainly “system of cryptography the pains of which resulted only in messages such as ‘my coat is brown, or that I had an egg with my breakfast’.”¹²⁴ The standard request for visitors to early séance-rooms was for the identification of the number and ages of the visitors’ progeny, an exchange that smacks of the boardwalk (guess your weight and age) and the “mitt camp” (home to the itinerant palm reader). At the height of Spiritualism’s popularity, the

¹²³ J.O.Barrett, *The Spiritual Pilgrim: A Biography of James M. Peebles* (Boston: William White and Co., 1871) 157.

¹²⁴ Kerr, 29.

keynote in public (and much of the private) performance was on physical manifestations and on providing *verifiable* information—information that the medium could or should not have had prior knowledge of. Alternately, mediums were called upon to contact the dead beloved of their clients—the message: all’s well in the afterlife. The dispatch sent by one Mrs. H to her little boy Jimmie serves well to illustrate the banality of such messages. Little Jimmy conveyed it to his uncle as follows:

Mamma ain’t dead, uncle. That wasn’t her they put in the ground. That was just something she lived in. I saw her last night. She came to me while I was in the bed cryin’. She was all white an’ beautiful. First she kinda floated over the bed, and then she came closer to me, and put her hand over my head and kissed me. I ain’t goin’ to cry no more. There ain’t no use, because she ain’t in the ground. She’s around me all the time, helpin’ me study and be good. Gee, I don’t see why anybody should cry at funerals!”¹²⁵

In short, the emphasis was on the provision of proof as to the origin of the ostensibly celestial communiqués and on the receipt of messages of personal consolation. As Emerson archly remarked, “these adepts have mistaken flatulency for inspiration.”¹²⁶ Thus the séance was often reduced to guessing games and proto-therapy.

This consistent banality presaged a change in the fortunes of Spiritualism. Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, American and European culture underwent a shift from the medium as the central figure in the popular occult to what Peter Washington has called the “western guru.” As we shall see, the western guru directly presages the contactee. As Washington argues in *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon*,

by 1875 the spiritualist revival was faltering and it was becoming clear that the movement’s original promise would never be fulfilled. Its limitations were apparent to all but the most committed. While musical dancing ghosts might be an amusement, they didn’t have much light to throw on the life after death. Séances provide spectacle,

¹²⁵ Cook, 74.

¹²⁶ Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Knopf, 1983) 48.

mystery, and consolation for the bereaved, but they lacked clear objectives, positive doctrines, proper rituals and coherent organization. Something more was needed.¹²⁷

As we have seen, Washington exaggerates the case somewhat. The spirits did indeed have “positive doctrines” and the séance is nothing if not highly ritualized. However, the more popular manifestations of Spiritualism did tend to bear the marks of popular entertainment and the information offered by the spirits tended toward the parlor trick. More importantly, its emphasis on physical proofs literalized spirituality in a way that leached it of much of its power and appeal, chasing spirit into what Emerson called “the rathole of revelation.”

The “something more” that was needed, Washington goes on to argue, was to be provided by the emergence of the western guru in the person of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and her successors C.W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant et al. in the case of Theosophy; Rudolf Steiner in the case of Anthroposophy and G.I. Gurdjieff with his “fourth way,” among others. Like the spiritualist medium, the guru’s ability to communicate with other-worldly presences was the mark of a unique talent and like the earlier mediums, the Guru returned from her celestial journeys with messages of both cosmic and terrestrial import. Unlike the mediumship of Spiritualism, the faculties of the Western Guru were those of the adept—marking off a kind of occult aristocracy. Spiritualism was broadly democratic in the sense that anyone could potentially be a medium and all one needed to do to access one’s nascent power was hold a séance—an event which occurred in parlors all across America. The powers of the Western Guru were not casually obtained but were a function of both native talent *and* intensive training and study—a combination that lends itself to a re-mystification of the world of spirit—an esoteric versus exoteric set of practices. Regardless of the fact that the founding exponent of the tradition, H.P. Blavatsky, was a woman (albeit a woman who by all accounts exhibited many

¹²⁷ Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky’s Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America* (New York: Schocken, 1996) 46.

masculine traits), the figure of the guru was considerably more masculine than its Spiritualist counterpart. As a “mannish” woman, Blavatsky muddied clear gender boundaries just as the Spiritualist mediums before her. Basham argues that she “took on Jehovah himself. In place of the forbidding father, she offered a gender-free Occult Mother whose only principle was the capacity for change.”¹²⁸ Blavatsky and her fellow travelers distanced themselves from the earlier spiritualist mediums in a variety of ways, two of which are key to the current discussion. While the medium served as passive conduit, the western guru entered into conscious and active communication with her spectral interlocutors - one of the clearly gendered elements in the shift from the feminized Spiritualist medium. Secondly, the interlocutors of choice for the guru were no longer the dead, but rather so-called “ascended masters.”

Prior to entering into a discussion of the nature of mediumship and the Masters within Theosophical tradition, we should first take note of the Romantic impulse that informed the movement’s inception and popularity. In his introduction to the collection of Spiritualist pamphlets entitled *Spiritualist Thought* Gary L. Ward proposes a typology of Spiritualism. The terminal mode consists of a Spiritualism in which

the proposed cosmologies have developed beyond traditional Christian confines, or even beyond demythologized explanations such as those of Lockwood [*The Molecular Hypothesis of Nature*], which have naturalistic language but are still based on a Christian worldview. In this kind, Spiritualism is interpreted with the aid of occult notions of astral planes or eastern belief in reincarnation, etc...Deep spiritual truths are not to be found in biblical personages or in church leaders of the past or present, but rather in the masters from the east, wherein lies all hidden wisdom (no number).¹²⁹

Ward’s “type 5” Spiritualism captures both the sense of how later Spiritualism turned toward the East and how Spiritualism was influenced by Theosophy, a movement to which it had given birth.

¹²⁸ Basham, 195.

¹²⁹ Gary Ward, “Introduction,” in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward (New York: Garland Press, 1990).

This turn to the “East” as well as the ancient past, for inspiration, was a centrally important impulse of Theosophy and the many religious movements that followed it (J. Gordon Melton’s *Encyclopedia of American Religions* lists no less than 46 organizations emerging directly from the original society).¹³⁰ As Edward Said has famously argued, while Orientalism has consistently consigned the Oriental Other to an inferior position, there has also existed an ongoing line of argument within Orientalism that imagines the East as a source of regeneration. Said notes that Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, for example, urged upon their countrymen, and upon Europeans in general, a detailed study of India because, they said, it was Indian culture and religion that could defeat the materialism and mechanism (and republicanism) of Occidental culture.¹³¹

Theosophy, like Spiritualism, argued the compatibility of science and spirit. Annie Besant writes that “Theosophy accepts the *method* of Science—observation, experiment, arrangement of ascertained facts, induction, hypothesis, deduction, verification, assertion of the discovered truth—but immensely increases its *area*.”¹³² Unlike Spiritualism, Theosophy held that Western Science in and of itself was insufficient to the task of plumbing the truths of the metaphysical. “Her [nature] more hidden workings, those workings of life without which form could not be, have received no attention, not being susceptible of physical observation, and this gap can only be filled by the teachings of the Ancient Wisdom.”¹³³ The Ancient wisdom in question was to be sought and found in Theosophy’s central figure of alterity—the mahatma or ascended master.

The figure of the ascended master depends upon two assumptions central to Theosophy and most of the alternative religious movements that would come to make up the “new age.”

¹³⁰ J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedia of American Religions* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1987).

¹³¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1977) 115.

¹³² Annie Besant, *Theosophy* (New York: Dodge Publishing, 1912) 21.

¹³³ Annie Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1977) 201.

The first was that all world religions were fundamentally the same, arising from a single universal wisdom tradition. The second was that said tradition was maintained by occult adepts who were human, but through intensive spiritual practice have become all but immortal.

Each successive Initiation carries with it certain definite obligations, which must be fully discharged before the next step can be taken. The fifth Initiation “perfects” the Man, closing his human evolution. By that He becomes a liberated Spirit; He has “reached the further shore.” Some of these remain on our earth, to watch over and forward human evolution; others depart to fill the various offices needed for the helping of our own and other planets, and for the general guidance of the Solar System. Those we call “Masters” are among Those who remain on our earth and they form the fifth grade of the White Brotherhood.¹³⁴

These masters held themselves aloof from the rest of humankind, revealing themselves only to the privileged few. They secluded themselves in the wilds of the Himalayas, or Egypt, or the Middle East or on Venus and Mars, depending upon whose version the aspirant attended to and which of the brethren one sought congress with. One latter day and still operative religious movement boasts contact with a series of masters that directly recalls some of the more popular spiritualist interlocutors of the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Clare Prophet’s Church Universal and Triumphant (itself descended from the Great I AM, more on which in chapter two) claims contact with such major religious figures as Jesus, the Virgin Mary and Buddha as well as spiritualist stalwarts such as Francis Bacon, King Arthur and Merlin.

The masters, collectively referred to as “The Great White Brotherhood” by Blavatsky, influenced worldly events from afar and entered into communication only with those who were particularly advanced in their occult studies. The Brotherhood, a conclave of “ascended masters,” consisted of entities that resided alternately in exotic terrestrial locales (India, Tibet) and abodes extraterrestrial (Venus in particular). The Brotherhood, according to theosophical thought, have guided the development of humanity from the time of the latter’s emergence and

¹³⁴ Annie Besant, *Theosophy* (New York: Dodge Publishing, 1912) 70-71.

have an ongoing interest in our collective fate.

In the beginning, the leaders of the Occult Hierarchy on this earth are said to have been mighty beings whose evolution had been completed upon some other globe, who came here to guide and lead infant humanity. Later, as some earth humans became competent to take their place, these early “God-Kings” withdrew... As the centuries passed, and ritualism and materialism accumulated side by side...the wisdom was kept in its purity only in hidden, sheltered places—in the deserts or in hidden mountain valleys.¹³⁵

This is a theme we see carried through and developed in the trope of the ancient astronaut. The sense that humans have been offered the guidance of, and were perhaps even created by, some off-world intelligence was most popularly elaborated by the writings of Erik von Daniken. Daniken’s books, starting with “Chariots of the Gods?,” were immensely popular in the 1970’s, selling over twenty-five million copies worldwide. Less popular, but considerably more elaborate, is Zechariah Sitchin’s multi-volume “Earth Chronicles.” Sitchin, a scholar of early near-eastern texts, provides a reading of biblical and pre-biblical texts to make the case for the extraterrestrial origins of *Homo sapiens*. The sense of paternal intelligence guiding us from afar that animated these texts is central to the contactee mythos.

With the inclusion of these so-called western gurus along with the earlier spiritualist tradition, one arrives at a fuller understanding of the cultural precedents that precede the contactee “movement.” Varying from case to case, and vacillating between the purely mediumistic model and the model of the western guru, contactees were both mere passive conduits open to the will and communiqués of the space brothers, and active interpreters and exegetes of the word from above. The communion between contactee and space-brother was a sometimes somnambulant proceeding and sometimes a conscious (or “super-conscious”, to borrow from the vernacular) and *mutual* exchange between extraterrestrial intelligences and chosen human interlocutor. The space brothers of UFO lore bore a striking resemblance to the Great White Brotherhood of theosophical origin. This is no surprise in that the first recognized

¹³⁵ Anna Kennedy Winner, *The Basic Ideas of Occult Wisdom* (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1970) 93-94.

space brother religion, The Great I AM, began as an American popularization of Theosophy.

CONCLUSION

Thus the Great I AM, generally understood to be the first true “space brother” religion, should be situated in a lineage that begins with American Spiritualism and its predecessors. This lineage, as discussed in the preceding chapter, established a key set of practices and understandings regarding the Other. The trance state or somnambulism was central to all the cases thus far discussed. Through these interstitial states of consciousness lines of communication with the Other were opened. “Only in these conditions of partial psychic dissolution...do these hidden faculties make their power and presence felt.”¹³⁶ Those most likely to open such channels were individuals who were somatically delicate, socially marginal and/or of indeterminate gender—“clever girls, philosophic Bohemians, weak women—and weaker men.”¹³⁷ The Others themselves were recognizably human and subject to most foibles afflicting the species, barring the grosser manifestations of physical being. The uncanny aspects of these Others were confined to their point of origin, the knowledge they possessed, and their ghostly mode of self presentation. The messages they conveyed ranged from the banal to the profound to the incomprehensible.

We see emerging from our brief survey of Spiritualism and its forbearers a set of tensions that define the terrain of communication between human and Other. The primary tension was between a movement toward integration and one toward disintegration—a centripetal and centrifugal movement. As a centripetal or integrating movement, the communion of mortal and spirit promised the natural and logical extension of humanity’s progressive mastery over matter,

¹³⁶ Podmore, 358.

¹³⁷ Basham, 121.

time, and space. It promised the extension of science into arenas Bacon had consigned to Authority and Faith. It held forth the oxymoronic vision of a faith built on fact and observable phenomenon—“a glimpse of an ultimate incandescence where science and religion fuse into one.”¹³⁸ Spiritualist practice put irreconcilable realms into communication—present and past, living and dead—an optimistic hyperbole offered partially in response to the lingering question of communication’s sheer possibility—as “an answer to the dread that separate centres of consciousness must always be strangers.”¹³⁹ Most fundamentally, communion with spirits brought the assurance that one need not fear the alienation from self that death threatens. The mortal and immortal selves were fused as one by promises from beyond the grave.

Communion with the Other simultaneously functioned centrifugally. Spiritualism injected strains of indeterminacy into the very transparency it promised. The lines of communication it opened were as suggestive of collapse as they were of progress. If one could be simultaneously in Poughkeepsie and Cleveland, and speak to the dead about the future, the basic coordinates of being begin to shudder. If one can speak scientifically of such things, than what of the science that proclaims their impossibility? At the level of the Self it was the capacity of mediumship that most directly threatens integrity. The links between the understood instability of the feminine and the capacity to bridge the worlds of the living and the dead were legion.¹⁴⁰ The medium hovered between the slackness of neurasthenia and the fraught tensions of hysteria. One Frederick R. Marvin went so far as to discuss the pathology of “mediomania,” afflicting “women, especially at puberty or the menapauses, or at some period between puberty

¹³⁸ Myers, 290.

¹³⁹ Myers, 282.

¹⁴⁰ See Basham.

¹¹⁹ Frederick R. Marvin, *The Philosophy of Spiritualism and The Pathology and Treatment of Mediomania* (New York: Asa K. Butts and Company, 1874).

and the menopauses.”¹⁴¹ A general elision existed between mediumship and personality disintegration. To open oneself to spirit communication was to court madness. Media straddled a series of ostensibly irreconcilable opposites—asleep/awake, man/woman/, self/other—all basic coordinates of being. So we see the forces of History—the centripetal drive toward integration, narratives of ascendant mastery—entangled with the centrifugal forces of genealogy—multiplicity, disintegration and fractured narrative. The dynamic suggests nothing so much as the figure of the ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail. As always the question remains, what’s left behind?

The relationship with the spirit world enacted by the movements previously discussed, a relationship that claimed compatibility with the worlds of science and reason, arguably began with the works of Emmanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg's works supplied much of the philosophical and/or theological underpinnings of American Spiritualism. But the Swede’s celestial peregrinations depended upon his ability to place himself in a trance state. American Spiritualism required the imported figure of the mesmerist to tap into the abilities of its native seers. One such seer, who first exhibited his powers while in magnetic trance, was Andrew Jackson Davis, the so-called John the Baptist of Spiritualism. Davis’ writings and his public performances were key in turning Spiritualism into a national movement. As a national movement, Spiritualism aligned itself with much of the progressive political movements of its day—with spirits espousing support for the abolition of slavery and women’s suffrage. Spiritualism dogma hoped for and expected the arrival of a terrestrial utopia—a utopia presaged and abetted by the open communication between the living and the dead. As the century wore on, the ranks of Spiritualism were diminished and Theosophy emerged through the writings of

one prior affiliate of the spiritualist creed, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Spiritualism and Theosophy in turn provided the seedbed for the emergence of the space brother religions.

In the ensuing chapter, we will attend to the rise of the space brother as presiding Other in the ongoing communication between humans and their visions of alterity. The relationship between such communication and visions of social perfection continue, albeit along lines quite dissimilar to the preceding. We will examine, in turn, the strange career of proto-fascist William Dudley Pelley and the emergence of the Great I AM from the ashes of the Pelley organization. The latter of the two movements will set the precedent of *embodied* encounters between human and Other and bring us to the brink of a major shift in the mythos of the displaced utopian imaginary, the arrival of the flying saucer, or the UFO.

Ch.2 Contact

INTRODUCTION

Contact with extraterrestrials was far from unknown prior to the twentieth century. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the seminal figures of American Spiritualism, Emmanuel Swedenborg, claimed to have traveled throughout the solar system and observed life on the various planets. Swedenborg's visits to other planets and meetings with their representative populations took place in the same way that the vast majority of such meetings did prior to WWII, which was via astral travel, with the contactee functioning as a medium.¹⁴² The séance room was no stranger to extraterrestrials. In fact most pre-twentieth century contact took place in a spiritualist context. Extraterrestrials were merely angels of another sort. Messengers from the beyond, presenting themselves as historical luminaries, unnamed natives or beloved relations had cavorted in parlors across the nation, revealing the perfection that lay beyond the veil. Extraterrestrials, beings from other planets, were counted among this spectral parade. They too bore witness to the perfectibility of society and individual. In an era when space travel was mere fancy, the vast reaches of outer space were understood as somehow equivalent to the world of the hereafter—angels, aliens and the dead all of a piece. As the twentieth century progressed, beings from other planets would assume pre-eminence among those Others seeking to impart wisdom to terrestrial humans. The elision of angel and alien and the transfer of sovereignty from

¹⁴² J. Gordon Melton, "The Contactees: A Survey" in *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 1-13.

the former to the latter mark a key dynamic in the changing nexus of communication between humans and the Other. Angels, as creatures of spirit, reside in the realms of spirit—displaced from the world of matter, the world of the observable. Their place of residence, heaven, is difficult to locate. Particular coordinates do not moor its status as place. Spiritualism went a long way toward imagining and articulating a fully manifested and habitable heavenly realm. Swedenborg’s earlier equation of angels and dead humans demystified and lent a familiar sort of materiality to the angel. Spiritualism’s attempt to limn the contours of the afterlife lent a similar materiality to heaven. Even so, heaven remained and remains a place without location. The movement from spirit to ascended master to alien marked a trajectory of increasing materiality. This trajectory was of course uneven in that the three aforementioned types—spirit, ascended master, alien—coexisted. The suggested arc is one of shifting pre-eminence rather than outright replacement. Spiritualism strove to articulate spirits that were recognizably human—a marked contrast to the angels that preceded them. The exact location of the spirits’ home, however, remained a mystery. Ascended masters occupied a state of being between human and spirit. They were humans who had evolved beyond mere humanity yet still fell short of being purely spiritual entities. Their locale, while comprised of a shifting series of places, was concrete: Venus, Mars, Tibet, and Mount Shasta. They resided in spaces not off the map. Aliens, while they may have found ways around or through the laws of time and space, were ostensibly biological entities. They may have been more evolved spiritually, but they were still embodied. And, for a while, their homes were known.¹⁴³ They could be seen in the night sky. Venus and Mars had been spoken of and celebrated for millennia. The alien and the ascended master acted

¹⁴³ As the century progressed, their point of origin became less clear and more far-flung, reaching out to Zeta Reticuli and Sirius.

as spiritual aspirations embodied. This embodiment, in turn, enacted the ongoing materialization of the spiritual.

With the exception of Swedenborg, most extraterrestrial contacts were with denizens of Venus and Mars. Contact with figures from those locales continued into the twentieth century, and with some notable changes, culminated in the emergence of religions based upon the messages of our space-faring brethren—the “space brothers.” It is the business of this chapter to explore the intermediary phase between the occult revivals of the nineteenth century and the post- World War II emergence of the flying saucer. We will examine, in turn, two principals that maintained the traditions discussed in the previous chapter while laying the groundwork for the space brother religions that followed. The two principals in question are William Dudley Pelley and the Ballards, both of whom built followings from ostensible ongoing contact with Others. The chapter will treat each in turn, focusing on the nature of the contact between these principals and their extraterrestrial interlocutors, the nature of the interlocutors themselves, and the content of their messages. At issue in this treatment is: the early twentieth century maintenance and transformation of the tropes previously established as part of the nexus of alien-human communication; the connections between the sociopolitical aspirations inherent in the communication between human and Other and the more traditionally articulated politics of the day; and the transmogrification from spirit to alien, including both the increasingly common claim that these spectral interlocutors hail from other planets and the movement toward embodied contact with those interlocutors.

The extraterrestrial as framed by the contactee narrative functioned as a variant on the entities that populated Theosophy and Spiritualism. The Great White Brotherhood was central to the spiritual system elaborated by Blavatsky. The brotherhood, a conclave of “ascended

masters,” consisted of entities that resided alternately in exotic terrestrial locales (Tibet) and abodes extraterrestrial (in particular Venus). The brotherhood, according to the lore of Theosophy, guided the development of humanity from the time of the latter's emergence as a species and thus had a vested interest in their collective fate. The earlier space brother religions followed a similar logic to that of the ascended master. They were generally framed around a message originating with some extraterrestrial intelligence and conveyed via a privileged conduit or medium. The sender was most often a self-identified entity who, out of great love and concern, decided to impart his/her wisdom to a chosen recipient. This entity was often a professed member of a cohort of planetary civilizations who, bound together in an interstellar league, shared a longstanding and ongoing interest in the earth's development.

WILLIAM DUDLEY PELLEY

The first of the recognized space brother religions was the Great I Am, a group that arose in 1934, under the leadership of Guy and Edna Ballard, from the ashes of William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirts, a.k.a. the “Foundation for Christian Economics” and the “Christian Party.” At the time of the Ballards' recruitment of the Silver Shirts' membership, Pelley was embroiled in a series of lawsuits. Matters more pressing than the maintenance of his membership took up his attention and the Ballards' *de facto* coup went unchallenged. In that Pelley provided a clear link between the Spiritualism of the nineteenth century and the first true space brother religion, we will now examine the details of his case.

Pelley was both a successful writer of sentimental fiction and plays and a self-taught philosopher whose life and politics reflected the life of his times. Young Pelley began his self-education with the *Communist Manifesto*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and *Philistine*

magazine, the latter edited by iconoclast Elbert Hubbard who “urged lenient child-rearing, advocated divorce for incompatible couples, and mocked all ‘smug’ religions—especially Christianity,”—causes which had all resonated with the spiritualists of the previous century.¹⁴⁴ Pelley began to issue the *Philosopher*, his attempt to propagate ideas central to his emergent philosophy, in Fulton, New York in 1909. Progressive child rearing, manly independence, the power of maternal love—the obvious tension between the two preceding indicating Pelley’s ambivalence vis-à-vis the feminine—and the “scientific, unsentimental” discussion of faith all received hyperbolic treatment in the nineteen-year-old’s journal.¹⁴⁵ This last echoes the nineteenth century belief, so central to Spiritualism, and doomed to increasing obscurity following the 1925 Monkey-Scopes trial, that science and religion were compatible. The notion that matters of faith would bear scientific scrutiny also aligns with a central tendency in the nexus of communication between human and Other —the materialization of the spiritual. Pelley would continue to assert the compatibility of science and religion throughout his life. In a much later communiqué he intoned, “‘religion’ and ‘science,’ in short are beginning to be recognized as parts of the same Truth, of the same Reality, as indeed they must be.”¹⁴⁶ This ostensible compatibility was *necessary* in the bid to maintain a public space for spiritual discourse. In a period of ascendant positivism, spiritual discourse needed to be clothed in the language of materialism.

The *Philosopher* further espoused a utopian vision led by a unified, non-denominational Christianity—a utopia characterized in part by the nationwide establishment of “Guild Houses”

¹⁴⁴ Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983) 26.

¹⁴⁵ Ribuffo, 29.

¹⁴⁶ William Dudley Pelley, *Books for your Soulcraft Library* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

that would provide a wide variety of services to those who wavered in the “struggle for existence.” With his call for an end to poverty, his condemnation of the ostentatiously wealthy and his secular vision of “Comrade Christ,” the young Pelley brought to mind the social gospel so often espoused by spiritualist circles. The call for a non-denominational Christianity and a scientific examination of matters of faith further recalled the sustained attack on orthodoxy carried out by Spiritualism in the preceding century and suggested a dynamic of disintegration—heterodoxy. His rhetoric would remain consistently heterodox, summoning forth a world in which “old worlds disintegrate, old fetishes wobble; out of the womb of Time and Change is born the fresh majesty of wisdom ennobled.”¹⁴⁷ Yet his calls for mutual aid and a constant recourse to mother love both enacted a more centripetal dynamic. Over the course of his life, he would occupy both poles of the tension that so beset the political life of his age—communism versus fascism—often simultaneously. Like most avatars of modern communication between the human and the Other, Pelley’s vision was in many ways defined by sustained internal contradictions.

As he continued to think through his philosophy over the course of his adult life, Pelley showed evidence of the confusions and prejudices that beset his age. While crowing about “Why I Am Glad I Married A Suffragist” for *American Magazine* and generally championing the independence of women, Pelley maintained standards straight out of the Victorian cult of true womanhood. As Leo Ribuffo points out in his study of Pelley, this alleged feminist approved of his wife’s “public activities only as long as she remained a true woman who cooked suppers, nurtured children, and acknowledged his status as ‘boss’.”¹⁴⁸ Much of Pelley’s written output

¹⁴⁷ William Dudley Pelley, *Soulcraft 78th Discourse: Redemption: How the Early States of Man worked for Spirit’s Concept of Society* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Ribuffo, 37.

featured female characters who were adventurous and traditional in equal measure, all of whom pointed to a central lesson—woman’s role at bottom is providing comfort and sustenance to men. His vision of women was one that positioned the feminine as the necessary and divinely ordained counterpart to the masculine. As he would later write, in a typically turgid text

Woman gained to her present status of bodily pulchritude, her gentleness, docility, poise, endurance, tact, and disposition to preserve and nurture and mend and conserve, purely from the exercise of those talents that had been subtracted “out of the side of Man” and given an organism for contrasting expression although in constant and continuing association with those contrasting attributes. She is the “missing half” of Man in his spiritual totality.¹⁴⁹

Pelley was a critic of “feminized” Christianity yet prone to grossly sentimental professions of faith. He supported many of the goals of socialism yet called for a firm response to the dangers of Bolshevism. All of the contradictions inherent in his philosophy placed him squarely in the context of the debates of his day. More generally, his apparently contradictory positions placed him in the nexus or circuitry so prevalent in the discourses of the Other we have thus far discussed. Pelley’s rejection of orthodoxy and his calls for dramatic reform were coupled with a strong desire to maintain standards of femininity and an abhorrence of Bolshevism. At the same time that he wanted to challenge the sacred cows of his day, he bowed down before them. Placing a high value on social decorum and standards of gentility, his rhetoric operated both in the register of integration and the register of disintegration, enacting both a centripetal and centrifugal dynamic.

In the midst of a checkered career as small town newspaper owner, novelist, journalist and screenwriter, Pelley underwent a conversion experience that brought an end to the internal turmoil wrought by the many contradictions besetting him, placing them in a cosmic context that

¹⁴⁹ William Dudley Pelley, *Soulcraft Eighth Discourse: The Enigma of Sex and why woman was identified as issuing from the Side of Man* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

allowed for the logic of both/and. It was this experience that fully shot him into the orbit traversed by our tale. Demoralized by his time in Hollywood, whose culture he viewed as fully debauched, Pelley withdrew to a bungalow in Altadena. Ensnared in the Sierra Madre (especially appropriate given his fixation on the sanctity of motherhood) Pelley commenced a half-year “accounting with my soul.”¹⁵⁰ Pelley’s quest culminated during the night of 28-29 May of 1928, during which he was subject to visions profound. Near 2:00 A.M., feeling that he was dying, Pelley “whirled through space and landed in a strong pair of arms. Two men dressed in white placed him on a white marble pallet surrounded by alabaster walls and Corinthian columns.”¹⁵¹ The place that he found himself was “A sort of marble-tiled-and-furnished portico...lighted by that soft, unseen, opal illumination, with a clear as crystal Roman pool.”¹⁵² The *mis-en-scene* described here recalls nothing so much as the sort of bastardized classicism that recurs throughout much American mysticism. In placing the receipt of occult knowledge in a Greco-Roman setting, such knowledge is suggestively linked to the taproot of the Western humanities. Claiming classical precedent is a kind of secular humanist version of “Well it says so right here in the Bible.” The Greco-Roman ambience communicated a sense of worldly perfection and true civilization achieved. It also captured something of the fundamentally anachronistic circuitry of communication between human and Other. Pelley’s vision was situated in the past via the faux classical *mis-en-scene*. It held the promise of *future* perfection. There was, in addition, as in all cases of trance, a sense that the experience took place outside of time. His later account of the experience was entitled “Seven Minutes in Eternity.” Lastly, in

¹⁵⁰ Ribuffo, 49.

¹⁵¹ Ribuffo, 49.

¹⁵² William Dudley Pelley, “Seven Minutes in Eternity: the Amazing Experience that Made Me Over” in *The American Magazine* (March, 1929) 8.

keeping with the recurring integration/disintegration dynamic, the Greco-roman ambience lent stability to an experience that would have otherwise been wholly vertiginous.

Pelley learned during his sojourn that his body was merely an “overcoat.” This language implies a sort of Gnostic disgust in which the body is some encumbrance to be shed. In the case of the “overcoat,” said shedding would presumably occur in a place where inclement weather is no longer—what spiritualists sometimes referred to as “Summerland.” This implicit revulsion for the body was both reflected in Pelley’s repressed sexuality—Pelley was relieved to find that eternity was “strangely sexless”—and his chaste, white-on-white vision of redemption.¹⁵³

Classical motifs are selectively used in American mysticism—the Dionysian (centrifugal) element is markedly absent in Pelley’s vision. The presence of this Gnostic disgust could also be felt in the broader currents of which Pelley was part. The sense that perfection lies always somehow beyond the mortal coil and the prevalence of disembodied modes in the perception of that perfection all speak to a troubled relationship with the human body. This relationship was clearly present in Spiritualism, as attested to by the understanding that while spirits still wore clothes and lived in houses, their redemption extended to a release from grosser corporeal needs. Spirits were apparently sustained by the air around them and engaged neither in sex nor in defecation.¹⁵⁴ Pelley was later to describe his return from beyond the vale in terms that most graphically indicate the power of Gnostic disgust: “Something awful closed about me! It seemed as though a great suit of clammy, cloying armor, a miasma of implacable sinew, had shut around me. It clutched me horridly, an excruciating agony that ended in a click.”¹⁵⁵ The sense of the

¹⁵³ Ribuffo, 51

¹⁵⁴ As an interesting side note, constipation was ostensibly a common complaint among mediums.

¹⁵⁵ Ribuffo, 51.

¹⁵ William Dudley Pelley, *Soulcraft 78th Discourse: Redemption: How the Early States of Man worked for Spirit’s Concept of Society* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

physical human form as temporary and illusory was repeated across Pelley's oeuvre. He wrote later, in the "Soulcraft Scripts," that "Man has become lost in an hypnotic dream of the physical life," recalling both gnosticism and the Hindu concept of Maya, both of which hold that embodied existence is fundamentally illusory.¹⁵⁶ Awareness of this illusion is ostensibly a correlate of advanced spiritual states.

Pelley, in his vision, was told he was to be subject to further spiritual communiqués as needed. He was reborn and would continue to receive clairaudient messages and begin to transcribe automatic writings received from the dead and other sundry celestial beings. Over time, he would come to refer to himself as the "recorder"—a passive title in marked contrast to his other organizational designation—"the chief." His first successful transcription occurred in a Manhattan apartment some two years after his initial experience. The message, recalled in *Star Guests: Design for Mortality*, recalls the messages of previous spectral interlocutors both in its portentousness and opacity.

Memory is not memory if we make new thought bodies when we give up our material bodies. Man will some day know the truth and then we will make real bodies in the image of God.

Make no mistake, we are those who are now in the light and we have much to tell you. 'Music of the Spheres' is no idle phrase, but the very center of the mystery of the creation of this, your universe!

Where there is Harmony, there is Life, and all discord is Death. We of the more harmonious plane which is next above the plane of earth, make this statement to you because you are of that company whose bodies are yet of earth but whose eyes are opened to perception of the Truth. Many of us are with you, not alone at this moment but in many moments when you are unaware of our presence. We will endeavor to make more power for you in all that you undertake if you will endeavor to open yourselves more completely to our touch."¹⁵⁷

The language of the communiqué clearly drew upon the harmonial tradition of which Spiritualism was part and which informs most present-day New Age practices. If you were in

¹⁵⁷ William Dudley Pelley, *Star Guests: Design for Mortality* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press, 1950) 10.

harmony with the universe (“if you will endeavor to open yourselves more completely to our touch”) then all good things flowed toward you. It was the cultivation of sensitivity and occult knowledge (which is provided by some privileged medium, in this case, Pelley) along with the practice of openness that placed one in harmony. The message further echoed both earlier and later spiritual and extraterrestrial communication in that it singled out its recipient: “you are of that company whose bodies are yet of earth but whose eyes are opened to perception of the Truth.” This recurring harmonial sensibility placed the politics that emerged from the nexus of human-Other communication in clear tension with traditional utopian politics. Making oneself “open” was a fundamentally passive, read *feminine*, practice, especially when compared to the emphasis on organizing and seizure of power associated with traditionally understood political *action*. The politics of the displaced utopian imaginary were thoroughly feminized. The vectors of communication along which its texts were conveyed were watery in the extreme—entranced, in-between, utterly passive. The sense that a better world was coming was tied either to life-after-death or to some anticipated apocalypse in which the world as a whole is ushered into a new era by the actions of some vast Other. Here we see the implied complement to the materialization of the spiritual. By rendering terrestrial political concerns as matters of spirit, the politics that emerged from the nexus of human-Other communication spiritualized the material. As we shall see, Pelley straddled the line between the overtly feminized politics of the displaced utopian imaginary and the more masculine approaches of traditional political organizing and action. This tension between masculine ends (a scientifically based faith, a dramatically altered socio-political landscape) and feminine means (acting as a passive conduit for spectral communiqués, the cultivation of “openness”) was reflected in Pelley’s own ambivalence toward the feminine.

The publication of Pelley's experience in the March 1929 issue of *American Magazine* found a ready audience. Spiritualism, while greatly diminished as a movement since the end of the previous century, still held a fascination for a great number of people—with its gospel broadcast most notably by Sir Oliver Lodge. Christian Scientists (Pelley was later to become an automatic scribe for the departed Mary Baker Eddy), spiritualists and theosophists made up the bulk of the respondents to *Seven Minutes in Eternity*, and it was largely from these three movements, most prominently the latter, that Pelley drew the materials for his own emergent theology.

In 1930, via his Galahad Press, Pelley began publication of *Liberation*. In 1932, after receiving a welcome cash infusion via donation, Pelley moved to Asheville, North Carolina, incorporated the Foundation for Christian Economics and opened Galahad College. Both college and *Liberation* were committed to espousing Pelley's developing philosophy, much of which he culled from ongoing "hyper-dimensional instruction" received via "mental radio."¹⁵⁸ While the nineteenth century spiritualists depended upon the spiritual telegraph, the entities in contact with Pelley had progressed to a paranormal variant of a more *current* communications technology. Both telegraphy and radio were technologies haunted by the specter of disembodiedness.¹⁵⁹ Descriptions of the afterlife found within the journal's pages recalled the accounts offered by the spiritualists of the previous century and Swedenborg before them. Heaven was a "sphere of beauty and poise," yet strangely familiar in that the spirits therein wore clothes and lived in houses. Further hewing to the Swedenborgian/spiritualist tradition, the inhabitants of the other

¹⁵⁸ Jon Elliston, "New Age Nazi: The Rise and Fall of Asheville's Flaky Fascist," *Mountain Express*, Asheville, NC, Jan 28, 2004. <http://www.mountainx.com/news/2004/0128pelley.php> (Accessed July 2, 2005).

¹⁵⁹ See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

world were still struggling to ascend the ladder of spiritual ascension, moving toward the goal of the seventh heaven, home to the Great Souls or Ascended Masters and site of Pelley's "Great Release" of May 1928.

The message of *Liberation* largely consisted of various consoling messages from the Masters on "sex, success, and the meaning of life" conveyed in articles with titles such as "Why You Are Opposed by Invisible Persons," "Take Your Daily Cues From the Great Pyramid" and "You Can Remember Before You Were Born!"¹⁶⁰ Along with these banal, utilitarian communiqués, however, its pages spoke increasingly of a "Great Time of Troubles" in which cosmic forces in the form of "demon" souls would scourge humanity of its weakness and greed, conjuring visions of an impending apocalypse. Those in harmony with the universe could look on with assurance, knowing that the Masters and the great souls currently incarnated on earth, among which Pelley counted himself, guided the proceedings.

The worst of the demons with whom the great souls were bound to enter into conflict inhabited Jewish bodies. In the spiritualist context, race functioned primarily as a marker of exoticism, with the exoticized Other—the Native American being a frequent exemplar—operating as a source of wisdom. Theosophy offered exotics from the East—sages of Oriental wisdom—but also deployed race in a negative register. Theosophy offered a vision—one that would be a key element in both Pelley's philosophy and that of National Socialism—in which some races were in ascendancy and others were in decline. Pelley articulated this philosophy of race throughout his career. In one instance he wrote that

the jungle black man—not necessarily the Negro living shoulder to shoulder with the white man in a high degree of civilization—is operating mundanely at the lowest rate of vibration distinguishing the strictly human, below which he would be animalistic. The Nordic Aryan white man is operating at the highest demonstrable rate of vibration also

¹⁶⁰ Ribuffo, 55; Elliston.

distinguishing the strictly human. And between these two are all forms and exhibits of intervening rates, perpetuating the effects of such vibrations in physical surroundings.¹⁶¹

The Jews were understood as operating at a low vibratory rate, whereas “Nordic Aryans” apparently resonated at the threshold of the next level past “Human.” Pelley’s writings were part of a broader public discourse of scientific racism. Harkening back to the optimism of nineteenth century dreams of positivism and progress, the eugenics movement rested on the tacit assumption that the collection and collation of information on undesirable traits in individual humans and in classes of humans was a necessary step in constructing the perfect society. The discourse on genetics and race mimicked the spiritual discourses emerging from the nexus of alien-human communication in one fundamental way. In an attempt to maintain a place in public discourse for defamatory discourses of race, the eugenics movement was concerned with rearticulating old, non-rational arguments about race in a scientific language.

Along with such contemporaries as Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh and Walt Disney, all of whom he counted as supporters, Pelley argued that the International Jew lay at the bottom of the world’s current woes. In his travels through Russia as Y.M.C.A. representative in the year following the 1917 revolution, Pelley claimed to have learned of the Jewish conspiracy underlying Bolshevism and international banking. His revelations following his “Great Release” further led him to understand, in a fashion similar to theosophists (though she publicly eschewed anti-Semitism, H.P. Blavatsky has long been rumored to be the author of the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), that race was a function of spiritual hierarchy and whites had “attained something cosmically which Semitic Asiatics have not attained.”¹⁶² It was on battling the conspiracy of these lesser souls that his efforts increasingly focused. This struggle, as in the

¹⁶¹ William Dudley Pelley, *Soulcraft Eightieth Discourse: Races: The Necessity for Racial Divisions of Humankind and the Purposes they Serve* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁶² Ribuffo, 58.

hermetic credo *as above, so below*, was understood as a reflection of a higher spiritual struggle. While Pelley's writings and organizing called for an engaged politics, it was always with the understanding that such engagement was an extension of actions occurring at a cosmic level—again enacting the spiritualization of the material. This, in Pelley's thinking, was what set his movement apart from more traditional political action. "A hundred abortive 'movements' to aid in this national crisis have been started in the past three years, to fall by the wayside because their platforms were based on the assumption that this distress was but a passing episode in human life instead of the Great Armageddon designated by Divine Prophecy."¹⁶³ The national crisis in question was the Depression read as the corruption of America by Hebraic forces.

According to *Liberation*, President Hoover was manipulated by agents of the "International Shylock," the bankers responsible for the Depression in the first place; meanwhile, their covert communist brethren sought to "emasculate" Christian principles for "racial profit." The Galahad college curriculum in 1932 covered "predatory cliques" in American life, false claims to divine favor by "certain people," and "racial ethics" in the lost world of Atlantis. Finally, when Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933, Pelley announced formation of the Silver Legion and brought the "work of Christ militant into the open."¹⁶⁴

It was the formation of the Silver Legion, and its most public face, the Silver Shirts, that brought Pelley fame as a homegrown quasi-fascist.

The utopian politics that issued from the nexus of alien-human communication were more invested in an apocalyptic narrative than in politics per se. The displaced utopian imaginary was as open to the fascism of the 1930's as it was to the rational reform of the nineteenth century. In fact, I argue that various elements of the displaced utopian imaginary readily lend themselves to the emergence of a fascist politics. Most obviously, the racial politics implicit in Theosophy and its variants harbor the seeds for such a development. The basic

¹⁶³ William Dudley Pelley, *The Silver Ranger, Bulletin No. 3*, (Oklahoma City). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library's vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁶⁴ Ribuffo, 57.

narrative attached to this racial mythos is that earth has passed through a number of ages. Each of these ages sees a particular race in ascendancy and others in decline – races which in a national socialist parlance would be understood as “degenerate.” In Pelley’s view, as well as that of his anti-Semitic contemporaries, the Anglo-Saxon race was in ascendancy and the Jews, along with other “ancient” races, were in decline. This notion of world ages placed racist politics on a cosmic scale and invested them with a sense of inevitability. When the struggle between racial groups was revealed as cosmically ordained, to resist that struggle was to resist the cosmos. As we have seen, in the harmonial tradition the key to enlightenment was to let go and allow oneself to be buoyed and carried by the forces of the cosmos. So if the cosmos revealed, through a chosen medium, that the struggle against degenerate races (or homosexuals or secular humanists) was the order of the day, a harmonialist could only accede to the program.

Arguably, the utopian vision in-and-of itself contains the seeds of fascism. Any vision of perfection precludes all elements that would disturb said perfection. Perfection calls for the replication of the same and the eradication of difference as do both the historical model attacked by Foucault in his discussion of genealogy and the struggle to sustain the fiction of self. The particular vision of perfection desired by the traditions discussed herein, one that draws on the biblical heaven as its model, is especially afflicted with the problems of homogeneity. The surcease of struggle, when attached to the maintenance of individual personalities, as it is in biblical visions of heaven as well as in Spiritualism and the philosophy espoused by Pelley, presented a peculiar set of challenges. For all struggle to subside, all desires must be met, which is another way of saying, if struggle is to cease then so must desire. This disappearance of desire is reflected in the sloughing off of the body—by the whiteness of heaven and its strange sexlessness. The centrifugal force of the movements thus far discussed is undone by their

insistence on the survival of the individual human personality, minus its animal attributes, after death. The maintenance of self, the central, centripetal desire attached to totalizing historical narratives remained despite the disruptive forces of trance, out-of-body excursions and prophesized social upheaval. The vision of heaven and thus the utopia envisioned by the movements we have been examining was a vision of purity, and the drive toward purity, by the very rigor of its exclusivity, is arguably fascist.

Thus the displaced utopian imaginary can and did operate in a fascist register as well as a progressive one. The sense of world historical mission and destiny so often attached to fascist politics, especially in its national socialist guise, began already to nudge it into the realm of the displaced utopian imaginary. When one adds the politics of race and all the mystical baggage it had accrued via Blavatsky's musings as well as a divinely ordained mission of purification, one finds oneself squarely in the realm of the mythic, the realm whose logic the displaced utopian imaginary pursues. Pelley's impulse toward the seizure of power and his organization of a cadre of armed supporters might seem to tilt his movement over into traditionally *active* utopian politics. I would argue, however, that the fantastic nature of his politico-spiritual aspirations and the fact that said aspirations never successfully went beyond posturing and wishful thinking placed him more so in the trajectory we have been tracing.

Pelley's politics, while labeled by his contemporaries as fascist, were a troubled amalgam of white supremacy, Christian messianism and democratic ideals. As to his sympathy for European fascism, his own words in a broadside addressed "To All Christian Ministers" leave that affiliation unquestionable.

This organization is working shoulder to shoulder with the finest Germanic elements in the United States to actualize the ideals of the Nazi Party of the Fatherland, without violence if it can be managed, but similarly inspired to bring a rebirth of racial

consciousness to Christian elements of North America as a new racial consciousness has been inspired of late in Germany under Adolph Hitler.

You are asked to fully inform yourself about the true purpose and accomplishments of the Nazi Party before passing judgment on it for instigating race hatred or religious prejudices. We also ask that you permit yourself to be fully informed regarding the tenets of the Christ Democracy, which this Great Silver Legion is sponsoring.¹⁶⁵

As we shall see, his anti-Semitism was also quite apparent throughout much of his writings. His disdain for modern mass culture mirrored Nazi ruminations on the sullyng effects of same.

Have you listened to so much asinine jazz over the Jewish-owned air that you can't hear the voices of those Revolutionary heroes calling to you across the years to honor their sacrifice and uphold their ideals...Have you watched so many gangster movies, made by Jews and exhibited in Jewish-monopolized theatres, that you can't see Ethan Allen in that greatest drama of modern times, thumping on the door of Fort Ticonderoga and crying, "Open in the name of Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress."¹⁶⁶

Yet there were elements of his "Christian Economics" that hearkened back to the Socialist ideals of *The Philosopher*, discouraging any full identification of Pelley's vision with fascism. Pelley's keystone work on Christian Economics, *No More Hunger: Presenting the Christian Commonwealth* recalled the social gospel's condemnation of exploitation as well as the Marxist formula of from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. As much as he derided Roosevelt, Pelley's vision had more than a whiff of the welfare state. "We say, we people who believe in the principles of the Living Christ behind this finer and better form of democracy, 'the weak are with us to be made strong!' We make it our business to set up permanently a system whereby they can get the help of their fellows in becoming strong—nor earn their odium because they cannot, with the strength given them, keep up with the inhuman pace for which they were not equipped by nature."¹⁶⁷ His language often recalled the

¹⁶⁵ William Dudley Pelley, *Silver Shirts of America: To All Christian Ministers*. Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library's vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁶⁶ William Dudley Pelley, *The Silver Ranger, Bulletin No. 3*, (Oklahoma City). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library's vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁶⁷ William Dudley Pelley, *The Silvershirt Weekly*, Asheville V1, No.1 (Asheville NC: Aug. 29, 1938).

revolutionary nomenclature of the committed socialist, calling on the faithful to battle greed, unbridled competition and Mammon. His description of the Christian Commonwealth as a “National Intentional Community” anticipated the 1960s counterculture’s later adoption of the same term as an alternative to “commune.” This odd amalgam recalled nothing so much as American Populism with its tendency to shuttle between the espousal of radical democracy and anti-corporate capitalism and a rhetoric of provincialism, race hatred and exclusion. Of course one primary difference between the two is that ascended masters, whom he referred to as Mentors, dictated Pelley’s politics via “mental radio.”

Pelley would go on over the next ten years, in a varied and proliferating number of periodicals, to sell his occult vision of Christian Patriotism and his increasingly shrill message of anti-Semitism. Anticipating the targets of later American extreme right wing organizations, Pelley attacked the ACLU, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, the American Medical Association and, of course, Hollywood. As an example of the particularly Semitic evil of the latter, Pelley recalled his efforts to mirror Christ’s feeding of the multitudes in the screenplay for *Torment!* and the “typically” offensive response from the studio thusly:

Ve ain’t makin’ it moom-pitchers about your bastard Christ nor his loafes and fishes. Vat ve vant in it moom-pitchers is legs. Understand me?...legs!...Vimin’s legs! Ven ve get done vid you Christians, I guess you find out vy ve got it control of movies and it ain’t to preach no sermon in a church. I’m telling you! Better ve should put every goy girl in a whorehouse, and by gott you’ll like it!¹⁶⁸

Pelley, along with making the question of race more prominent in his version of the displaced utopian imaginary, also brought to bear the rhetoric of conspiracy theory—the above quote having shameless recourse to the trope of Womanhood’s corruption by predatory cliques—rhetoric that would continue to haunt the alien-human nexus. Pelley would go on to run for President in 1936 as representative of the "Christian Party" promising to "make it impossible for

¹⁶⁸ Ribuffo, 58.

a Jew to own property in the United States," and to "defranchise [sic] the Jew by Constitutional Amendment." These "reforms" were to take place in the newly emerged Christian Commonwealth envisioned by Pelley. Said commonwealth, a post-rebirth adaptation of the utopian principles outlined by Pelley in his *Philosopher juvenilia*, was to be the spearhead in the epochal battle between Aryans and Jewry, a battle of cosmic import and proportions. His run for president proved less than successful—placing him on the ballot in only one state, Washington (a state that would be among the few nominating Pat Robertson a half-century later).

The beginning of Pelley's legal problems preceded his run for president by some two years. In 1934, the newly formed House of Representatives Special Committee on Un-American Activities sent a representative to Asheville, N.C. who, cooperating with local authorities, seized Pelley's financial records. Later that same month the State of North Carolina indicted Pelley on charges of fraud, charges of which he was convicted in January of the following year. The "Chief," as he was known among the Silver Shirts, continued to attract the attention of federal authorities, openly vilifying Roosevelt as "the lowest form of human worm" and accusing him of a variety of crimes.¹⁶⁹ While Roosevelt expressed an interest in bringing Pelley up on charges of libel nothing came of it, but in 1939, Pelley and the Silver Shirts again became the target of the House of Representatives Special Committee on Un-American Activities, newly reconvened under Chairman Martin Dies. The investigation was complicated by appeals and outstanding legal problems in North Carolina, and came to a head with Pelley arrested under the 1917 Espionage Act on 4 April 1942. He was sentenced in Indianapolis and remanded to the custody of the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute with a sentence of fifteen years. Upon his release, he would take up residence in Noblesville, Indiana and start Soulcraft Press as a vehicle for his ongoing clairaudient revelation.

¹⁶⁹ Ribuffo, 74.

Pelley exhibited a variety of traits that mark him as contiguous with the modern varieties of enchanted public discourse thus far examined. First and foremost, Pelley’s primary struggle was to disseminate wisdom received via occult means. His mediumistic capacities allowed him to tap into a broader cosmic reality—a reality that functioned as a mirror for contemporary social problems and held out the promise of a utopian future. The sources of Pelley’s divine inspiration were the Mentors, “speaking from higher dimensions of Time and Space.”¹⁷⁰ The Mentors offered wisdom “combining the timelessness of the East with the energy and Purpose of the West,” recalling the Orientalism of Theosophy.¹⁷¹ A Mentor is defined by the Soulcraft Elucidata as “some capable person in a higher octave of discarnate life who undertakes to guide and educate an earthly pupil so that he gradually becomes adept in time in the higher esoteric principles.”¹⁷² The Mentors were joined by the “Heavenly Host” as spiritual intercessors. The latter are defined as

souls of one-time men and women who have progressed so far and so high, that there is no longer anything profitable to be derived from going in and out of earthly incarnation but who have not yet attained the capabilities of heading up universes in their own rights. In this interim period, they function as a guardian host to the spiritually illiterate people of Earth as necessity demands.¹⁷³

Between the two, the Mentors and the Heavenly Host, we see combined attributes of Spiritualism and Theosophy. As a bridge to the first true Space Brother religion, the Great I Am, we should note the potential points of origin for Pelley’s spectral interlocutors and indeed of humanity itself.

¹⁷⁰ William Dudley Pelley, *Books for your Soulcraft Library* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁷¹ William Dudley Pelley, *Something about Soulcraft*. (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁷² William Dudley Pelley, *The Soulcraft Elucidata: A Handbook of Expositions of Terms Employed in Soulcraft* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press, 1952) 28.

¹⁷³ William Dudley Pelley, *The Soulcraft Elucidata: A Handbook of Expositions of Terms Employed in Soulcraft* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press, 1952) 35-36.

Man, as Man, is not indigenous to this solar satellite by any means. Contingents of Man species have come to this planet from time to time over the aeons from a wide variety of similarly populated heavenly bodies. They have come in spiritized form—that is, Thinking Units lacking organism, but appropriating or otherwise acquiring the ape organism to “clothe” themselves, because over long periods of observation the ape organism seemed to be the most facile organism to get physical effects in the material world that was the Earth’s composition.¹⁷⁴

Thus the writings and philosophy of William Dudley Pelley both replicated many of the central tropes established by Spiritualism and Theosophy and anticipated both the rise of space brothers and the increasingly paranoid politics of the mid-to-late twentieth century exemplars of the displaced utopian imaginary.

THE GREAT I AM

It was in the year that Pelley’s legal problems began in earnest, 1934, that Guy and Edna Ballard began their bid to appropriate Pelley’s membership. The Ballard’s Great I Am is generally understood to be the first true space brother religion. As Gordon Melton notes in *The Contactees: A Survey*:

Not only did Ballard become the first to actually build a religion on contact with extraterrestrials (as opposed to merely incorporating the extraterrestrial data into another already existing religion), but this emphasis was placed upon frequent contact with the masters from whom he received regular messages to the followers of the world contactee movement.¹⁷⁵

The Great I Am is a classic example of both religious syncretism and religious hucksterism. The Ballards came to prominence in a time of religious and political ferment, working as contemporaries of Father Divine and Aimee Semple McPherson as well as Father Coughlin. They combined elements of Buddhism, Hinduism (e.g. their followers were referred to as

¹⁷⁴ William Dudley Pelley, *Soulcraft Seventy-Eighth Discourse: Redemption: How the Early States of Man worked for Spirit’s Concept of Society* (Noblesville IN: Soulcraft Chapels Press). Undated material recovered from Noblesville, Indiana Public Library’s vertical file archive on William Dudley Pelley in July of 2005.

¹⁷⁵ J. Gordon Melton, “The Contactees: A Survey” in *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 7.

Chelas, which in the Hindu tradition indicates the follower of a guru) and Christianity along with the primary sources of Spiritualism and Theosophy.

Gerald Bryan, a disaffected member, reports in his 1940 exposé that the bulk of the I Am's early membership was drawn from William Pelley's politico-religious organization. In his 1940 expose of The Great I AM, *Psychic Dictatorship in America*, Bryan writes of a meeting held by the Ballards in 1934 to which the treasurer of the Pelley organization was invited. At this meeting, the Ballards discussed various spiritual communiqués they had received from no less a personage than the Comte de St. Germain. Said communiqués discussed the Master's plan for propagating a new government in America, a government based largely on the principles espoused by Pelley. Participants were also alerted by St. Germain to the central role they were to play in bringing about this new order.

He told those flattered students of their past incarnations! He recited their marvelous achievements! They had all done great and stirring things! All of them had been associated with him before! They would even be closer to him now! They would now have a part to play in bringing the *new* civilization into America!

"These beloved students," [the message] begins, "are all far advanced souls with whom we have been closely associated before wherein very great Light has reigned. All of this group that are here were in association in the civilization of 70,000 years ago where the Sahara Desert now is."¹⁷⁶

Thus, with promises of greatness both past and future, was a key member of Pelley's organization seduced. And thus began the Ballard's successful bid to woo and absorb the membership of the Silver Legion into the ranks of the Great I Am.

The Great I AM was founded in the 1930s by Guy (1878-1939) and Edna (1886-1971) Ballard. Both Guy and Edna (a.k.a. Lotus and Twin Flame), the latter of whom some argue was the real driving force behind the Great I Am, had been involved with the occult as spiritualist

¹⁷⁶ Gerald B. Bryan, *Psychic Dictatorship in America* (Los Angeles: Truth Research Publications, 1940) 24 <http://www.home.gil.com.au/~perovich/Ballards/PsyDict.pdf> (accessed July 8, 2005)

mediums as well as students of Theosophy for years prior to the foundation of their church.¹⁷⁷

Bryan compared the Ballards to the Fox sisters, calling the Great I Am a “Streamlined”

Spiritualism.

But in this latter-day happening which assertedly occurred in an equally unpretentious house, although not considered “haunted,” this ancient and primitive belief in the supernatural has taken wings on a flight of fancy far beyond that of the humble happenings at the cottage home of the little Fox sisters. For this later happening deals not with spirit “raps” and “knocks,” but with distinctly more modern and streamlined methods of communicating with the other side of life.

In short, instead of having ordinary “spirit guides” and commonplace “ghosts” of departed relatives giving the usual type of spirit messages, we now have, reportedly, great and mighty “*Ascended Masters*” speaking audibly over a dazzling “Light and Sound Ray!”¹⁷⁸

The Ballards went beyond the spiritual telegraph and Pelley’s “mental radio,” utilizing a device that suggests nothing so much as the then-emerging technology of television. The Ballards, like Pelley before them, combined the two key nineteenth century sources of Spiritualism and Theosophy. Guy Ballard was also apparently familiar with Mesmerism. Bryan described him as making passes over his audiences before leading them in “decrees,” which were basically affirmations intended to create openness toward the guiding power of the Great I Am presence.¹⁷⁹

In 1930, Guy W. Ballard, a.k.a. Godfre Ray King and Ascended Master Daddy Ballard, was ostensibly investigating reports about the presence of a group of Divine Men known as the Brotherhood of Mt. Shasta. While engaged in this investigation Ballard came across a fellow hiker who revealed himself as the Comte de St. Germain, an ascended Master who Blavatsky had claimed as the greatest Oriental adept in Europe. A central figure in the Theosophical pantheon of the Great White Brotherhood, it was Germain, according to theosophical lore, who founded

¹⁷⁷ Bryan

¹⁷⁸ Bryan, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Bryan.

the Theosophical Society along with Masters Morya and Koot Hoomi and H.P. Blavatsky. His position as an occultist who wielded both spiritual and terrestrial power and his alleged many lives as a series of great men, made him a figure of great appeal to many generations of spiritual aspirants.

The Comte de St. Germain was an actual historical figure in the court of Louis XV. A polymath of international note, Germain engaged in international diplomacy (or according to the detractors among his contemporaries, espionage) at the behest of both Louis and Frederick the Great of Prussia. He also achieved renown as an alchemist and occultist and was linked with both the Knights Templar and Freemasonry's Egyptian Rite (convened by Germain's student, Cagliostro). The Comte de St. Germain claimed that he had also lived as St. Alban, the first British martyr, as Proclus, head of Plato's Academy, as Merlin and so forth. In his guise as Great White Brother, St. Germain lived previously as the High Priest of the Violet Flame Temple, a central institution in the paradisiacal civilization that flourished in what is now the Sahara Desert some 50,000 years ago. The violet flame is still a central element in I Am's theology. As one authority discusses it, the "violet consuming flame of divine love"

is a light, generated by the 'I AM Presence,' that surrounds individuals. When the Violet Flame is invoked, it obliterates evil and discord around the believer. The ultimate goal is to purify oneself, with the guidance of the Ascended Masters and the aid of the Violet Flame, so as to leave the human body and become an Ascended Master."¹⁸⁰

The above description has recourse to the rhetoric of purity and the gnostic disgust for the body so prevalent in the discourses of alien-human communication discussed thus far—the goal is to shed one's skin via the purifying power of fire and move to the next plane of existence. This recurring desire toward disembodiedness captures something essential about the displaced utopian imaginary. One hallmark of the displaced utopian imaginary is the favoring of the

¹⁸⁰ Donny Wyatt, "I AM Religious Activity" in *Religious Movements Home Page Project* ed. Douglas E. Cowan. <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/iam.html> (accessed July 8, 2005)

actions of some semi-divine or extraterrestrial Other over the actions of the terrestrial mortal as the engine of radical social change. One central understanding that promotes this tendency is that our current sense of what is real is somehow fundamentally askew. In the traditional Gnostic worldview, a demiurge, a blind idiot god, created the world we live in, and our existence as fleshly forms in this world clouds our perception, dividing us from the true creator of the universe and thus from reality. True existence lies outside the material realm, and thus true power does as well. If we are crippled by our embodiment and are imprisoned on this earth, we must place our hopes for change in beings that have somehow escaped, or at least begun to escape, the material plane. Thus is the urge toward disembodiedness inextricably linked with the understanding that the true fulcrum of change lies outside human agency.

It was the Comte de St. Germain who, after centuries of fruitlessly searching Europe for a suitable vessel for his wisdom, turned to America and met Ballard on the slopes Mt. Shasta. This meeting comprised the founding moment of the I Am Ascended Master Religious Activity, or the Great I Am (an organization that still exists and which provided the primary source material for one of the more infamous of modern cults, Elizabeth Claire Prophet's California-based Church Universal and Triumphant).¹⁸¹ Upon meeting St. Germain, Ballard was presented with a cool creamy liquid to quench his thirst. That draught of fluid, whose origin Germain claimed as the "Universal Supply," was the first in a series of lessons through which St. Germain would reveal the wisdom of the ages via his chosen "Accredited Messengers," Guy Ballard, his Wife (Edna), and son (Donald) with the goal of bringing about the Seventh Golden Age, The Age of I Am on earth.

¹⁸¹ James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton. *Church Universal and Triumphant in Scholarly Perspective* (Stanford: Center for Academic Publication, 1994).

Ballard was told during his initial meeting with St. Germain to retire to the Royal Teton Mountain on New Year's Eve. Ballard did so, traveling with St. Germain inside the mountain to a great cavern.

Once assembled, Ballard and 105 others became host to 12 Venusians who appeared in their midst in a blaze of light. During the course of the visit, the Venusians played the harp and violin much to the delight of all. On a large mirror they showed scenes from their home planet of advanced scientific and technological achievements. They also revealed a future dissipation of the dark forces threatening the earth and the gradual coming of a time of peace and goodwill.¹⁸²

These 12 feet "tall masters from Venus" were collectively referred to by Ballard as the Lords of the Flame, a title which directly references a section of the Great White Brotherhood as delineated by Blavatsky. These ascended masters from other planets would continue to play a central role in post-World War II saucer culture, with the only real addition being the saucer itself.¹⁸³ In addition to being a variant on the earlier stream of Spiritualism, the Great I Am would function as a sort of template for the later contactee groups, thus extending the influence of Theosophy into the post WWII saucer boom.

The description of Ballard's encounter with the Lords of Flame is drawn from *Unveiled Mysteries*, a book published by Ballard under the name Godfre Ray King in the same year that the Ballards began their coup against Pelley's Silver legion. The description adds a new element to the communication between human and Other. While the contacts we have discussed thus far occur along spiritualist lines, i.e. via trance medium, astral travel or automatic writing, Ballard writes of meeting both the Venusians and St. Germain in the flesh. Thus contact is made in this case in a fully conscious state and with an embodied entity in real time. What would seem to be a trend running counter to the Gnostic impulse begins with Ballard. It is with the Great I Am that we begin to see a shift toward an emphasis on both embodied and conscious communication

¹⁸² Melton, "Contactees," 2.

¹⁸³ Melton.

in cases of contact with Others. Ballard's contacts also usher in an era in which such contacts are increasingly with creatures from other planets—an ongoing embodiment of the Other's home.

By the late 1930's, Guy and Edna's ongoing channeling of St. Germain (the predominant mode of communication was still via occult means—at this point embodied communication was an *emergent* mode) drew a following, estimates of which range from one to three million.¹⁸⁴ The Ballards made a fine living off the adherents to their faith, selling salvational futures, rather than shares of non-operative oil wells, which had been Guy's forte prior to the founding of the Great I Am.¹⁸⁵ Bryan describes the process of tithing at an open public meeting:

Specific references are now being made to the "I AM Love Gift Boxes" located at the rear of the auditorium. You find later that they are very conveniently and advantageously placed for the reception of the little "Love Gift" envelope you hold in your hand.

"*Dear ones!*" says the announcer earnestly. "*Blessed Mr. and Mrs. Ballard do not need these offerings; they are merely for you beloved students to 'open up channels' for blessings from the great Ascended Masters.*"

The eyes of the announcer again look heavenward as though showers of blessings had already accompanied this reference to the unseen "Masters."

"Unless you give freely," he adds, still very earnestly, "you cannot receive." Then very emphatically, "That is the Ascended Master's law of life!"¹⁸⁶

Thus Bryan reveals the exceptional potential for fund raising implicit in harmonialism. As previously stated, if you were in harmony with the universe then all good things flowed toward you. It was the cultivation of sensitivity and occult knowledge (which was provided by some privileged medium, in this case the Ballards) along with the practice of openness that placed one in harmony. The openness in this case was cultivated by giving—specifically cash. The Ballards apparently discouraged the use of copper pennies in tithing, copper being offensive to the

¹⁸⁴ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, "The 'I AM' Religious Activity." in *Harper's Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Texe Marrs, "I AM," in *Texe Marrs Book of New Age Cults and Religions* (Austin, Texas: Living Truth Ministries, 1990).

¹⁸⁵ Guy did, however, continue to sell shares in a gold mine during his years as "accredited messenger," as well as borrowing against the caches of gold that St. Germain promised to reveal.

¹⁸⁶ Bryan, 8-9.

Masters. Members of the I Am Ascended Master Religious Activity were encouraged rather to use gold as the preferred medium for an offering. The blend of commerce and religion is at least as old as the recorded history of either enterprise. From the expected offering to the keepers of the mysteries, to the trade in holy relics and the sale of indulgences, spiritual and terrestrial profits have often been combined in Western culture. Given the religious energies of American culture, the sense that financial success and godliness are fundamentally linked and the consistent desire for transformative experience, the combination of religion and commerce in America is both common and varied. The Great I AM extracted wealth from its adherents in part via the promise of riches that would follow from full harmonial alignment, thus speaking to aspirants' worldly desires as well as their more spiritual needs. The Great I AM fell squarely in a long tradition of American religion for profit, a tradition that blithely combines what are often genuine spiritual aspirations with profit motive.

As mentioned previously, the Ballards, at the behest of St. Germain, planned to usher in a new eon in America. The Great I Am, like the Silver Shirts, consistently drew upon nativism as a strain in its operative ideology. The Ballards' combination of politics and religion was a bit more in line with Theosophy than Pelley's version. While Pelley drew consistently on images of Christ as the tutelary figure in his political philosophy, the Ballards' default leader was St. Germain. Christ, of course, had been enlisted politically many times before Pelley. Pelley was drawing on a long line of precedent. The Ballard's use of the figure of St. Germain placed their movement more squarely in a mystical occult lineage. The following description of an open meeting highlights the relation between nativism and mysticism as preached by Guy and Edna.

"We must save America!" says the announcer. You learn there are "vicious forces" within her borders and without. These are all to be destroyed! They are to be "*blasted*" from the face of the earth by the "decrees" of the students. Saint Germain, the mighty "Cosmic Master," has commanded it!

Like other movements which have as their credo the “saving of America,” the flag of the American republic is displayed prominently on the stage...Also, little American flags are displayed prominently on the lapels and white dresses of men and women in the audience. The man on the stage has his little flag too. Everywhere there seems to be flags—little stripes of red and white and rectangles of blue—adding more color and sentiment to gala event.

But you soon learn to your surprise that the color red is simply intolerable to Saint Germain and his “Accredited Messengers.” It is the color of the communists and all that is vicious, says the announcer. “You students should not wear it... No Ascended Master ever uses it.” The only exception seems to be the flag of our country.

“Some day, however,” the announcer quotes Saint Germain as saying, “when the Ascended Masters take charge of the affairs of this country, there will be *gold stripes* instead of red ones in the flag of the new American republic!”

“This is not a religion,” the announcer adds, “but a patriotic movement.”

He goes on to extol the “marvelous” patriotic work of the “*Minute Men of Saint Germain*.” This you learn is a men’s patriotic organization within the parent body which has dedicated itself to fly to the rescue of America, as did the minute men of 1776.

You learn also of the activities of the “*Daughters of Light*,” a sort of ladies auxiliary, with similar patriotic aims and purposes.¹⁸⁷

Under the guidance of the Ascended Masters, America was to serve a privileged role in the world to come. Bryan’s exposé (not an unimpeachable source given the author’s estranged relationship with the Great I Am, but generally consistent with other sources of information on the Ballards relates that one of the stated goals of the church was to replace the then current American government (Roosevelt was a great villain in the Ballards’ creed just as he was in Pelley’s) with a more enlightened version - presumably led by Ascended Master Daddy Ballard.¹⁸⁸ Both the Silver Legion and the Great I Am, like Spiritualism before them, draw on the political sentiments of their day, specifically anti-communism.¹⁸⁹

The nativist chauvinism indicated by the Ballardian sense that America was to lead the world into the new millennium bore a striking resemblance to the broader terrestrial chauvinism

¹⁸⁷ Bryan, 9-10.

¹⁸⁸ Rosemary Ellen Guiley, “The ‘I AM’ Religious Activity.” in *Harper’s Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); Texe Marrs, “I AM,” in *Texe Marrs Book of New Age Cults and Religions* (Austin, Texas: Living Truth Ministries, 1990).

¹⁸⁹ The Ballards largely jettisoned the overt anti-Semitism of Pelley, though anti-Semitism and anti-Communism are bound together at the root.

operative in most later “space-brother” discourse. Earth is always the pivotal planet in some intergalactic plot or struggle. Humanity itself is, of course, the key element in the great interest expressed by extraterrestrial parties regarding the earth and its destiny. The tropes of what were to become the human potential and new age movements are key here. Central to both of the latter movements and their multiple variants is the sense that humanity is nearing some potential evolutionary leap in consciousness (if not physical state). This leap will be brought about by the concerted efforts of groups and individuals of advanced abilities—groups who through the application of whatever occult practice (meditation, visualization etc.) will achieve some higher level of harmony with the universe and thus collectively usher in the new eon. The Great I Am professed itself to be such a group. The attraction of the ascended masters and various alien intelligences to humanity was based largely upon humanity’s supposed potential. The term *potential* was key here because humanity might also potentially continue down the path on which it was already headed. Rather than bootstrapping itself up to the next level of consciousness, humanity might simply destroy itself along with the planet. The sense communicated by messages from various space brothers was that we were at the pivot point. It could go either way, enlightenment or Armageddon and with these stakes in mind, the space brothers had important missions for their contactees.

In short, the space brothers promised nothing less than their own version of the Judeo-Christian apocalypse, a version that was a strange hybrid of the religious and the secular. Proceeding from its Greek root, the apocalypse was an uncovering or revelation. In its scripturally based historical meaning, the apocalypse was the divine disclosure that ushered in the end days. It was “the eschatological crisis in which the cosmic powers of evil are destroyed,

the cosmos is restored, and Israel is redeemed.”¹⁹⁰ The Apocalypse was the end of time in the sense that it signified a shift from profane time to a divine space that both transcended and embodied all time. It represented both the alpha and omega of the human species in that it represented a return to our divine point of origin, a return that was encoded as the sole and final goal of human existence and clearly embodied the Lacanian desire for a return to the Real. From a Judeo-Christian perspective, the apocalypse was the historical money-shot, the release and seeding of the final phase of humanity.

Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the apocalyptic underwent a transformation in which the divinely ordained and human aspiration were conflated. The central concern of the lineage discussed in this dissertation was and is to bring about the next phase in human evolution. This next big step is both preordained *and* contingent upon the efforts of “enlightened” groups and individuals. I will again note, however, that said effort is not expended along lines of traditional political action but rather in reconfiguring the relation between self and cosmos. It is not the power or activity of the believers themselves that will bring about the hoped for ascension but rather the power of the cosmos that their practice taps into. The evolutionary referent in such thinking has been variously construed as the development of such supposedly latent human powers as telekinesis, telepathy, astral projection and other magical faculties; as a mass embarkation to our new home in the stars; or some more ineffable shift, such as contact and union with the *overmind*.

The Great I AM and groups that followed in its lineage promised their followers a position in the avant-garde. You can bootstrap yourself to the next level *now!* The promised benefits functioned as asymptotic objects of desire—always promised, never arriving. The

¹⁹⁰ D.S. Russell, “Apocalyptic Literature” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger & Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press) 34.

promises of evolutionary progress held out to I Am devotees in exchange for tithing and various other sacrifices (no meat, onions, garlic, alcohol, television, or sex) included inviolable youth and health and limitless wealth. One website run by former members (the I AM Activity is ongoing) responds to such promises by proposing a wager:

Win \$10,000 Cash!!! Seriously!!! (n.b. real cash, not invisible Ascended Master cash)

We really would love to find the Ballards never lied so we encourage you to take a trip down to your local I AM sanctuary, and play ‘spot the wealthy, self made 90 year old youth.’

We are putting our money where our mouths are (something the Ballards never did) by offering \$10,000 cash for the first person to find a youthful 90 year old I AMer.

As proof of youthful countenance, the student will need to complete tests at a medical facility of choice. We also need a legitimate birth certificate. For detailed conditions of entry, please e-mail us. This is a serious offer.¹⁹¹

The sarcasm evident in the offer combined with a certain hopefulness (“We would really love to find...”) evinces the desire that draws seekers to such organizations as the Great I AM, the disappointment that follows from finding that the promises held out are merely more pie-in-the-sky and the residual belief that maybe the promise could yet be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

The cases examined in this chapter carry through many of the attributes established by Spiritualism. A tendency toward the feminine in modes of communication and being (trance and harmonialism); a rough alignment with the politics of the day; a tendency toward suspended opposition (masculine *and* feminine, earthly *and* divine, sincerity *and* flummery, centripetal *and* centrifugal) all recur throughout Christian Economics and the Great I AM Religious Activity. Like Spiritualism and Theosophy before them, Pelley and the Ballards offered access to privileged information. Those who delved into the nexus of communication between human and

¹⁹¹ “Win Ten Thousand Dollars Cash” in *The I AM Activity Exposed*. www.home.gil.com.au/~perovich/Ballards. (accessed July 1, 2005).

alien gained access to the status of initiate. The sense of initiation, of being a privileged insider, constituted a key element in the pleasures of belief, a pleasure that is both integrative and disintegrative. It constitutes a source of integration in the group identity created around those “in the know.” Initiation also offered a centripetal sense of cohesion in its offering of a still center of belief. The message from the cosmos—from the space brothers, from the ascended masters, from the dead—offered a series of credos that serve as anchors to the aspirant: human personality survives beyond death; the world beyond is one of illimitable movement toward perfection; the Others watch over us and shepherd us toward our own innate potential. Variations of these credos had long been on offer within the context of traditional Christianity. The moments herein discussed offer the consolations of Christianity and the excitement of radical politics, both read through a peculiar set of modifications: the “scientifically” established truth of life after death (the bourgeois subject projected into infinity), the presence of a host of Others who speak from the other side and the continuing efforts to render matters of spirit in terms more conversant with a positivist ethos. Elements of traditional Christianity were only fitfully present in the cases examined here. The traditional hierarchies of the Church are all but absent in the case of Spiritualism, focused into a single primary tier of leadership in the cases of Theosophy and the Great I AM, with Pelley following the form of a military chain of command. Christ was present as one avatar among many or as an elder brother.

Information provided by ascended masters promised the goods of the Christian afterlife in the here-and-now. This promise was most clearly conveyed by the claim that followers will gain the ability to “raise their bodies into ascension” without dying - a promise of heaven without death. This promise of ascension points to one of the key distinctions between the otherworldly interlocutors of Spiritualism and those of the space brother religions. The reason that figures

such as St. Germain could make their appearance in embodied form is that they had ascended without dying. Ascended masters moved to the next plane of existence in an embodied form. Their very embodiedness called for some physical locale. If they existed as bodies, they must also have had a concrete place—as opposed to the wispy nowhere of heaven—for those bodies to reside. Where did the masters stay when not visiting their chosen students? Perhaps they stayed on Venus, perhaps Mars. As spirits turned to ascended masters, so did heaven turn to other planets.

Aside from the intimations of physicality carried by Christian Economics and the Great I AM Religious Activity, Pelley and the Ballards marked the entry of a certain kind of paranoia into the human-Other nexus. While spiritualist interlocutors spoke primarily from a position of hope, promising a utopian future in heaven if not in this life, Pelley's teachings and those of the Great I AM spoke as well of the forces of destruction that must be vanquished by those in harmony with the Cosmos. Those forces, imagined as Jews or the Roosevelt administration, were understood to be operating as agents of greater forces. While the sense that powers beyond rational comprehension were guiding events from afar was part and a parcel of Spiritualism and Theosophy, the sense of the centrality of diabolical agency was not.

It bears repeating that the displaced utopian imaginary—the utopian desire and thought shaped by the human-alien communication nexus—is less concerned with politics per se than it is with the apocalyptic. The desire expressed is for dramatic and inalterable social change. That this desire might manifest around the possibility of negative change at the hands of some diabolical agency should come as no surprise, though of course such agency was not fully understood in the traditional Christian sense.¹⁹² The forces behind Roosevelt and the Jewish

¹⁹² A whole other story might be told from a traditional Christian perspective from which all of the movements and figures discussed herein would be understood as diabolical.

cabal were not simply Old Nick, but something decidedly vaguer. Just as the messengers had begun to take on a clearer form in the embodied visitations experienced by Ballard, the contours of the evil side of the Other would soon acquire clearer contour as well.

The movement toward a clearer point of origin also lent an increasing concreteness to the Other—increasingly appearing less as spectral parade than peripatetic advisors. With ascended masters claiming homes of Mt. Shasta, Tibet and Venus, we are at this point not far from the truly extraterrestrial. Pelley points the way with his sense that humans come from the stars. In the ensuing chapter we will meet Others native to other planets. The late 30's and the immediate post-WWII era brought some significant changes to the cultural milieu in which narratives of extraterrestrial communication unfurl. The first of these is Orson Welles' famed 1938 broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*; the second is the appearance of that simultaneously ominous and kitschy emblem of the space age, the flying saucer.

Ch. 3 The Saucer

INTRODUCTION

The tape has been replayed countless times. Listeners tuning in to CBS radio were startled by a news flash that interrupted a live on-air performance by Ramon Raquello and His Orchestra. Apparently, “a huge flaming object, believed to be a meteorite,” had landed on a farm near Grovers Mill, New Jersey. Reporter Carl Phillips, on the scene, recognized that the meteor in question was in fact a spaceship:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the most terrifying thing I have ever witnessed....Wait a minute, someone's crawling. Someone or....something. I can see peering out of that black hole two luminous disks...are they eyes? It might be a face. It might be...good heavens, something's wriggling out of the shadow like a gray snake. Now it's another one, and another one, and another one. They look like tentacles to me. There, I can see the thing's body. It's large as a bear and it glistens like wet leather. But that face. It...ladies and gentlemen, it's indescribable. I can hardly force myself to keep looking at it, it's so awful. The eyes are black and gleam like a serpent. The mouth is kind of V-shaped with saliva dripping from its rimless lips that seem to quiver and pulsate.¹⁹³

The brutally ugly aliens attacked and destroyed several onlookers with their “heat-rays” and the announcer conceded the horrid significance of these strange goings on. “Ladies and gentleman, I have a grave announcement to make. Incredible as it may seem, both the observations of science and the evidence of our eyes lead to an inescapable assumption that those strange beings who landed in the Jersey farmlands tonight are the vanguard of an invading army from the planet Mars.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Howard Koch, *The Panic Broadcast: Portrait of an Event* (New York: Little and Brown, 1970) 44-45.

¹⁹⁴ Koch, 45.

Thus began the famed 1938 Mercury Theater broadcast of “The War of the Worlds.” As is well known, the broadcast was met with mass panic. Minus the demarcation between “fact” and “fiction,” Orson Welles’ adaptation of the H. G. Wells’ 1897 serialized novel was interpreted by the listening public as a news broadcast of an actual alien invasion. The timing was propitious. Some seven months previously, the American public had heard, via the airwaves, accounts of Germany’s March 13 invasion of Austria. The Japanese and Chinese were at war. The Loyalists and Falangists continued their struggle in mainland Spain. Europe was careening toward one of the major conflagrations of the twentieth century, and in America, the Martians had arrived.

Beginning in 1947, some eight years after Welles’ celebrated hoax, the American public was confronted with an alien presence not so readily dismissed. As noted in a July 6 *New York Times* article, on June 24, pilot Kenneth Arnold reported that he had “observed nine objects flying at ‘1,200 miles an hour in formation, like the tail of a kite,’ over Washington State’s Cascade Mountains. Arnold gauged the speed (at 1656.71 mph rather than the *Times* more conservative 1200) by timing the objects’ passage between Mt. Adams and Mt. Rainier. He described the motion of these objects, stating, “they flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water.” On the following day, newspaper reporter Bill Bequette of the Pendleton, Oregon *East Oregonian*, coined the term “Flying Saucer” to describe what Kenneth Arnold had seen. This incident, cited by ufologists as the originary moment of the “modern age” of flying saucers, was followed by an unprecedented flurry of sightings nation-wide. Americans coast-to-coast were observing flying “dimes, “hubcaps,” and “ice cream cones.” Thus began the first in a series of American flying saucer “booms.”

The arrival of the saucer promised a change in the topography of the displaced utopian imaginary by its very physicality. These were *objects*, seen not in the dimness of the parlor or in the confines of an aspirant's mind, but in the open air by a wide variety of witnesses. But the apparently revelatory promise of the saucer was never to be realized. Welles' vision of a clearly demarcated moment in which the aliens arrive fueled much of post-World War II science fiction cinema. The aliens arrived and made their presence and purpose clearly known. The arrival of the saucers never achieved such finality—rather they advanced and receded, certain in neither their reality nor their intent. This chapter tracks two trajectories— the efforts to *rationaly* verify the presence and purpose of the saucers—or, in short, the beginnings of ufology, in which the rigors of verification proved only to nullify the phenomenon, and the ongoing trajectory of the ascended master in which the saucer appeared merely as a detail added to contactee lore. The two paths of the ufologist and the contactee, like the previously discussed moments of the displaced utopian imaginary, were both in their own ways concerned with closing the gap between a world view that allowed for spirit and one that hewed wholly to the rational. The closing of this gap was understood within the precincts of the displaced utopian imaginary as the engine of the “next thing,” the movement toward some social and evolutionary leap into the light. The fact that enlightenment was the goal of the various mystical movements detailed herein leads one to a fundamental irony. Spiritualism, Theosophy and the philosophies of William Dudley Pelley and the Ballards shared the goal of full comprehension of the natural and social worlds with the project of the big “E” Enlightenment and to a great extent shared its understanding of the central import of systematic investigation in achieving that understanding. But the point of focus of Spiritualism, Theosophy and the space brother religions was the very realm that the project of the Enlightenment, especially as realized in the positivist ethos, sought

to evacuate from the space of public discourse. Spiritualism and the movements that followed it acted with the understanding that rational comprehension of that realm—the realm of spirit—was the missing piece in the struggle to achieve earthly bliss. The engine of the displaced utopian imaginary was nothing less than the impossible—the rational comprehension of the irrational. UFOs, in contrast to their promise of material finality, proved rather to be emblematic of that impossibility.

The two narratives, that of the UFO and attempts to arrest it and the ongoing space brothers' saga, stand in stark contrast. While the space brothers continued to offer the hope of utopia achieved, the saucer appeared and disappeared—offering a fleeting glimpse of other possibilities only to recede upon closer examination. Carl Jung suggested that UFOs, as mandalic symbols of totality, appeared as an expression of the dissociation brought about by the onset of the cold war. The iron curtain, in Jung's view, delineated a traumatic dissociation—east v. west—of two parts of a whole. The saucer promised a tantalizing vision of wholeness, a stilling of the turmoil brought about by the violent sundering of east and west.¹⁹⁵ Jung argued that the form of the saucer itself in its roundness recalled nothing so forcefully as the archetype of totality and wholeness. In an era troubled by an unprecedented global split and the specter of atomic war (set in motion by the *splitting* of the atom) the saucer held out the promise of

¹⁹⁵ Along with representing a healing of the dissociation brought about by the Cold War, the saucer was also emblematic of the immanent threat of Soviet communism. One initial interpretation of the presence of flying saucers in U.S. skies was that they were a Soviet secret weapon. While this hypothesis was quickly dismissed by official government inquiries into the UFO phenomenon, it continued to haunt the public imagination—particularly in the allegorical forms offered by science fiction cinema. In the visions of 1950's and 60's science fiction, saucers functioned as harbingers of physical and cultural destruction at the hands of an alien ideology. This more paranoid vision of the UFO figured centrally in neither ufology nor space brother religions in the period under discussion in this chapter. It would not be until after the advent of abduction, the subject of the ensuing chapter, that the paranoia of the Cold War truly came to roost within the precincts of the displaced utopian imaginary.

salvation through the union of opposites.¹⁹⁶ Yet the saucer, promising a union at the broader level imagined by Jung and the more specific union of two opposing world views, was unreachable, evanescent.

Jung described the situation of the post World War II arrival of the saucer in terms that resonate strongly with the dynamics that inform the displaced utopian imaginary. He surmised that the presence of UFOs could be described in two potential ways. One was that the saucers were a rumor that, broadly circulated, created the ground for visions. The second was that the UFOs were objectively real and the repeated sightings of these objects created the ground for the emergence of a myth. The first, where rumor leads to visions, sounds like nothing so much as the materialization of the spiritual or ethereal—imagination made manifest. The second, where sightings of actual objects lead to the formulation of myth recalls the spiritualization of the material—material reality rendered sublime via the agency of myth. Both dynamics speak to the desire so central to the displaced utopian imaginary, the desired integration of the materialist and idealist world views, a positivist world that allowed for the presence of spirit and mystery. Jung, in suggesting that the saucers were *both* myth *and* in some sense objectively real, captured the logic of the phenomenon—one that hewed to the form of both/and rather than either/or. Yet the fundamental question of organized research into UFOs in the years following World War II was whether or not UFOs even existed—either yes or no.

The flying saucer, or UFO, appeared as an embodiment of the aspired to rapprochement between the worlds of spirit and material. Its presence in the skies of the modern world recalled the signs and portents of the bible. Its evanescence—UFO's appeared and disappeared

¹⁹⁶ Carl Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (New York: MJF Books, 1978).

apparently at will—spoke to the ongoing presence and unfathomable nature of mystery. Its apparent solidity, granted some level of official status by the sobriquet unidentified flying *object*, seemed to locate it in the world of positivism. As *object*, mystery was made amenable to the rigors of empiricism. Its status as object implied that it must be knowable in terms of the coordinates of observable reality. As Welles' broadcast foretold, the emergence of the flying saucer seemed to promise an envoy from worlds beyond amenable to “both the observations of science and the evidence of our eyes.” Simultaneously, the UFO symbolized the impossibility of the rapprochement between the spiritual and the material—or more precisely the rapprochement between spiritual and materialist worldviews. As an object of scientific inquiry it resisted any definite interpretation. Like the will o' the wisp, it seemed to disappear upon close examination. In the present day, after nearly half of a century, the study of UFO's has yet to produce any material evidence that definitively establishes the existence or non-existence of the phenomenon. As we shall see, the very nomenclature that defined the field of ufology from the 1970's on suggested that the full comprehension of the UFO was somehow asymptotic.

Ufology constituted a kind of limit case for the rational engagement with the world of spirit. The UFO as object all but disappeared under the rigors of empiricism. Its elusiveness, its tendency to exhibit behaviors apparently contradictory to physical laws (appearing and disappearing, maneuvering in impossible ways, accelerating at inconceivable rates), and its capacity to invoke awe in its witnesses all invited the rigidities of staunch skepticism. The central irony of ufology was that it attempted to examine an object with a set of tools the very nature of which denied the possibility of the object in question. In examining ufology, this chapter will treat a series of narratives, personalities and objects. The U.S. military was the first to systematically analyze UFO reports. Given the UFO's unknown point of origin and the

potential public responses to the flurry of reported sightings, it was clearly in the interests of the federal government to offer an official explanation for the phenomenon. After some 20 years of research tainted by the overriding concern of “national security”—both research and taint to be discussed below—various independent factions arose to carry out an ostensibly less partisan research program. One heuristic both central to the enterprise of ufology and particularly revealing of ufology’s self-imposed limitations emerged out of this latter phase. The range of “close encounters” defined by J. Allen Hynek carved out a set of cases that were something of a departure from those thus far discussed as constitutive of the displaced utopian imaginary. As we shall see, following the model of “close encounters,” meaningful communication between human and Other was beyond the pale of “traditional” ufology. Hynek’s heuristic will provide a guide to both ufology and UFO encounters up to, but not including, the point of contact.

After a discussion of ufology, the chapter will then proceed to a discussion of the second element of the post-saucerian displaced utopian imaginary under consideration—the ongoing saga of the space brothers. The development of a connection between the UFO and the ongoing discourse of the space brothers was uneven. In the decades following World War II, there were both instances in which contactees continued to convey communiqués from extraterrestrial entities yet made no mention of UFO’s and cases where saucers whisked contactees away to stellar destinations. In these latter cases, the UFO made no meaningful addition to the space brother myth, merely serving as a mode of transport. Yet while space brother narratives seemed unconcerned with the novelty of the saucer’s arrival the advent of physical travel versus the expedients of trance-based communication did speak to the previously discussed dynamic of the increasing embodiment of communication between human and Other. The chapter treats two particular cases from the lore of the space brother, one that enacted the dynamic whereby the

space brother myth continued in its development without any substantial mention of flying saucers and one that included the saucer primarily, if not solely, as mode of transport. In the two cases, those of Dorothy Martin and George Adamski, the saucer was marked in turn as absent or superfluous. What *did* emerge from these two cases was the clear contour of the fully imagined space brother myth: elements of continuity with earlier occult traditions found in members' beliefs, in the content of messages, and (sometimes) in the mode of communication via which the messages were received; intimations of the cosmic importance of both message and recipient; warnings of imminent disaster based upon negative human affect (hatred, violence, greed, selfishness) and/or the rapid pace of technological development (particularly atomic weaponry); and lastly the promise of the potential for accelerated evolutionary growth - moving to the "next level" of consciousness/existence. But before treating the emergence of the fully formed space brother myth, let us turn first to the UFO's tantalizing promise and the ever-receding material verification of the spiritual.

UFOLOGY AND THE CULT OF MATERIAL VERIFICATION

The champions of Spiritualism imagined a process of demystification as one of the primary effects of open communication between the dead and the living. As articulated by Professor W.M. Lockwood in *The Molecular Hypothesis of Nature*, Spiritualism was not an investigation of the "supernatural," it was merely "the effort to extend the boundary line of scientific verification into the domain of the 'Unknown Country.'"¹⁹⁷ In the spirit of rational progress, communication with the dead was not a matter of occult wisdom but rather evidence of the ever-growing mastery of Man over Nature. Thus the attendant phenomena of Spiritualism were read

¹⁹⁷ W.M Lockwood. "The Molecular Hypothesis of Nature: The Relation of its Principles to Continued Existence and to the Philosophy of Spiritualism," in *Spiritualism I: Spiritualist Thought*, ed. Gary L. Ward. (New York: Garland Press, 1990) 4.

as rationally comprehensible and a variety of explanations accordingly emerged, in rough and wishful agreement with the scientific and technical knowledge of the day. The dead had developed a material technology, the spiritual telegraph, as a medium for communicating with the living. Communication between the dead and the living was explicable in terms of the molecular level of reality. Theosophy as well sought a rapprochement between science and religion, or the material and the spiritual.

Space brother communiqués likewise enacted this dynamic of materializing the spiritual. Christ existed, as did angels, but they were not supernatural beings but rather material beings from other planets. Heaven was outer space (and, in the language of one memorably entitled UFO books, God drives a flying saucer).¹⁹⁸ Thus an underlying directive of the displaced utopian imaginary in its spiritualist as well as space brother mode would appear to be to bring the world of the spirit into plain sight. Rather than pursuing a strictly materialist agenda in which matters of the spirit and the “supernatural” were relegated to the status of embarrassing anachronism, the displaced utopian imaginary repositioned the spirit as materially explicable and posited its centrality in the further unfolding of human potential. In keeping with a narrative of progress and Weberian rationalization, the story of extraterrestrial contact as told in this dissertation thus far is one of progressive materialization—a distinctly Modern story. From the vaporous materializations of the dearly departed, to meetings with fully fleshed masters in the mountains, to journeys aboard space craft with aliens who might pass as businessmen, contact took on an increasing solidity. While the arrival of the flying saucer suggested an extension of this dynamic of materialization, its presence was oddly weightless.

¹⁹⁸ R. L. Dione, *God Drives a Flying Saucer* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973).

J. Gordon Melton, a noted commentator on American religion, has argued that the only thing that was added to the contactee story by the arrival of the saucer was the saucer itself.

[T]he saucer remains the only new element in the contactee story. It tends to replace astral travel as the means of getting around, both by extraterrestrials and by earthlings tripping into outer space for the first time. The saucer is not essential, however, and in many accounts in which it appears, it is obviously an additional frill. In many contactee accounts during the fifties, no flying saucer is included at all.¹⁹⁹

While Melton is right to note that the emergence of the saucer did little to alter the content of the contactee narrative, it nevertheless does play a role in the process of materialization. While the gap between terrestrial contactee and e.t. entity had before been closed by some occult expedient, astral travel being the foremost, with the arrival of the saucer the passage of communicants was now through physical space via a material vessel. Communication acquired a new technological component (in addition to the spiritual telegraph and the Ballards' light and sound ray). Both contact and communication became increasingly embodied.

The ostensible presence of interstellar craft invited empirical study and implied a material explanation. If physical craft were repeatedly visiting earth, then clearly there must have been some physical evidence left behind. The saucers themselves, rather than some sentient Other, became a principle object of inquiry, their very name changing in time to the more clinical "unidentified flying *objects*." The emergence of ufology in response to the large number of sightings in the years following World War II is a story and study in its own right (told notably in the pages of Curtis Peebles' *Watch the Skies; A Chronicle of the Flying Saucer Myth*).²⁰⁰ There was little crossover between the story of the contactees and that of ufology. The latter basically wrote off the former as cranks. The careers of the Ballards, Adamski and their kith smacked too much of an all-too-familiar brand of religious hucksterism. The clear personal gain

¹⁹⁹ J. Gordon Melton, "The Contactees: A Survey" in *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds*, ed. James R. Lewis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 7.

²⁰⁰ Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

attached to cultivating a following spoke strongly against considering such contactees reliable witnesses. Thus the research agenda of ufology in the 1950s was unconcerned with contact as we have previously discussed it, except as a point of embarrassment. While the so-called “extraterrestrial hypothesis” (holding that UFO’s are of extraterrestrial origin) was among the explanations put forward to explain the apparent presence of UFO’s, the focus was on the object, not on any ostensible occupants and certainly not on any “message” they might have for humanity.

The first efforts at the systematic study of flying saucers or UFO’s were carried out by U.S. armed forces. In that the objects seen in the sky were potentially manned craft cruising U.S. airspace, the Air Force seemed a natural candidate for assessing the nature of the flying saucer. The Air Force had a long relationship with UFO phenomena that began shortly after Kenneth Arnold’s sighting over the Cascades in 1947. Following the recommendation of Lt. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, head of the Air Material Command, Project Sign began operation in January of 1948. In that first year of operation a clear split emerged between those sympathetic to the position that UFO’s might be intelligently piloted extraterrestrial craft (the e.t. hypothesis) and those wholly unsympathetic to the idea that UFO’s were anything that could not be conventionally explained. The early hypothesis that UFO’s were potentially a Soviet technology was quickly dismissed after initial investigations (though parallels between the Soviet menace and alien presence would continue to be explored within the precincts of popular culture). The split between the two factions came to a head when the pro-e.t. contingent prepared an “Estimation of the Situation” and sent it up the ranks. The existence of the document in question is controversial, the Air Force having denied its existence for years. No copy of it has yet surfaced. Ostensibly the document suggested interplanetary visitation as the most plausible

scenario. The document was allegedly dismissed by Air Force command as insufficiently substantiated and ordered destroyed. In the ensuing months, Project Sign relieved members of the pro-e.t. contingent who were replaced by skeptics. At this point, the official goal of the project became the reduction of the numbers of “unexplained” cases by the provision of conventional explanations. At the end of 1948, the project was renamed Grudge. By the end of the following year, Grudge’s files had been mothballed and the project was all but discontinued.

Interest in pursuing UFO research was renewed following a series of sightings and radar trackings of fast moving aerial objects near Fort Monmouth, New Jersey in 1951. This renewed interest led to yet another change in classification. In March of 1952, Project Grudge became project Blue Book. The early phase of Blue Book was the closest the Air Force came to entering into committed long-term scientific investigation of UFO phenomena. One proposed action at the time was the building of automated surveillance systems in corridors where concentrations of sightings had been reported. University of Arizona Atmospheric physicist and noted UFO researcher James E. McDonald commented that

the 24 months from October, 1951 through September, 1953, emerged as a kind of “heroic period” of Air Force investigations...the one interval during which UFO’s were seriously and relatively vigorously investigated...[S]hortly after 1953 began a sort of new dark age when debunking and superficial investigations once again came to characterize [Blue Book’s] response to the UFO problem.²⁰¹

Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14 was released to the public on October 25, 1955 and was broadly held to discredit the existence of UFO’s – even though critics pointed out that close study of the report suggests a conclusion at variance with the official position.²⁰² Throughout the remainder of its existence, up until 1969, when the Air Force terminated the project, Blue Book remained a project concerned, according to Air Force Regulation 202, with reducing “the

²⁰¹ Quoted in Jerome Clark, “Project Blue Book,” in *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 466-467.

²⁰² Dr. J. Allen Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report* (Dell: New York, 1977)

percentage of unidentifieds to the minimum.”²⁰³ In the same year Blue Book closed shop, the University of Colorado UFO Project, more generally known as the Condon Committee after its head, University of Colorado physicist Edward U. Condon, released its findings. The project was staffed, as reported by an internal memorandum between the assistant and head deans of the university’s graduate school, “almost exclusively by nonbelievers who, although they couldn’t possibly *prove* a negative result, could and probably would add an impressive body of evidence that there is no reality to the observations.”²⁰⁴ The summary of the Condon report claimed “that further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby.”²⁰⁵ Like *Project Blue Book Special Report No. 14*, critics pointed out that close study of the Condon report suggested that conclusions diverging from those of the committee were quite reasonable given the content of the overall report. Nonetheless, media reception of the report and the general public response aligned with Condon’s recommendations. The study of UFOs was scientifically insignificant; ergo UFOs did not really exist. Thus the first organized, large-scale investigations into the UFO presence were rarely sympathetic to their object and more commonly concerned with explaining it away.

The official governmental investigation was paralleled by various civilian organizations that had sprung up to investigate UFOs. The Aerial Phenomena Research Organization (APRO), formed by Jim and Coral Lorenzen, in January 1952 and the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, founded in August of 1956, were two such organizations. Civilian ufological organizations were beset over time by internal schisms, shifting levels of membership and public interest in UFOs, and financial problems as well as their own research agendas.

²⁰³ Clark, 470.

²⁰⁴ Jerome Clark, “University of Colorado UFO Project,” in *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 602.

¹³ Clark, 603

NICAP focused on pressuring the U.S. government to release its supposed secret files on the UFO presence. Such a focus made it easy to dismiss the efforts of the organization as driven by a conspiratorial mindset and an *idée fixe*. APRO focused on close encounters of the third kind, instances where witnesses have viewed animate occupants aboard sighted craft. Of course, any mention of space aliens immediately put researchers into the camp of the contactees, none of whom were taken seriously by mainstream science.

One civilian organization that emerged following the collapse of government sponsored research was founded and led by a figure long associated with large scale, government sponsored investigations into UFO activity. J. Allen Hynek had been involved in the study of UFO's from early on. As director of the McMillan Observatory at Ohio State, he had been invited to consult on the Air Force's examination of UFO reports, Project Grudge, in 1948 and continued as scientific consultant to Project Blue Book. Hynek later became an outspoken proponent on UFO's as a subject worthy of sustained scientific inquiry, founding the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) in 1973. He is probably best known for a classificatory scheme first proposed in his 1972 book, *The UFO Experience*, a scheme that organized UFO sightings into a series of graded "close encounters."²⁰⁶ This scheme is especially important in our discussion of UFO's. To understand the encounters that makeup the content of ufology—encounters that stop short of actual contact between human and extraterrestrial—we must adopt a different approach than when examining cases of direct contact. Hynek's research agenda provides an approach to understanding UFO activity that stops short of the concerns so central to the displaced utopian imaginary as we have come to understand it. In cases of direct contact such as the successful spiritualist séance or the encounters described by Pelley, the Ballards or Adamski, the

²⁰⁶ See King-Hele in *Nature* (October 27, 1972) and Murray in *Science* (August 25, 1972) for favorable reviews in mainstream scientific journals.

extraterrestrial *communicant* supplies the meaning of the encounter. Given the lack of communication in encounters of lesser proximity, one must look elsewhere for the construction of meaning. In the literature it is often the attempts to explain away or debunk such encounters that constitute the central locus of meaning. Thus, along with examining the range of lesser encounters, the following section will also examine the methods by which such encounters are “explained away.” In doing so we will follow Hynek’s tripartite structure of “close encounters.” Furthermore, in following Hynek’s heuristic, we will establish a dynamic in which as the proximity between percipient and object increased, the potential explanations both for and against the encounter became increasingly bizarre and/or complex. Thus the struggle to render the spiritual in material terms became increasingly difficult as the object to be explained moved closer to the percipient. The clarity apparently offered by the appearance of *objects* in the sky was illusory. The closer they came the more the hoped-for rapprochement between science and spirit seemed to recede.

At the outermost range of proximity lay sightings in which unexplained lights in the sky were witnessed at a distance of greater than 500 feet. Once the object in question moved inside the range of five hundred feet, sightings were classified as “close encounters.” Encounters of the first kind were sightings where objects or brilliant lights appear less than 500 feet away but have no effect on the percipients' environment. Close encounters of the second kind were cases in which “physical effect on either animate or inanimate matter is manifested.” Encounters of the third kind were those “in which the presence of animated creatures is reported.” In CE1 cases, the object was furthest in proximity from the percipient—lights in the sky, maneuvering in ways that both suggested intelligent control and militated against identification as terrestrial craft. Such cases allowed for the broadest set of quotidian explanations—atmospheric and/or

astronomical misattribution and misperception, hallucination, as well as simple hoaxing and confabulation. Thus in the set of cases classified as mere sightings (further away than 500 feet) or CEI (the types of cases most common in the immediate post World War II era) the distance between phenomenon and percipient was at its greatest and the distance between experience and potential quotidian explanation was at its most proximate. In terms of misidentification, sightings had been explained by misattributed sightings of planets (ironically, given the ostensible point of origin of extraterrestrial contacts—Venus and Mars are common candidates) and stars. Radar sightings were explained as the result of temperature inversions. Swamp gas was another widely ballyhooed explanation, as were light refractions caused by cloud-bound ice crystals. Explanations offered for CEI sightings sometimes depended less upon misattribution and more on gross misperception. In the case of the Nash Fortenberry sighting, arch debunker Donald Menzel initially offered the explanation that the two pilots had mistaken fireflies trapped between panes of cockpit glass for spacecraft.²⁰⁷ Again, a UFO encounter where the witness sees a vessel less than 500 feet away was classified as a close encounter of the first kind. The second kind refers to sightings in which some physical effect is manifested by the vessel, such as scorched earth, flash burns suffered by witnesses and mechanical failures in the proximity of the UFO (the classic manifestation of which is a stalled automobile). In close encounters of the third kind witnesses actually saw the occupants of the vessel. Hynek's tripartite structure served as a basic classificatory heuristic for organizing massive numbers of reported encounters, and tracking the decreasing distance between witness and phenomenon.

CEII's began to close the gap between percipient and phenomenon. While debunkers and skeptics still drew on the full set of explanations, they became less convincing and more dependent upon the sense that the percipients were victims of gross misapprehension and/or

²⁰⁷ Keith Thompson, *Angels and Aliens* (New York: Addison Wesley, 1991) 24.

perpetrators of willful deception in the case of CEII's. When evidence included the manifestation of "a physical effect on either animate or inanimate matter," the argument that witnesses had in fact only seen some heavenly body or trick of the light became increasingly untenable. In the case of physical effects on animate objects, examples ranged from flash burns on areas of witnesses' skin exposed during a sighting to hair loss and temporary paralysis. The skeptical explanation for such manifestations was to suggest that they were psychosomatic, or to use a less neutral term, hysterical. While such an explanation shifted attention away from the purported presence of a UFO, it left the causal nexus in the rather amorphous mind-body continuum, where it kept company with such medical oddities as stigmata and hysterical pregnancy. In the case of mechanical failure, such as the classic stalled automobile, the potential "rational" explanations were both obvious and numerous. In the instances of physical evidence manifested as a change in soil composition or plant biology, the case was less clear. There were few cases in which such evidence was held up to close scrutiny, due in part to the fact that the UFO was generally an anathema in the official scientific world. In those that had been extensively examined, the results were far from conclusive. The 1981 Trans-En-Provence CE2, which left clear markings of two concentric circles in the spot where a craft allegedly landed, underwent significant analysis by the Group d'Etude des Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non-Identifiés (GEPAN). GEPAN ultimately reported a loss of chlorophyll in surrounding flora and other effects consistent with the presence of some unknown electromagnetic field, all of which pointed, in the words of GEPAN's official report, to the

Occurrence of an important event that brought with it deformations of the terrain caused by mass, mechanics, a heating effect and perhaps certain transformations and deposits of trace minerals....We cannot give a precise and unique interpretation to this remarkable

combination of results... We can state that there is, nonetheless, confirmation of a very significant event which happened on this spot.²⁰⁸

In an instance that further closed the gap between phenomenon and percipient, the case of William Booth Gill combined the attributes of both CEI and CEIII, thus eliciting a broad range of explanations from debunkers. In this case Menzel ran through a variety of misattribution, misperception and psychosocial explanations to dismiss an event witnessed by thirty-eight individuals and attested to in a signed affidavit by twenty-five of them. Father William Booth Gill, an Australian Anglican missionary and his colleagues had been skeptical but intrigued by the ongoing reports of UFO activity over Papua, New Guinea where they were stationed. At 6:45 p.m. June 21, 1959, Gill's assistant, Stephen Gill Moi

spotted a bright white light in the northwestern sky. Thirty-eight persons gathered to watch a large, four-legged, disc-shaped object hover overhead. (Gill would later estimate its angular size to be comparable to that of five full moons lined up end to end.) On top of the object four humanlike figures, their bodies surrounded by illumination, were busy at some unknown task. At various times one or all of the figures would disappear below, only to reappear soon after, at 7:30 the object was lost from view when it ascended into the gathering clouds.

About an hour later other smaller objects arrived on the scene. Gill speculated that these might be satellite craft from the original vehicle—the one he thought of as a “mothership,” which again became visible at 8:50. The UFOs remained intermittently visible until 10:50, when clouds covered the view.

The sighting had lasted over four hours. Twenty-five of the observers signed a report of the incident that Gill prepared soon afterwards.²⁰⁹

The ships returned the two following evenings, with the human witnesses and humanoid figures eventually waving to one another (waving being the extent of communication between witnesses and e.t.'s in this case). In response to the affidavit attesting to the veracity of the account, Menzel surmised that the New-Guinean parishioners of Gill had signed the affidavit to ingratiate themselves with “their great white leader... I doubt very much that they knew what they were

²⁰⁸ Quoted in Jerome Clark, “Trans-en-Provence CE2,” in *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 562-563.

²⁰⁹ Thompson, 53.

signing.”²¹⁰ Gill’s amused response was “that great white leader business might happen in Hollywood movies about African missionaries, but certainly not where I was.” Many of the parishioners were educated and fluent in English. Failing the psychosocial explanation of the parishioners blindly following the great bwana, Menzel next went to an astronomical explanation combined with perceptual miscues. Menzel suggested that Gill, who suffered from myopia and astigmatism, had mistaken an “out-of-focus, elongated image of Venus for his mother ship.” The Gill case was further complicated by the fact that it was a multiple witness sighting and said witnesses claim to have seen the occupants of the craft. The latter factor places the sighting in the category of CEIII. The claim that Gill and his parishioners saw animate creatures engaged in some unknown task was “explained” by Menzel as a function of Gills mistaking his eyelash for an alien, since “slight irregularities of the ‘hairs’ of the lashes, perhaps dust or moisture, could easily be interpreted as activity of the ‘beings’.”²¹¹ So how to explain the fact that 24 other witnesses corroborate Gill’s impression? Phillip Klass, who succeeded Menzel as arch-debunker (and still occupies that position within contemporary UFO debates), pointed to an implied relation between Gill and Stephen Gill Moi, one of the 24 other witnesses. Klass suggested that the name shared by both men implies kinship and thus conspiracy. Following this logic, Gill Moi supported Gill’s claims as the result of their alleged affiliation. Moi’s name “suggests his close friendship with Gill.”²¹² Gill in turn related that he had only known Gill Moi for 19 months prior to their shared experience. “When I arrived on the scene, Moi was a man well into his thirties and he had had that name since he was a baby. How could he have been named after me?”²¹³ Thus given the detailed nature of the account and the close proximity of this encounter,

²¹⁰ Thompson, 53.

²¹¹ Thompson, 54.

²¹² Thompson, 54.

²¹³ Thompson, 54.

the offered explanation was reduced to increasingly vertiginous models of hallucination, confabulation and conspiracy. The wide variety of explanations offered by Klass and Menzel speaks to the urgency and diligence of debunking efforts.

In terms of the hoped-for rapprochement between science and spirit, at the far end of proximity, mere sightings and close encounters of the first kind, science trumped spirit. The most readily available explanations were based on known visual, atmospheric and astronomical phenomena. Questions of forces that lay outside the materialist conception of reality remained un-raised because unneeded. Something was seen, but those somethings were within the realm of the known. As encounters moved closer to the object, the objective correlates offered via scientific explanation dwindled to the point where the preferred explanation became psychological. Something was seen, but those somethings were misinterpreted via the mechanisms of mania or psychosis. Alternately nothing was seen and the supposed percipients were liars. So science offered nothing to the believer—there was no potential shared ground. At the far end of proximity, witnesses were informed that they were mistaken—they saw nothing that existed outside the boundaries of the known world. At the close end, witnesses of close encounters of the third kind were informed they were alternately stupid, liars or mad.

The most vocal and visible figures within ufology have often been the debunkers. In turn, much of the meaning attached to the UFO has been provided by explanations that constitute the UFO as something else—an optical property or misperceived planet. As defenders of quotidian reality, debunkers function as true believers, keepers of the faith. Menzel was a classic example of how wishful thinking infects the debunker as effectively as those who believed UFO's real. Donald Howard Menzel (1901-1976) had impeccable academic and scientific credentials—enrolled as an undergraduate at 16, graduate work at Princeton, one of the very first

practicing theoretical astrophysicists, Harvard faculty at 31, full professor by 37, director of Harvard Observatory, and president of the American Astronomical Society. Menzel made it his personal crusade to ensure that no concerted research efforts on UFO's would be pursued by official science. In doing so, he was not always as scrupulous as science demands. Accusations made by critics of Menzel include misrepresentation of data and speculation unanchored by specific cases. James E. McDonald, a University of Arizona atmospheric physicist, and ufologist sympathetic to the extraterrestrial hypothesis, wrote of his unease concerning Menzel's methods.

My puzzlement stems from realizing that Dr. Menzel's background in physics and astronomy is well-attested by his authorship of a number of texts and references in those areas. Despite that background, when he comes to analyzing UFO reports, he seems to calmly cast aside well-known scientific principles almost with abandon, in an all-out effort to be sure that no UFO report survives his attack. Refraction processes are quite well understood in optics, and the refracting properties of the atmosphere are surely as familiar in astronomy as in meteorology, if not more so. Yet in "explanation" after "explanation" in his books, Menzel rides roughshod over elementary optical considerations governing such things as mirages and light reflections.²¹⁴

Explanations as to the origin of Menzel's single-minded efforts to discredit any agnostic treatments of UFO sightings included his own personal UFO encounter, which in his later explanation and dismissal of, he substantially revised. Thus he may have had personal reasons for such vociferous denial. Secondly, he served in a variety of official and unofficial capacities in the federal government. While this is far from unusual for a Cold War era American scientist, some have drawn the tempting conclusion that his debunking efforts were carried out at the behest of national security. From a scientific perspective the saucer represented a threat to the understood contours of the natural world. From the perspective of national security, the saucer represented a similar threat. If there were some set of objects moving freely through U.S. airspace, objects that successfully eluded both capture and explanation, than both the borders of

²¹⁴ Jerome Clark, "Menzel, Donald Howard (1901-1976)," in *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 395.

the nation and, perhaps more importantly, the credibility of the nation and its leadership were at risk. Just as the desires of the individual align around the propagation and maintenance of the myth of the consistent and integrated self, so do the energies of science and state concern themselves with boundary maintenance.

As we shall see, what meaning the adherents of contactee culture did attach to the ostensible presence of UFO's aligned with the previously established contours of the space brother myth. In turn, sympathetic researchers sometimes offered broad explanations for UFO phenomena, including the extraterrestrial hypothesis, but generally pled insufficient evidence for any final conclusion. In debunking however, the UFO had its own particular meaning. The saucer functioned as a placeholder, as an absence around which a variety of celestial, meteorological, optical, psychological and psychosocial phenomenon orbited. The central object of faith defended by this orbit was a world transparent and explicable given the application of reason. The defense of this position often resembled the desperate attempts to maintain a sense of integrated self in the face of disintegrative forces. It is ironic to note that the champions of Spiritualism and the space brothers shared this same trope of reason triumphant and its implied corollary of ineluctable progress. But while the spiritualists and contactees deployed their faith in reason and progress to lobby the acceptability and transparency of the phenomena of contact, UFO debunkers such as Menzel used said faith to isolate and banish those phenomena. This spoke clearly to the hegemony of the positivist vision. Because of this hegemony, scientific grappling with the UFO conundrum consistently resulted in either the disappearance of the object under analysis—explained into oblivion—or the disappearance of science, with no models available for the attempt to deal with UFOs as *real*.

DOROTHY MARTIN

While ufology began from science in its attempt to engage the irrational (the materialization of the spiritual), there was a corollary movement that began in the realm of the fantastic and moved toward science (spiritualization of the material). Ufology functioned as an exemplar of the former while much of the discourse around the space brothers functioned in the latter mode. Typically, space brother contactees after World War II continued to receive messages via traditional occult means: dreams, visions, voices in the head, automatic writing etc. One post-World War II example of this type of contact is particularly well documented in the classic sociological study *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World*.²¹⁵

Even though Dorothy Martin, the primary subject of *When Prophecy Fails*, held forth as contactee in a moment where public knowledge of and interest in UFO's had been clearly established, flying saucers played no appreciable role in her cosmology. Her primary contacts were indeed from other planets, indicating the continuing ascendancy of the extraterrestrial in the displaced utopian imaginary, but they appeared sans saucer. In Martin's case, while such objects were reported with startling frequency in American skies, they did not enter, in any appreciable fashion, into her received wisdom. Martin's case exemplified the type of post-saucer space brother religion in which the saucer was marked by its *absence*.

Published in 1956, *When Prophecy Fails* is a study of a group that coalesced around Dorothy Martin of Chicago in the early 1950's. The three researchers who authored the study were concerned with a specific behavior that seemed to recur in a particular kind of social movement. In groups where specific prophecies are made and the events prophesied fail to

²¹⁵ Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, & Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group that Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

occur, one might expect group members to become disillusioned and leave the group. Contrary to this expectation, individuals, in the face of events that directly contradict their beliefs, tend to reaffirm their faith and step up their efforts in recruiting others to share their beliefs.²¹⁶ With this basic conundrum in mind the three authors happened upon Dorothy Martin (referred to as Marian Keech in the study) when a Chicago paper ran an item on the imminent catastrophe she had prophesied. With the assistance of several others, the researchers became members of the group surrounding Martin and entered into several months of participant observation. The case of Dorothy Martin is of interest in the current context for a number of reasons, one being that she was part of the contactee “mainstream”—contactees with mystical leanings who communicated with extraterrestrial intelligences via traditional occult means. Martin’s contact with higher alien intelligences took place through automatic writing. Her case is extremely well documented in that *When Prophecy Fails* provides an extensive first hand account of her and the group that came to surround her. Also exceptionally, the account sets out neither to prove the veracity of Martin’s claims of extraterrestrial contact nor to debunk those claims. The question of whether the groups’ beliefs are true or false is largely beside the point. The more interesting question is what do their beliefs mean, imply or do. It is, of course, the latter approach—coming to Martin’s group and their beliefs as a text to unpack versus imagining the same as a series of facts to be verified or debunked—that informs the project you are reading at present. Finally, Martin’s case is of interest in that the messages communicated by her contacts provide clear examples of many of the key tropes of contact lore.

Dorothy Martin’s story began when she awoke early one winter morning with a strange tingling feeling running up her arm and a strong feeling that “someone was trying to get my

²¹⁶ A dynamic similar to the contemporary situation in the U.S., where in the face of clearly diminishing resources the response is to dramatically increase levels of consumption.

attention. Without knowing why, I picked up a pencil and a pad that were lying near my bed. My hand began to write in another handwriting. I looked at the handwriting and it was strangely familiar, but I knew it was not my own. I realized that somebody else was using my hand.”²¹⁷ Here, in the perceived mode of contact, Martin was made the instrument of another’s will, recalling the *werkzeug* of the shakers and the mesmeric somnambule and, in short, the whole feminized apparatus of the displaced utopian imaginary. Upon inquiring as to the identity of her interlocutor, Martin was surprised to find that it was none other than her deceased father who controlled her hand. His message was fairly banal, as messages from the dead often were. It consisted mainly of instructions for Martin’s mother regarding the spring planting in the garden. The message also included some rather vague descriptions of life in “the astral.” Dorothy dutifully conveyed the message to her mother and was told in no uncertain terms to keep any further such messages to herself. Thus the first message received by Dorothy was squarely in the spiritualist tradition, both in the mode of its reception and in the banality of its content.

Prior to her spiritualist encounter Dorothy Martin had already developed a strong interest in the occult, an interest that began with attending a series of theosophical lectures. She had also exposed herself to the work of Guy Ballard who communicated to her “the idea that one might ‘walk in the light’ of superior knowledge.”²¹⁸ She was a participant in Dianetics and OAHSP. While the reader doubtless has at least a passing familiarity with the former, the reference to OAHSP probably requires some explanation. OAHSP, also known as Kosmon, emerged in 1881 in the form of the “new bible,” dictated to Dr. John Ballou Newbrough. The central tenet of the resultant text is that humanity was entering a new age, the new Kosmon era, in which Man will become God. “It’s time for a change of gods. The old gods—Allah, Buddha, Christ,

²¹⁷ Festinger 33.

²¹⁸ Festinger 34.

Jehovah, and the others of the East and Mideast have at last reached the age of retirement.”²¹⁹

The new bible, entitled OAH SPE (O=earth, AH=sky, SPE=spirit) was quite long (some 1008 pages), and provided details of the history of the higher and lower heavens for the preceding 24,000 years as well as a brief history of the 55,000 years prior. OAH SPE captured both the critical attitude taken toward traditional religion by the displaced utopian tradition and the sense of human divinity so central to the New Age. Between her exposures to Theosophy, the Great I AM and OAH SPE, Martin was well versed in the notion that higher truths emerged through celestial dictation.

Following her initial experience with automatic writing, Dorothy Martin began receiving messages from more exalted personages. Primarily these messages originated with beings residing on the planets Clarion and Cerus; beings Dorothy would come to know as the “Guardians.” Note that these beings no longer claim their point of origin as Venus or Mars, two planets that figure largely in earlier occult/extraterrestrial lore. This was increasingly the case as empirical knowledge of the two latter planets increased. Among these Guardians was Sananda, a figure destined to become her primary interlocutor.²²⁰ Sananda, it turned out, was none other than the current incarnation of Jesus Christ—“his new name having been adopted with the beginning of the ‘new cycle’ or age of light.”²²¹ Here again we see the figure of Christ salvaged via the materialization of the spiritual—casting him as an extraterrestrial. Jesus is alive; he just lives on another planet.

²¹⁹ Texe Marrs, *Book of New Age Cults and Religions: The Newest Information Revealed and Explained* (Austin, Texas: Living Truth Publishers, 1990) 231.

²²⁰ Note the slight variation on “Ananda,” a Hindu term for bliss. An element of orientalism persists in Dorothy Martin’s philosophy, recalling the Eastern leanings of its nineteenth century theosophical predecessor.

²²¹ Festinger 36.

One message from an assistant of Sananda worked an interesting variation on the standard trope of alien concerns raised by the advent of nuclear fission. In the years following World War II many of the messages received from space brothers indicated concern that our use of atomic weaponry might threaten both the life of our planet and the balance of the universe. Sananda informed Martin and her followers that these very same weapons had an unexpectedly desirable effect.

We have at last contacted the Earth planet with the waves of ether that have become tactacle [sic] by the bombs your scientists have been exploding. This works like an accordion. When the condensation leaves the carceious level of the ether or atmosphere levels that support a large light layer of marine life, it causes a barrier to be set up. Now that the bombs have broken that barrier we can break through. That is what your scientists call the sonic barrier. We have been trying to get through for many of your years, with alcetopes and the earling timer.²²²

Thus it turned out that not only did the atom bomb create broad concern amongst the members of the galactic federation but it also created the opportunity for them to communicate their concerns. New technology, like the spiritual telegraph and the light and sound ray of yore had once again closed the gap between the seen and the unseen, between the material world and the world of spirit. It was the erasure of this gap, in the logic of the displaced utopian imaginary, that was the first step toward the dreamed of social transformation.

The messages imparted by Dorothy Martin's interstellar informants would become the current stock and trade of New Age philosophy. Underlying all messages was the sense that the world was due for an awakening. "The world mind is still in lethargy. It does not want to awaken."²²³ And of course it was the chosen role of the operative, in this case Martin, to assist in awakening the world mind by conveying the teachings of the space brothers "to those who are ready."²²⁴ Martin's first apostles were the Laugheads, referred to in *When Prophecy Fails* as Dr. Thomas and Daisy Armstrong. Both of the Armstrongs were occult aficionados, as well as

²²² Festinger 38.

²²³ Festinger 38.

²²⁴ Festinger 38.

students of ufology. They were familiar with both the I AM movement and the writings of William Dudley Pelley. Their affiliations prior to becoming followers of Martin clearly hewed to the trajectory traced by the preceding chapters. Thomas had also enjoyed a long interview with George Adamski, more on whom shortly, and emerged convinced of the reality of flying saucers and their mission of exploration and observation. The Laugheds' link to Adamski is one instance where Dorothy Martin's milieu *does* rub up against the UFO.

Thomas came away from his meeting with an enlarged version of Adamski's drawing of the footprints of his Venusian contact, a drawing "whose curious interior markings seemed to him symbols of a mysterious sort" and whose referent, if real, would constitute a singularly *material* piece of evidence. "Armstrong" would continue to show his students this drawing as "proof" of the alien presence.²²⁵ Upon his return home after meeting with Adamski, Laughead presented the drawing to his wife who dedicated herself to deciphering the aforementioned mysterious symbols. "Her interpretation of the footprints forecast a rising of the submerged continents of Mu and Atlantic, an event that would be consistent with the flooding of the North American continent."²²⁶ Here we see another common trope of new age and space brother prophecy; the prediction of massive "earth changes"—California falls off the map and into the sea, the new ice age dawns, ancient continents rise from the sea.²²⁷ The prediction of such changes pointed to the fundamental dream and desire of the Space Brother religions and the New Age ones that followed, the vision of a world utterly changed; unrecognizable with relation to what came before. Prophecies that predict such massive transformations in the very geography of the planet constituted both a gross material metaphor for the desired "psychic" changes as well as foreseeing a purely physical change which predicated some radical shift at the social level. Clearly things would be dramatically different if suddenly half of North America were underwater.

²²⁵ Festinger 41.

²²⁶ Festinger 42.

²²⁷ Earth changes and the teachings of the Great I Am come together most explicitly in one current incarnation of the Ballards teachings, Lori Toye's *I Am America*- see www.iamamerica.com.

Dr. Laughead first encountered Dorothy Martin at a meeting of the “Steel City Flying Saucer Club.” More accurately, it was here that he first *heard* of her. Dorothy had attended an earlier presentation of a lecturer and “expert” on flying saucers who later spoke to Laughead of Martin when speaking at the club. So while flying saucers made no explicit appearance in Martin’s philosophy, it was clear that they were at least of interest to her. Perhaps the reason for their absence from her creed is as simple as the fact that, given the expedients of telepathy, clairvoyance and automatic writing—the traditional occult modalities of communication that so informed both the earlier moments discussed herein and Martin’s own experience—a physical mode of transport was not required. While the authors forgo naming the lecturer presenting on flying saucers, they do indicate that Dorothy met with him after the lecture and told him about her “lessons.” “He appears to have been impressed by her, for, some time later, while he was on a lecture tour that brought him to the Steel City Flying Saucer Club, he seems to have given Mrs. Keech [Martin] a favorable notice. In particular, he talked about her work to Dr. Thomas Armstrong [Laughead], a frequent attendee at meetings of this club.”²²⁸ Laughead became the biggest booster of Martin’s cosmic communiqués, which consistently reiterated several basic points. The first of these was that the Guardians were part of a highly advanced civilization.

The Guardians are beings of the UN (intelligence of the Creator; mind of the High Self) who have risen to the density seven or eight, who are UN as the Oneness with the creator, who can and do create by the UN the casement or vehicle they choose to use in the seen...We are like the human beings of Earth and have much in common; though there are millions of years difference in our culture, we are still brothers... We have been learning for millions of years....We know no death, as you do. It is as a cocoon turns into a moth - very consciously and voluntarily - *when we need or desire* the change.”²²⁹

The latter statement recalled one of the central promises of Spiritualism—immortality—and its corollary Gnostic belief in body as shell. Death was merely a change in state.²³⁰ Its only

²²⁸ Festinger 39.

²²⁹ Festinger 44.

²³⁰ That this promise continues to be part of Space Brother lore was dramatically communicated several years ago by the group suicide of the members of “Heavens Gate”. Readers who recall the events of March 26, 1997 may well have noted the use of the word “vehicle” to describe the body in one of the preceding messages (“the casement or vehicle they choose to use”). This was the language used in the videotaped note left by Marshall Applewhite aka “Bo” aka “Te”. The group had left behind their earthly “vehicles” to go on to the “next level.”

casualty was the body. At a certain level of enlightenment, density, or rate of vibration, the body becomes fungible, optional. Beings operating at such levels “can and do create by the UN the casement or vehicle they choose to use in the seen.” A second motif in the messages received by Martin from the Guardians—a motif we might call “the Teachers”—was that

the Guardians are instructors or teachers in a school of the universe, called ‘the Losolo’ (located on Cerus), who are communicating with Mrs. Keech in order to teach her - and, through her, other humans—those principles, ideas, and guides to right conduct that are necessary to advance the spiritual developments of the human race and to prepare the people of the Earth for certain changes that lie ahead... ‘It is ignorance of the Universal Laws that makes all the misery of the Earth... We see and know that you struggle in darkness and want to bring real light, for yours is the only planet that has war and hatred. We feel no sadness but are interested in the progress of the people of your Earth. Why? We are all brothers. Need I tell you more?’²³¹

Both motifs were consistent with later space brother religions. Highly advanced aliens from other star systems were concerned about the destructive nature of human civilization. “[T]he people of Earth are rushing, rushing toward the suicide of themselves ... To this we are answering with signs and wonders in the sky.”²³² They chose a human interlocutor to communicate their wisdom to other humans in the hope that this wisdom would help Earth to raise itself to the “next level.” This shift to the next level was always imminent—“Surely there is light and it shall be revealed to you. You are coming to the end of an age of darkness”—and was often marked by some cataclysm or other types of “signs and wonders.” The mission statement of Lori Toyé’s “I Am America,” which draws both on the teachings of Martin and the Ballards, quotes Master Koot Hoomi (one of the ostensible founders of Theosophy) in a clear formulation of this particular trope, “A new cycle awaits humanity. It is a cycle filled with growth, learning and life. Painfully and lovingly, sometimes, this growth is achieved through disease, poverty, and destruction. However, within your heart lies the gentle revolution that can redirect the course of such events.”²³³

²³¹ Festinger 45.

²³² Festinger 46-47.

²³³ I AM America, *Mission Statement* (www.iamamerica.com/Pages/mission_statement.html), accessed 6/4/2004.

In the case of Dorothy Martin and her followers, as in other millennial space brother religions, the faithful were to be spared the results of the cataclysm— “[certain earth dwellers] will be gathered up and relieved of the experiences of the holocaust and of the coming events.” This caveat recalled nothing so much as the Christian rapture. Although in the case of the space brothers it would not be Christ and his heavenly host that come for the faithful, but rather Christ along with other officers of the star command. The cataclysm was offered as a warning and a stopgap. Without it humans would continue down the path to nuclear destruction—a destruction that would have disastrous consequences for the earth’s environs as well - “Earth will be fragmented and the whole solar system disrupted.”²³⁴ Also of note in the preceding communiqué is the indication that “(i)t is ignorance of the Universal Laws that makes all the misery of the Earth.” In accordance with harmonial tradition, it is the lack of integration between terrestrial humans and the Cosmos that drives the problems of the world. The establishment of Utopia is a matter of re-alignment, an enactment of the “gentle revolution that lies within your heart.”

Like Scientology, the Great I AM and other space brother religions such as the Unarians, Martin and her followers paid much attention to the question of past lives. The notion of reincarnation functioned as a simultaneously centrifugal and centripetal trope. It was centripetal in the sense that it promoted the belief of the survival of personality and centrifugal in its intimations of fractured identity—I am Genghis Khan *and* George Washington *and* Jesus. As reported by Festinger et al., there was considerable talk about who each member was in biblical times. Generally in such “recall,” participants found that they were formerly some exalted personage or another. Martin, of course, discovered that she had been the mother of Christ. This sense of former greatness both flattered and made it easier to believe that one was playing a central role in momentous events. The central appeal of membership in such groups was that

²³⁴ Festinger, 53.

one was privy to cosmic secrets, with the primary secret being the source and timing of perhaps the most momentous occasion in history since the rise of the bipedal hominid—the “next thing.” Not only was one privy to such imminent events, one was an active participant in them.

Thus, in short, all of the basic elements of the Space Brother contactee appeared in the case of Dorothy Martin: elements of continuity with earlier occult traditions found in members’ beliefs, in the content of messages, and in the messages’ modes of communication; intimations of the cosmic importance of both message and recipient; warnings of imminent disaster based upon negative human affect (hatred, violence, greed, selfishness) and/or the rapid pace of technological development (particularly atomic weaponry); and lastly the promise of the potential for accelerated evolutionary growth - moving to the “next level” of consciousness/existence. As noted earlier, the millennialism of the space brothers was an odd amalgam of secular and religious modalities. Clearly the mindset of those who followed the space brothers was one prone to magical thinking and the prevalence of occult themes clearly indicated a predilection for matters spiritual. But just as Spiritualism strove toward framing the afterlife as a material phenomenon, so did the space brother religions attempt to materialize the spiritual. They did so by the use of pseudo-scientific jargon—the alcetope and the earling timer—and by making outer space the spiritual realm. Ascended masters lived on Venus and Mars or Clarion and Cerus. Christ was still present, only his ascension was not into heaven, but to another planet. His centrality to Earth’s fate was still understood, he was “Lord Jesus Sananda, Earth’s Christ Teacher during this time of the Planetary Ascension in his Mission to reclaim Earth as a Planet of Light.”²³⁵ But he did so not as the only Son of God, but as member of the galactic command. Martin and her followers exemplified the tendency in post World War

²³⁵ Rev. August Star, “About the Ashtar Command” in *11:11 Ashtar Command Ascension Network*, (www.staresseenia.org/About/abt.ashtr.com.htm)

II space brother religions to largely ignore the recent advent of UFO phenomena. While Martin was certainly aware of and interested in UFOs, there was no evidence of any attempt on her part to integrate the ostensibly material phenomena of flying saucers with her operative philosophy. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the other characteristic response of space brother religions to the advent of UFO's was to include them as a mode of transport preeminent example of the latter tendency was George Adamski.

GEORGE ADAMSKI

Most of the contactee movement is and was characterized by occult modes of communication, automatic writing and channeling. As previously noted, Ballard's embodied contacts with St. Germaine and the Venusian Lords of the Flame set a precedent for *embodied* contact with extraterrestrial visitors. Among cases of immediate post World War II embodied contact, perhaps the most notable, both in terms of continuity with the cases and traditions already discussed and in terms of influence on later cases, was that of George Adamski, a central figure in the contactee movement that emerged out of post-World War II southern California.

Adamski claimed, primarily in his book *Inside the Space Ships* (a title later changed to *Inside the Flying Saucers*), to have traveled willingly with extraterrestrials in their spacecraft. Adamski was acting as envoy or ambassador, traveling in comfort with his hosts—hosts who politely and thoroughly addressed the questions posed by their guest and proffered the knowledge that they were here to save humanity from its own destructive impulses.

Adamski parlayed his experiences into the attainment of guru status. Through writing, speaking and hosting gatherings of "saucerians," he developed a religious following. The messages received and conveyed by Adamski, his status as elect individual speaking to true

believers, all carried through the earlier models of contact and dissemination developed in nineteenth century Spiritualism. What was different was that his mode of contact was no longer simply spiritual (though strictly speaking, neither was Spiritualism, given its emphasis on physical manifestations as exhibited via the creation of sound using visible instruments and the appearance of ectoplasm), but had attained a clear physical component. The other primary difference of course was that the Others in question were not from heaven but from other planets. Adamski interacted with embodied extraterrestrials in real time and entered the craft upon which his contacts had descended from the skies.

Given the level of public interest in UFO phenomena, it was in the interest of Adamski to place great emphasis on the craft itself—note the aforementioned title of Adamski’s book. But the flying saucers that hosted him did nothing to fundamentally alter the established narrative tropes of the alien-human encounter. The Others who presented themselves to George Adamski were still recognizably “human.” Their Otherness, as in earlier cases of the displaced utopian imaginary, sprang from their point of origin and their both implicit and explicit *perfection*. Their ships were merely further evidence of their mastery over time and space, further material evidence of the utopian future that waited if only humans would accept their counsel and align themselves properly with the cosmos.

Adamski drew ridicule and contempt from “mainstream” ufology. His claims and exploits smacked of a style of religious charlatanism that had long been known within American culture and appeared to be simply old-fashioned religious faddism dressed up in space-age clothing. He had no convincing evidence to offer and everything to gain from claiming contact. His behavior clearly indicated he was willfully profiting from the public attention gained via their claims. Adamski went so far as to publicly admit that forming a religion was the best way

he could think of to obtain permission to make a certain highly profitable commodity, especially in times of prohibition—wine.

Adamski was active as a lecturer on the occult as early as the 1930's, though it was not until after the beginning of the modern age of the flying saucer that he began lecturing on saucers. In the 1930's Adamski founded the Royal Order of Tibet (further shades of Theosophy) through which he obtained a license to make sacramental wine. Thus during prohibition Adamski manufactured "enough wine for all of Southern California." It was in 1949 that Adamski began his career as contactee. In that year Adamski published a science fiction novel, *Pioneers of Space: A Trip to the Moon, Mars and Venus*. The book contained detailed accounts of space travel that bore a remarkable resemblance to the accounts that "the professor" (so-called by his students) provided of his own later alleged space travels. That same year he began lecturing on saucers, claiming to have witnessed the passage of a large space ship while observing a meteor shower with friends on the evening of October 9, 1946. According to Adamski, a military officer told him some weeks after this encounter, that the object he had seen was definitely a craft from another world. Adamski further claimed that the government had knowledge of the existence of UFO's (a claim that would become an *idée fixe* for more conspiracy-minded ufologists) derived from tracking a 700 foot spacecraft "on the other side of the moon," and the arrival of these craft was imminent because as science now knew, "all planets are inhabited."²³⁶

Adamski's authority was somewhat buttressed by the mistaken association between him and the Palomar Observatory. His association merely extended to the fact that he and his wife ran a café at Palomar Gardens, which included a small observatory of its own, some miles away from the observatory itself. Adamski claimed that in 1947 he had witnessed 184 UFOs passing overhead in groups of 32 (this story is repeated across a variety of sources, even though 184 is not quite divisible by 32). He later produced two photographs, ostensibly taken through his 6-

²³⁶ Jerome Clark, "Adamski, George (1891-1965)," in *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998)19.

inch telescope, that were featured in 1950 by *Fate* magazine, a magazine central to the propagation of the saucer myth.

In ensuing years Adamski claimed to have had a series of encounters with a beautiful long-blond-haired Venusian, “Orthon,” an archetypical *Nordic* type alien, the first of which he discussed in *Flying Saucers Have Landed*. Like the spiritual entities encountered by spiritualists and later by Pelley and the Ballards, Orthon seems very much human, only somehow more perfect, more advanced.

I fully realized I was in the presence of a man from space - A HUMAN BEING FROM ANOTHER WORLD! The flesh of his hands to the touch of mine was like a baby's very delicate in texture, but firm and warm. His hands were slender, with long tapering fingers like the beautiful hands of an artistic woman. In fact in different clothing he could easily have passed for an unusually beautiful woman, yet he was definitely a man.

He was round faced with an extremely high forehead; large, but calm, grey-green eyes, slightly aslant at the outer corners; with slightly higher cheek bones than an Occidental, but not so high as an Indian or an Oriental; a finely chiseled nose, not conspicuously large; and an average size mouth with beautiful white teeth that shone when he smiled or spoke.

As nearly as I can describe his skin the colouring would be an even, medium-coloured Suntan. And it did not look to me as though he had ever had to shave, for there was no more hair on his face than on a child's.

His hair was sandy in colour and hung in beautiful waves to his shoulders, glistening more beautifully than any woman's I have ever seen. And I remember a passing thought of how Earth women would enjoy having such beautiful hair as this man had.²³⁷

Adamski's description of Orthon (a name which, for clarity's sake, Adamski manufactures at a later time—Adamski's space brothers did not follow the terrestrial convention of naming) was notable for a number of reasons. The first of these is that while the extraterrestrials that contacted Adamski condemned racially based divisions and inequalities, they were all more or less white. While there were some differences in complexion and hair color, there were no brothers among the space brothers. This was consistent with the racialism that informed Theosophy and Pelley's Christian Economics—the occult bedrock of the space

²³⁷ ²³⁷ Desmond Leslie and George Adamski, *Flying Saucers have Landed* (London: W. Laurie, 1953) 195.

brother myth. You will recall that in the cycle of racial histories, it is whites that have always been in ascendancy. If movement to the “next level” was imminent, it would make sense that humanity’s more perfect future selves would be white. There *was* a whiff of the “oriental” about Adamski’s space brothers (also consistent with the theosophical predilection for the Tibetan) with eyes slightly aslant and high cheekbones “but not so high as an Indian or an Oriental.” The overall impression was more Elfin than Asian. Orthon was something of a racial amalgam, but he never fully left the confines of Whiteness. Apparently when Earthlings approach perfection it will be as white people.

The sense of border crossing indicated by Orthon’s *almost* racial otherness extended to Orthon’s gender as well, for his beauty was that of a woman. Fine tapered hands, “the beautiful hands of an artistic woman,” soft skin, no facial (and presumably body) hair and a head of hair to die for, but lest we stray too far in our sense of his feminine beauty, rendering Orthon *too* exotic, Adamski observes that Orthon “was definitely a man.” This constant sense of great beauty attended the descriptions of all of Adamski’s contacts, as it did in Ballard, Pelley and Swedenborg before him. The note of sensual pleasure in Adamski’s description was present in all of the passages wherein he described extraterrestrial encounters. Thus while the space brothers may have been alien in some ways, their aesthetic appeal was wholly keyed to terrestrial sensibilities. The space brothers, like the ascended masters and spirits before them, were alien but not *too* alien. Also like those earlier precedents, Adamski’s proffered vision was one in which humanity’s future was comprehensible to then current human sensibilities. Just as Spiritualism was predicated on the survival of human personality, the displaced utopian imaginary as discussed thus far was predicated on the survival of the recognizably human. That everything about the aliens and their craft was pleasing to the senses, to the point of creating a

kind of sustained rapture, was especially of note when compared to the dis-ease and displacement that would attend later alien abductions.

The messages given to Adamski were fairly predictable, closely following the lines of messages offered by earlier space brothers, ascended masters and the spirits of the dead. In his first encounter, Orthon warned Adamski of the looming threat of nuclear war and of his fellow extraterrestrials' concerns about Earth humans' warlike ways. In this first encounter, Orthon and Adamski communicated via a combination of gesture and telepathy (the latter reflecting earlier occult traditions).

He made me to understand that their coming was friendly. Also, as he gestured, that they were concerned with radiations going out from earth...

I persisted and wanted to know if it was dangerous to us on Earth as well as effecting things in space.

He made me understand—by gesturing with his hands to indicate cloud formations from explosions—that after too many such explosions. Yes! His affirmative nod of the head was very positive and he even spoke the word 'Yes' in this instance. The cloud formations were easy to imply with the movement of his hands and arms, but to express the explosions he said, 'Boom! Boom!' Then, further to explain himself, he touched me, then a little weed growing close by, and next pointed to the Earth itself, and with a wide sweep of his hands and other gestures that too many 'Booms!' would destroy all of this.²³⁸

Thus Orthon noted the other side of the human potential for perfection—the potential for annihilation. In tales of the trials that ostensibly precede ascension, the space brother myth sometimes tended to collapse this opposition—linking annihilation and perfection, further underlining its status as a kind of secular millennialism.

In a later journey, recounted in *Inside the Spaceships* Adamski ostensibly reencountered Orthon and made the acquaintance of other beautiful aliens, including a Martian called "Firkon"

²³⁸ Leslie and Adamski, 1953, 199.

and a Saturnian named “Ramu.”²³⁹ The two latter figures approached him in an unnamed Los Angeles hotel, to which Adamski had been summoned by what felt to him like impulse. He noted that Firkon and Ramu had “nothing in their appearance to indicate that they were other than average young businessmen.”²⁴⁰ Again, Adamski’s contacts were human, though humans who had achieved a level of perfection superior to terrestrial humans. Thus while they were perhaps more alien than nineteenth century spirits or ascended masters in their point of origin, they were still quite familiar in visage and deportment. Adamski was alerted to their extraterrestrial origin only when one of the contacts *touch*ed him. “As I acknowledged the greeting, the speaker extended his hand and when it touched mine a great joy filled me. The signal was the same as had been given by the man I had met on that memorable November 20, 1952. Consequently, I knew that these men were not inhabitants of earth.”²⁴¹ Said signal is communicated viscerally—it was only through touch, a sense that Adamski’s alien contacts later affirmed as *the* primary faculty, that Firkon and Ramu revealed their otherness. The progressive embodiment of contact, from astral travel, to trance-based communiqués, to embodied desert meetings, here extends to the touching of hands, a touch without which Firkon and Ramu would have appeared to be just another pair of pretty Anglo Angelinos. They even spoke perfect English, a skill explained by the “fact” that they were both “contact men,” individuals who resided on Earth in an effort to gather more information on the troublesome terrestrial humans.

Firkon and Ramu ushered Adamski into a Pontiac and took him for a ride to the outskirts of town, where he re-united with Orthon. These proceedings had the texture of *human* interaction. Their car, the hustling of Adamski into the back seat, their journey to the outskirts of

²³⁹ George Adamski, *Inside the Flying Saucers* (New York: Paperback Library, 1967 (originally published in 1955 as *Inside the Spaceships*).

²⁴⁰ Adamski, 1967, 29.

²⁴¹ Adamski, 1967, 30.

town—these were all details more reminiscent of crime fiction than any encounter with the truly Other. The four of them went aboard a saucer, a “scout ship” and traveled to a larger mother ship where Adamski was entertained. Throughout his visit, all described as immensely pleasurable, the earthly contactee was treated warmly and the least of his queries was attended with care and respect. He met a variety of female space travelers, all of whom, naturally, exhibited exquisite beauty. “They wore no jewelry [or makeup] of any description. Indeed, such adornment would have served only to detract from their own natural beauty.” Of meeting these women, he said “This was indeed a tremendous surprise as, for some reason, I had never visualized women as space travelers.”²⁴² It turned out that not only were there women aboard the craft, but that there were actually female pilots! One of the many ways in which the space brothers surpassed us (as did the dead before them) was apparently in the realm of women’s rights. That Adamski took this lesson to heart was shown when he later revealed that, home again after his space travels, he engaged “in piping water in and out of tanks and round about the grounds (with some able *women* assistants!) [emphasis in original].”²⁴³ As we shall now see, Adamski’s hosts presented a vision of promised utopia.

According to Adamski’s contacts all inhabited planets, with the exception of Earth, existed in a confederation. “Peoples of other worlds are not strangers to one another, but are all friends and are welcomed wherever they go.”²⁴⁴ Brotherhood and cooperation, in fact a kind of socialism, were the rule. Adamski viewed a painting of a pastoral scene while on board the mother ship. He commented that

this might have passed even more easily for an earthly scene except that the farmhouses were not scattered around the countryside, but also followed the circular plan. I was told that this arrangement had been found more practical in enabling these farm groups to

²⁴² Adamski, 1967, 47-48.

²⁴³ Adamski, 1967, 163.

²⁴⁴ Adamski, 1967, 54.

become small, self-sufficient communities, containing everything necessary to supply all essential commodities for the country folk. On Venus there is true equality in all respects, including allocation of commodities.²⁴⁵

Adamski was further told of a scheme where large city-size vessels were constructed for shared use among planets.

“Many such ships have been built,” Kalna explained, “not only on Venus but also on Mars and Saturn and many other planets. However, they are not intended for the exclusive use of any particular planet, but for the purpose of contributing to the education and pleasure of all citizens in the whole brotherhood of the Universe. People naturally are great explorers. Therefore, travel in our worlds is not the privilege of the few, but of all.”²⁴⁶

The story that Adamski gathered from his aforementioned guides and from various Masters who he met on board the space ships was that the members of the galactic confederation all lived in harmony. They lived to very advanced ages and did not fear death. They knew no crime or disease. So what was it that kept Earth from achieving such a blessed state? To begin with, our planet was disadvantaged by the fact that it had been used as a dumping ground for “trouble-makers,” a sort of galactic Australia.

Although the race of man as a whole prefers to live in peace and harmony with all creation, here and there a few will grow in personal ego and aggressiveness, and through greed will desire to assume power over men...and even though we know the evil toward which such attitudes lead, in conformity with the universal laws, we are not free to bind these brothers in any way...So ... the Earth in our system was chosen for the new home of these unruly ones.²⁴⁷

In part, because of its special population, Earth was retarded in its alignment with the divine plan.

There is nothing wrong with your Earth, nor with its people, except that in their lack of understanding they are young children in the universal life of the One Supreme Being. You have been told that in our worlds we *live* the Creator’s laws, while as yet on Earth you only talk of them. If you would *live* by the precepts of even what you already know,

²⁴⁵ Adamski, 1967, 51.

²⁴⁶ Adamski, 1967, 52.

²⁴⁷ Adamski, 1967, 134.

the peoples of Earth would not go out to slaughter one another. They would work within themselves, their own groups, their own nations, to achieve good and happiness in that section of your world wherein they were born and therefore call “home.”²⁴⁸

Thus again, as Harmonial tradition would have it, moving toward heaven on earth was primarily a question of re-alignment. If enough people could open themselves to the cosmos and begin to live in harmony with the divine plan, then Utopia could be achieved.

And no man lives who has never once dreamed of what you call Utopia, or the nearly perfect world. There is nothing which man has ever imagined which is not, somewhere, a reality. And, therefore, nothing that is not possible of achievement. For you too, on Earth, this is possible. For us on the other planets of our galaxy, it is now so.²⁴⁹

Thus we see two of the primary modalities of the displaced utopian imaginary fulfilled, the proffered vision of a Utopian achieved and the promise that it could be achieved here on earth.

But how are humans to know the divine plan? How are they to move toward that state of harmony? Herein lay the last modality of the displaced utopian imaginary, the promise of help from afar. The brothers have been observing us for some time. They did so, aside from the observations of intrepid aliens who lived among us, through an electronic device “no larger than an ordinary cabinet radio, with a screen similar to a TV set. ‘With this,’ [Firkon] explained, ‘we can picture anything taking place on Earth, or on any planet over which we either pass or hover. Not only do we hear spoken words, but pictures are picked up and shown in screen.’”²⁵⁰ Here we had moved beyond the spiritual telegraph, mental radio and the light and sound ray to a version of satellite surveillance. With the combined data of direct and remote surveillance, the space brothers claimed to “have a history of Earth and the happenings thereon dating back seventy-eight million years.”²⁵¹ This long-term, pervasive surveillance might have induced

²⁴⁸ Adamski, 1967, 71.

²⁴⁹ Adamski, 1967, 70.

²⁵⁰ Adamski, 1967, 60.

²⁵¹ Adamski, 1967, 78-79.

paranoia in another context but in the hands of the space brothers, it was merely an instrument of use in guiding humans toward the perfection they desired. The space brothers wanted nothing more than to help humans mend the error of their ways, but they could not force them. Under universal law “each individual, each group of mankind, all intelligent life on each world, must decide its own destiny without interference from another. Counsel, yes. Instruction, yes. But interference to the point of destruction, never.”²⁵²

Adamski offered one of the first full expressions of the space brother narrative. According to him, humans had long been under the observation of intergalactic forces that saw their potential and had their best interests at heart. But humans were in danger of destroying themselves and upsetting the balance of the universe. Thus the aliens were taking an increasingly active role and were here to help humans mend their ways. They were kind and beautiful and loving—everything that the grays, who we will first encounter in the next chapter, are not.

The story of the contactee and the space brothers continues to the present day. The same themes of imminent catastrophe and the potential emergence of a new golden age still flow through channeled messages to the faithful, offering visions of a world transformed. In turn, the articulations of these themes continue to draw upon the bedrock of Spiritualism and Theosophy. The space brother contactee did little to alter the trope of redemption from afar developed in the nineteenth century—primarily changing the point of origin to other planets and adding a contemporary socio-political gloss. In turn, the arrival of the flying saucer on the scene did little to change established patterns. It did, however, in its invocation of the technical—we are talking

²⁵² Adamski, 1967, 73.

after all of space *ships*—open the door to a renewed effort to establish scientific credibility for the phenomena of extraterrestrial contact.

CONCLUSION

In the current context, the period following World War II is most notable for the arrival of the flying saucer. The appearance of these unidentified flying objects marked a bifurcation in our tale. In the continuing saga of the space brothers, the saucer made its appearance only sometimes. In the case of Dorothy Martin—a case that bore all the earmarks of the space brother ethos—the saucer played no discernible role. Martin’s contacts were from other planets, a fact that lent an increased solidity to their profile, but they had no evident need for material transport. In that they communicated to Martin via traditional occult means—automatic writing in this particular case—they had no need to travel physically in order to convey their wisdom.

In the case of Adamski, the space brothers appeared in embodied form and thus, in a rationalist framework, would require physical transport. The insertion of a physical craft into the alien-human communication nexus is an ironic turn given the general movement away from embodied communication foreshadowed by the rise of electronic media. The advent of telegraphy was perhaps most notable for its divorce of the message from an embodied messenger. Before telegraphy, communication between two parties at a distance required the physical (versus electrical) transportation of the message across space. This newly disembodied mode of communication was reflected in the modes via which the Others in the contexts of Spiritualism and Theosophy (most often) communicated with humans. With the introduction of embodied encounters with masters and sundry Others from distant planets, the physical component of communication was re-introduced. The increasing presence of the flying saucer in

the space brother narrative further compounded this physicality: embodied messenger; locatable point of origin; manifest mode of transport.

The drama of the space brother, as played out in the immediate post-World War II context, continued its focus on the messenger and the message of potential perfection. With Martin and Adamski, the formalization begun by Theosophy and its Great White Brotherhood continued. Instead of the brotherhood, we find the beginnings of a Star Command—a hierarchy of humans from other planets who are bound together in confederation and who seek the enlightenment of the earth human. Their point of origin continued to recede to other planets—most commonly Venus and Mars—and continued to become more concrete. The Other's mode of appearance was in the form of beautiful humans—visions of Nordic perfection. As in Spiritualism and the movements that followed in its wake, the uncanniness of the Other was undermined by its relative familiarity. The narrative that sprang from the alien-human nexus continued to articulate the conundrum of radical change in a familiar form—a vision of alterity that was comforting in its sameness.

Running parallel to the continuing saga of the space brother, the immediate post-World War II period also witnessed the rise of ufology, a thoroughgoing attempt to align the increasing appearance of strange objects in the sky with the consensus reality dictated by the standards of empiricism. The point of focus for ufology was not the presence of some anthropomorphic Other bearing glad tidings of future perfection but rather the recurring appearance of an ostensibly physical phenomenon. In its struggle to account for the impossible with the tools and ethos of positivism, ufology struggled to close the same gap that so centrally concerned the movements previously discussed in these pages. Ironically, as the endeavor moved closer to its

object of desire, the modes of explanation available veered increasingly into the nether regions of the rationally possible.

The displaced utopian imaginary's engagement with the flying saucer, both in the case of ufology and that of the space brothers, was oddly marked by a dynamic of absence and disappearance. In the case of ufology, the constant tug-of-war between agnosticism and outright skepticism constantly threatened the UFO's erasure. Even among researchers sympathetic to the possibility of the UFO's existence, the object of study was always already a residuum, a remnant. It was only the cases that survived attempts at quotidian explanation that were rendered suitable for analysis. In treating a phenomenon that seemed about proliferation and divergence, that profligate energy was apparently put in service of explanations to the contrary. UFO's were swamp gas, errant celestial bodies, temperature inversions, willful deception. It was ironic that the ostensibly centripetal forces of rational inquiry seemed bent on such dissolution, as if infected by its object of study. Even the cases that made it through the vetting process were so beset by skeptical interpretation that their significance was all but canceled out. For obvious reasons such remaindered cases were perhaps the targets of the most energetic of skeptical attacks. The game of skeptical ufology recalled the zero sum logic of the octoroon. If the case was not all the way true (white) then it was all the way false (black). In its struggle to rescue the integrity of a fully rational view of the world, this stark sense of the true or false binary did nothing to approximate the both/and logic of the phenomenon.

In the case of the space brothers, the saucer did a different but no less notable disappearing act. In the case of the so-called contactee mainstream, saucers were absent because unneeded. Communication between human and Other using traditional occult means—telepathy, astral travel, automatic writing—required no physical vehicle. In the case of contactees such as

Adamski—the UFO was effortlessly subsumed. While it provided a mode of transport and thus had functionality, in terms of the space brother *narrative* it was merely a flourish or element of texture. Thus the UFO—which seemed to offer such a marked increase in the physicality of communication between humans and Others, and in turn seemed to move such communication into the realm of proper consideration for rational inquiry—was instead marked in turn by disappearance, absence and superfluity.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1961, the beautiful, loquacious ambassadors from the stars were increasingly displaced by grimly silent homunculi. Journeys of wonder and enlightenment began to give way to ones of terror and confusion. Along with the beginnings of the abduction phenomenon in the early 1960's, the stakes of both ufology and contactee culture started to shift. Narrative structures moved beyond both the psychic communications of the contactee and the purely visual experience of the UFO witness to the fully embodied scenario of alien abduction. For ufologists, the focus slowly shifted from the objective element of the craft to an increasingly bizarre set of encounters between the occupants of those craft and various, bewildered, human percipients. For those invested in the contactee narrative, the links between the ostensibly benevolent wishes of ascended masters/space brothers and the presence of UFO's became increasingly difficult to sustain. How to read silent, invasive, nightmarish encounters as benign? The emergence of abduction as an increasingly common form of alien-human interface unfolded slowly over the course of a decade and while alien abduction as a mode of contact began in earnest with the 1961 case of Betty and Barney Hill, it was not until the nineteen-eighties that abduction fully took its place as the central research vector in ufology and a standard form of human-alien communication.

This gap between the Hill case and the emergence of abduction as *the* central trope in UFO lore is consistent with the overall uneven development of the displaced utopian imaginary in response to emergent themes of paranoia. The themes of paranoia and depersonalization that so informed the abduction myth had initially emerged in Cold War discourses on the dangers of

communism. The connection between the communist menace and aliens had played out in the 1950's and 1960's not in narratives of "actual" contact with UFO's but in the narratives of science fiction. If anything, in the ostensibly real narratives of the alien, specifically in the tales of space brothers, socialism still operated as a primary utopian modality. The case of Betty and Barney Hill and the emergent narrative of alien abduction seemed to catch the nexus of alien-human communication up to some of the more slippery misgivings of the cold war. William Dudley Pelley had certainly engaged with a broader sense of the dangers of Bolshevism, but his alien interlocutors operated in the space brother mode, offering a source of clarity and advice rather than menace. It was not until the advent of abduction that the communication between human and Other took on the creeping hues so aptly represented by the tales of alien paranoia that flourished in the science fiction cinema of the cold war.

This belated alignment occurred at roughly the same time as the very misgivings (the dangers of gross materialism, depersonalization and conformity) attached to communism came to be applied to *American* culture. The Beats, the efforts of critical sociology, e.g. Whyte's *Organization Man*, and the beginnings of the psychedelic gospel as taught by Leary et al. all spoke to an emergent sense that the wholly rational vision of the world was in some fundamental sense foreshortened and sterile—perhaps even inimical to the prized individualism so long held as the antithesis of and antidote to communism. The beginnings of alien abduction embody that basic sense of discouragement in the context of the displaced utopian imaginary. Ufology, however, would continue to attempt engagement with the Other on the terms set by positivism—operating with full faith in the promise offered by the latter. Tales of abduction were only reluctantly engaged by mainstream ufologists. They seemed more in line with the stories told by space brother contactees than with anything empirically verifiable. Abduction lay outside the

scope of *serious* inquiry. It would take some twenty years after the first broadly discussed case of alien abduction—the Hill case—for ufology to fully embrace the abduction narrative and thus cast its fate outside the confines of the rationally possible.

As we enter the realm of abduction, the stakes involved in both confirmation and rejection of percipients' claims increase, just as the gap between reported experience and available explanations not solely dependent upon psychosocial factors widens. The perception of inexplicable objects is central to all modes of encounter, and thus the percipient is always a functional component of the phenomenon. But with the shift to abduction, the level and nature of contact shifts away from the relatively abstract space of visual perception and simultaneously brings vision to the fore in a very different sense—wherein the *witness* becomes the *witnessed*. Visual contact is abstract in that there is always a potential gap between the seeing and the thing seen. Thus we see quotidian explanations for such encounters framed in terms of misperception, with supposed spacecraft explained away as misconstrued conventional aircraft, celestial objects or swamp gas. Third kind encounters up the ante in terms of posited explanations, pushing rationalization past frames of misperception and into the realm of psychopathology. One is unlikely to simply "misrecognize" a terrestrial creature as a space monster. Abduction further increases the weight borne by quotidian explanations. As Jodi Dean observes, "the closer the alien gets, the more foreign it becomes."²⁵³ Abduction is an embodied experience that offers no mundane correlate for the purposes of debunking.

This chapter tracks both the emergence of the abduction narrative, primarily via an examination of the case of Betty and Barney Hill, and the implications of the shift from contact in the style of space brother communiqués to the more bizarre and violent mode of abduction.

²⁵³ Jodi Dean, "The Familiarity of Strangeness: Aliens, Citizens, and Abduction" in *Theory and Event* V.1#2 http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v001/1.2dean.html, 6 (accessed June 12, 2005).

The shift from contact to abduction marks among other things the shift from a narrative that put forward a clear utopian vision—marked by long held political ideals and a recognizably human future--to a narrative that offers neither a clear utopian outcome nor a recognizable future self. The chapter begins with a discussion of the Hill case then moves on to examine the role of hypnosis in the emergent abduction narrative that was established by this case. Lastly I examine the way that abduction presents a utopian scenario that, unlike earlier moments of the displaced utopian imaginary that imagined a future utopia predicated upon the maintenance of both the individual personality and the broader sense of the human, imagines a post-human future. In short, I argue that abduction, as an iteration of the displaced utopian imaginary, offers a *postmodern* vision of utopia.

BETTY AND BARNEY HILL

The case of Betty and Barney Hill is highly illustrative, if not paradigmatic, of the abductee narrative, both in terms of the narrative of their encounter and the ongoing reverberations of that encounter. It thus constitutes a reasonable starting point for our discussion. The Hills were a Boston area interracial couple actively involved in the civil rights movement. Barney served both on the New Hampshire Civil Rights Commission and the Rockingham Community Action Program. Given the tropes of hybridization and the unassimilable Other that would emerge out of tales of abduction, the Hills status as mixed race couple (Barney was African American and Betty Caucasian) is notable. Barney's initial therapist following his experience, Dr. Duncan Stephens, suggested that the emotional difficulties Barney was experiencing were largely the result of the stresses of maintaining a mixed marriage in a racist culture. Jodi Dean points out that John G. Fuller's account of the Hill case tends to efface Barney's struggle as an

underemployed black man in 1960's America.²⁵⁴ After the night of September 19-20, 1961, Betty and Barney would tell a tale that would change both their lives and the landscape of ufology in profound ways. Their story has been told and retold many times in both the popular press and within the literature of ufology. The Hill case was the “primordial precedent, the urtext of alien abduction.”²⁵⁵

On the evening of September 19th, 1961, Betty and Barney Hill set off on a nighttime journey, driving from just south of Montreal through the White mountains of New Hampshire to their home in Portsmouth. Along the way they ostensibly sighted a UFO which, in turn, led to close encounters of the first through third kind and ultimately to abduction. Upon returning home on the morning of September 20, while they did recall witnessing a UFO, the Hills could not recall the events that transpired during their abduction. In fact, they could not recall that they had been abducted at all. The memory of those events, events that occurred over a two-hour-plus period of lost time, and which would eventually emerge via hypnosis, changed both the face of ufology and the displaced utopian imaginary itself. We will begin this chapter with a general discussion of that shift, followed by a discussion of the abduction scenario, the role of hypnosis in abduction and finally the vision of utopia that emerges from abduction as a mode of contact.

Up to the public revelation of the Hill case, first in a two-part series by John G. Fuller in *Look Magazine* (on Oct. 4, 18 1966) and then at more length in Fuller's book, *Interrupted Journey*, published that same year, ufology had been primarily concerned with establishing the physical presence of unidentified flying craft—a concern well within the confines of positivist

²⁵⁴ Dean.

²⁵⁵ Keith Thompson, *Angels and Aliens: UFO's and the Mythic Imagination* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991) 64.

science.²⁵⁶ The Hill case was the start of a slow shift within ufology that would lead to human-alien interaction becoming the central node of inquiry in the study of UFO's. As discussed in the previous chapter, serious researchers interested in UFO phenomena shunned the contactee movement. Contactees, at best, dwelt on the fringes of religion. At worst they were engaged in calculated fraud. The central point of interest for this dissertation, the ostensible contact between humans and beings not of this earth not only held no interest for mainstream ufology--it was an outright anathema. Contactees were an embarrassment. It was hard enough to get the world to take unbiased inquiry into the presence of Unidentified Flying Objects seriously without the associated phenomena claimed by individuals like George Adamski--ongoing journeys to distant planets and enlightenment gained at the feet of interstellar visitors. People like Adamski and the claims they made cast ufology as pulp fiction—wishful thinking posing as science—and ufology imagined itself as solely concerned with verifiable facts.

Ufology was concerned with questions of physical presence rather than questions of meaning. In its incarnation preceding the advent of alien abduction, the study of UFOs concerned itself with a much more immediate question. Were the objects repeatedly viewed in the skies over America, and elsewhere, mere fancy or true objects with physical dimensions? It was primarily in the case of the former that UFO discourse entered into questions of meaning. If UFOs were the product of fancy, what explanation might be offered for the repeated nature of their sighting—suggestibility, mass hysteria, Cold War jitters, the power of rumor? In the positive case, in which UFOs were actual objects, the goal was not explanation, but verification. How might it be established that UFOs existed as actual objects?

²⁵⁶ John G. Fuller, *Incident at Exeter/The Interrupted Journey: Two Landmark Investigations of UFO Encounters in One Volume* (New York: MJF Books, 1966).

Recall for a moment the three phases of close encounter, one of the primary organizing structures of mainstream ufology. The first includes cases in which a craft is viewed from a distance of less than 500 feet—visual verification of the craft’s presence. The second concerns cases in which the craft exerts some physical effect on the witness or the witnesses’ environment—physical verification of the craft’s presence. An interaction of a sort takes place here but one that exists on a purely physical plane. Close encounters of the third kind concern sightings in which the human percipient establishes visual contact with the occupants of a craft. Here we reach the threshold of potential communication between human and extraterrestrial. A witness sees the occupants of a craft and ostensibly the occupant sees the witness as well. Beyond the threshold of this seeing and being seen we might find contact in the sense thus far understood in the iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary discussed in this dissertation—the exchange of *meaningful* communication. But the rubric of close encounters extends only *to* this threshold, not beyond it.

Beyond the threshold of close encounters of the third kind we find ourselves again in the realms of meaning traversed by the displaced utopian imaginary. At the very point of physical contact between human and extraterrestrial, questions about physical presence give way to much messier questions of meaning. Once contact beyond visual apprehension begins—the purely physical world of the object shades over into the world of the subject, and thus beyond pure action and reaction (moments largely measurable and explicable) into questions of volition and intent. What is the purpose of the craft’s visitation? What are the intentions of its occupants? What is the nature of the relationship between visitor and human?

The communication between human and extraterrestrial that played out in the context of earlier iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary was different from that which occurred in the

abduction scenario in a variety of ways. The fact that the latter mode of communication between human and extraterrestrial is coercive is the most obvious difference. In the cases thus far discussed, the human interlocutors have been willing participants in communication. Increasing levels of paranoia regarding the intentions of the extraterrestrials is another related hallmark of the displaced utopian imaginary in the age of abduction. Clearly, if humans are being taken against their will, the beneficence of their abductors' intentions is open to question. The displaced utopian imaginary's dystopian doppelganger emerges in full force in the abduction scenario. All of these shifts will be treated at greater length over the remainder of the chapter. But first, let us return to the case of Betty and Barney Hill—the first widely discussed instance of abduction.

In September of 1961, some two months after their otherworldly experience, the Hills met with Robert Hohmann, C.D. Jackson (both employees of an unnamed electronics firm: the former as a technical writer and the latter as a senior engineer and members of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (N.I.C.A.P.)) at the latter's request. The Hill case first appeared on the radar as a close encounter within the realm of mainstream ufology rather than as abduction. It was during this N.I.C.A.P. meeting that Betty and Barney realized that there was a two hour-plus period that was not accounted for in their memories of the trip. Missing time was to become a hallmark of the abduction experience. Barney recalled,

and while they were here they were mentally reconstructing the whole trip. One of them said 'what took you so long to get home?' They said 'look, you went this distance and it took you these hours. Where were you?' Well, when they said this, I really thought I was going to crack up. I got terrified and I even put my head on the table... I was baffled as to what the reason was for us leaving Colebrook at 10:05 pm and arriving back here at dawn, somewhere around 5 am - nearly seven hours instead of less than four. Even if I allowed more time than I know we took at those roadside stops, there still were at least two hours missing out of that night's trip."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Fuller, 45-46.

In addition to the missing time, the Hills found that they could not account for some 35 miles of their journey. Earlier alien interlocutors—from Spiritualism through the space brothers—were all centrally concerned with communicating *something*. But in order for those interlocutors to communicate, their human counterparts had to remember what had transpired. The recurring motif of lost time in the abduction narrative, in that it was based on *forgetting*, pointed not to communication but its absence or erasure.

How might the Hills recall what occurred during those forgotten hours? How might they account for the fact that they *both* were unable to recall that period of time? In March of 1962, Betty contacted Dr. Patrick Quirke, a local psychiatrist suggested by a friend, in an effort to seek professional guidance on the advisability and potential effectiveness of hypnosis. At their initial and sole consultation with Quirke (a consultation which, as if to multiply the unlikely musicality of Quirke's name, took place at Baldpate, the private sanatorium at which the doctor was employed) he advised that at present it would be most prudent to allow their suppressed memories to surface naturally. The Hills followed Quirke's prescription and the idea of pursuing hypnotherapy remained dormant until the fall of 1963, following the public premier of the Hills' story. The application of psychological models to the abduction experience, specifically in the form of hypnotic regression, would over time become the norm. What began as a way of assessing and assuaging trauma would become a mode of communication, a way to articulate the experience of abduction. What had primarily been used as a way of debunking experience that defied rational explanation—mediums were hysterics, occultists delusional, witnesses to third kind encounters deranged—was slowly enlisted as a way to both heal those ostensibly exposed to the shattering experience of abduction and to add to the pool of knowledge about that experience.

In September of 1963, some two years after the initial encounter, the Hills were invited to relate their story to a discussion group at their church. This was to be the first time they had spoken of their traumatic experience in public. Also speaking at this meeting was Air Force Captain Ben Swett. Swett, who was invited to speak that evening in part because of his study of hypnosis, was struck by how abruptly the Hills' story ended after the moment they heard a series of tones emanating from the trunk of their car. Barney later recalled the events leading up to that moment as follows. On the night of September 19-20, 1961, after sighting the craft at close range and actually seeing the occupants of said craft, Barney ran back to the car, nearing hysteria. As he and Betty drove away, Betty found that she could no longer see the vessel. Barney yelled repeatedly that he was sure it had swung above them. An irregularly rhythmic beeping sound began to fill the air, "the car seemed to vibrate with it." It sounded like, as the Hills later described in their interview with Air Force Major Paul W. Henderson, "someone had dropped a tuning fork."²⁵⁸ The sound seemed to originate from the trunk of the car. Neither Betty nor Barney could identify it. As the beeping proceeded, they both fell into a sort of daze. Some time later the beeping repeated and the Hills found themselves still in their car, traveling down the road. As Barney later put it, Swett "was interested that the account was cut off as if by a cleaver at that point."²⁵⁹ A discussion of hypnotism as a potential tool for unlocking the mystery of what occurred after the series of tones ensued.

After the meeting with the church discussion group, Barney broached the subject of hypnosis with his therapist. Barney, after becoming increasingly exhausted and enervated, had sought psychiatric assistance in the summer of 1962. So it came to pass that after a year and a half of conventional therapy, his therapist, Dr. Duncan Stephens, referred Barney to Dr.

²⁵⁸ Fuller, 27.

²⁵⁹ Fuller, 58.

Benjamin Simon, a Boston psychiatrist and neurologist who had developed his hypnotic skills treating World War II veterans. Stephens felt that Simon might be able to shed some light on Barney's professed period of amnesia and his fears that something highly strange might have occurred during that forgotten passage of time. Initially, the events of the night of September 19, 1961 were not viewed by either Stephens or Barney as central to the latter's current general malaise. The two spent their time together exploring Barney's childhood, questions of race and the vagaries of his entry into a mixed-race marriage in a small New Hampshire town. While maintaining the UFO incident was ancillary to Barney's emotional distress, Dr. Stephens conceded that it was best to be thorough.

The three preliminary sessions with Dr. Simon began in December of 1963. It was in the fifth session, on the twenty-ninth of February, 1964, that the veil obscuring what had occurred at Indian Head began to lift. This sense of "removing the veil" indicates the notion of authentic truth underlying surface manifestations implicit in the model of hypnotic regression. In its subscription to this idea—that of some singular, accessible truth—and in its estimation of psychoanalysis as science, the study of abduction has continued to express a desire for the union of rational modes of inquiry and irrational objects. It was through the application of this ostensibly rational mode of inquiry that the abduction narrative emerged, a story that was far from rational.²⁶⁰ The first of the Hills (they were treated separately and alternately, one in the examination room while the other waited outside) to begin recalling the forgotten or repressed events was Barney. His recall was less enlightening than that of Betty because he had kept his eyes closed for almost the entirety of the events that occurred during the period of lost time.

Prior to the moment at which the Hills' shared memory lapse began, Barney had pulled over the

²⁶⁰ Of course there is a long and stormy tale that could be told about the fortunes of psychoanalysis vis-à-vis its acceptance among a broader scientific community *as* science. It seems fitting that such a border dwelling discipline would serve as the *rational* bridge to the twilight world of abduction.

car and gone into a field with binoculars to have a closer look at the craft they had been watching (a close encounter of the first kind). It was in the field that Barney espied animate occupants aboard the vessel (a close encounter of the third kind) and it was upon seeing these creatures that Barney became convinced that it was he and Betty who were the objects of observation. Here we see the reversal so central to the advent of abduction. The abductee's place in the scenario is no longer that of subject, but that of object. Utterly terrified Barney returned to the car and drove off with Betty and their dog Delsey. As they drove away, the Hills began to hear the tones that signaled the beginning of their amnesiac episode. Under hypnosis Barney recalled that after driving several miles he realized he was no longer on the highway.

I have driven several miles. I think I have driven a lot of miles. And the road is not Route 3. But it is in a heavily wooded area. But it is a road. And this is when I am flagged down... I looked and I was being signaled to stop. And I thought, I wonder if there has been an accident...I saw a group of men, and they were standing in the highway. And it was brightly lit up, as if it were almost daylight, but not really day.

This intense light is typical of low-altitude UFO sightings and such light is a frequent preliminary to abduction. It is characterized by its excessiveness—a light that can burn skin like the sun—a light so bright it blinds. Both tropes, that of light so bright it blinded and that of light so strong it burned, were emblematic of the intensity of the experience and framed what amounted to a mystical experience in terms of an encounter with alien technology. In his writing on UFO phenomena, Jung referred to UFO manifestations as “technological angels,” aptly summing up the sense that UFO encounters framed pre-rational religious experience in a fashion that allowed for its expression in an age that largely disavowed such experience.²⁶¹ The light so bright it blinds captured the sense of the religious epiphany that “blinds” one to the worldly, freeing up a truer sight, the second sight of the blind sage. The light so strong it burns summoned up the language and method of alchemy, with fire and the alembic working to burn of

²⁶¹ Carl Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* (New York: MJF Books, 1978).

the dross of base metals to reveal the gold underneath. Abduction, much more so than earlier iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary, captured the panic and violence of mystical experience—an experience defined, in Jung’s terms as an encounter with the wholly Other.

Barney went on to remember leaving his car. “I am thinking of getting out of the car, and I had not thought that these men when they helped me out of the car [sic] - I could not feel them. And I only became aware that I could not feel them when we were going up an incline. And then I felt that I could not feel them. My arms were in the position of being supported. But I was not walking.” Abductees often describe the sensation of floating. The difficulty Barney showed in describing being lifted and carried but feeling no contact with the creatures carrying him approximated the confusion of this sensation. The loss of control and volition implied by such a sensation is central to the overall terror of the abduction experience. “And I want to peek. I want to look. I want to look... I opened my eyes... I saw a hospital operating room. It was pale blue. Sky blue. And I closed my eyes.”²⁶² That is the last that Barney recalled visually. The rest of his recall was based upon memories drawn from other senses—a harbinger of the fact that the abduction scenario is primarily based not around visual recognition but around sensation.

I was lying on a table, and I thought someone was putting a cup around my groin, and then it stopped...I thought how funny. If I kept real quiet and real still, I won’t be harmed...And it will be over. And I will just stay here and pretend that I am anywhere and think of God and think of Jesus and think that I am not afraid. And I am getting off the table, and I’ve got a big grin on my face, and I am greatly relieved. And I am walking, and I am being guided. And my eyes are closed, and I open my eyes, and that is the car. And the lights are off, and the motor is not running. And Delsey is under the seat. And I reached under and touched her, and she is in a tight ball under the seat, and I sit back. And I see Betty is coming down the road, and she gets into the car, and I am grinning at her and she is grinning back at me. And we both seem so elated and we are really happy. And I’m thinking it isn’t too bad. How funny, I had no reason to fear. And we look and I see a bright moon. And I laugh and say, ‘Well there it goes.’ And I’m happy.”²⁶³

²⁶² Fuller, 126.

²⁶³ Fuller, 127-128.

The cadences of Barney's recollection, with its repeated opening (and...and...and), recall both oracular speech and the child's shaggy dog tale. It is, of course a bit of both. Barney was doubly infantilized/rendered passive by his initial experience and by his vulnerability under hypnosis. The wildly implausible content of the tale recalled childhood's fabulist modalities. The modes of communication discussed in the preceding chapters all lent themselves to oracular speech and all required a "receptivity" that was feminizing if not outright infantilizing. They all involved a surrender of self as an act of will. Abduction works its dissipation *against* the will. Barney's recitation rendered a narrative that offered a strangely occluded vision of the human future. While the preceding modes of the displaced utopian imaginary offered clear visions of the recognizably human in an achieved utopian context, abduction offered visions of a future no longer recognizably human.

It was with the next visit on the seventh of March that Betty's recall began. Betty remembered two groups of "men" approaching the car, three on either side. In recalling these events, despite Dr. Simon's constant reassurance, Betty was clearly frightened and her speech was punctuated by sobs. Seeing Barney behind her, she called out to him. He seemed to be sleepwalking and would not respond. She balked at entering the craft and was reassured by one of the figures. "Only one spoke, the one who was on my left...He had sort of a foreign accent...but he was, you know, very business like."²⁶⁴ Said figure is repeated across iterations of the abduction narrative. Dubbed "the doctor" or "the leader" by abductees, the figure is generally closer to average human height than its lieutenants and often has skin closer to a Caucasian hue (versus the ashen pallor of the rest). Both in its marginally increased resemblance to the human and in its willingness to "speak," the doctor stands as an exception to the overall

²⁶⁴ Fuller, 158.

tenor of the abduction experience in that it invites identification on the part of the abductee. By and large the abduction scenario offers little or no purchase for identification—its surfaces recall stainless steel and its *dramatis personae* offer no words or affect. This is a far cry from the warm environs and generous hosts of Adamski and the familiar textures of heaven. The doctor figure repeatedly assured Betty that they just wanted to run some tests on them and then she and Barney would be returned to their vehicle unharmed. Just as Dr. Simon repeated to Betty throughout her session, the creature continued, albeit ineffectually, to tell her “You don’t have to be afraid.”

Once on board, Betty was subjected to an examination. The creatures took a series of samples—skin, earwax, hair—all of which were wrapped in what Betty recalled as pieces of cellophane or plastic. These samples were stored in the top drawer of a device, “something like a microscope, only a microscope with a big lens,” through which the creatures observed her. They manually examined her as well, running their hands over her head, neck and shoulders as well as her arms, hands, and after she had been told to remove her shoes, her feet. All the while she was seated on a stool with a head brace, “like a dentist, not like a dentist, something like, you know, the brace of a dentist’s chair.”²⁶⁵ She was led to a table and laid down on it.

So they roll me over on my back, and the examiner has a long needle in his hand. And I see the needle. And it’s bigger than any needle that I’ve ever seen. And I ask him what he’s going to do with it (*She is beginning to be upset again*)...And I ask him what, and he said he just wants to put it in my navel, it’s just a simple test. (*More rapid sobbing*) And I tell him, no, it will hurt, don’t do it, don’t do it. And I’m crying, and I’m telling him, ‘It’s hurting, it’s hurting, take it out, take it out!’ And the leader comes over and puts his hand, rubs his hand in front of my eyes, and he says it will be all right. I won’t feel it (*She becomes calmer*) And all the pain goes away. The pain goes away, but I’m still sore from where they put that needle into my navel. Because I told them they shouldn’t do it...I asked the leader, I said, ‘Why did they, why did they put that needle in my navel?’

²⁶⁵ Fuller, 160.

And he said it was a pregnancy test. I said, ‘I don’t know what they expected, but that was no pregnancy test here.’ And he didn’t say anymore.²⁶⁶

Betty’s narrative of unwanted medical attentions established a baseline of humiliation that would run throughout later iterations of the abduction scenario. She was subjected to an ostensibly medical procedure, made the object of an unwanted application of technical expertise. The invasiveness of the procedure, the fact that it occurred without her consent and the clinical detachment of its execution all pointed to the ways the abduction scenario renders its participants as objects. As Dr. Simon brought the session to an end, he repeated his therapeutic mantra, “We’ll stop here now. You’ll be relieved, relaxed and at ease...When I wake you up, you will not remember anything that has transpired here. You will not remember anything that has transpired here until I tell you to recall it.”²⁶⁷ The doctor’s injunctions eerily recalled the instructions Barney recalled in a later session. “I was told in my mind that I would forget what happened. It was imprinted on my mind...And he told me that I should be calm and I should not be afraid. And that no harm would come to me. And that I would be left alone to go on my way. And that I would forget everything, and I would never remember it again.”²⁶⁸

This motif of forgetting points to a dynamic of meaning deferred. In the previous chapter I discussed the opposing narrative strands of ufology and the space brother religions. In the case of the latter, as had been the case in the previously discussed modes of the displaced utopian imaginary, the otherworldly interlocutors in question were endlessly voluble and quite explicit as to the meaning of their presence. Conversely, in the case of the UFO, the other in question refused engagement. The “behavior” of the UFO hewed toward evanescence and disappearance. The empirical engagement with the phenomenon was often characterized by a recession of

²⁶⁶ Fuller, 162-163.

²⁶⁷ Fuller, 163.

²⁶⁸ Fuller, 199.

meaning to the vanishing point. A massive number of cases were reduced via what was often a rote application of quotidian explanations—light refraction, misidentified heavenly bodies and conventional aircraft. Those remaining cases were written off as conspiracy, confabulation or madness of one variety or another. Whatever may have been left over remained because it slipped through the screen of rational explanation, emerging as unanswered questions. UFO sightings that were not explained *away* remained *unexplained*. Abduction likewise enacted this deferment of meaning. The call for forgetting by both alien and psychotherapeutic interlocutors, the general silence of the alien Others and the inscrutability of their actions all lent themselves to this dynamic. Of course the absence or deferment of stable meaning also suggests its obverse. The saucer and/or abduction as signifier without clear signified functioned as speculative engine. The absence of definitive explanation allowed for multiple and contradictory explanations.

The basic narrative that filled in the period of lost time was articulated in these early sessions. Betty and Barney were flagged down by figures in the roadway, led onto the awaiting craft and subjected to physical examinations on different parts of the ship. Following their examination, the two were returned to their car with the injunction that they would recall nothing of the experience. Further details would emerge in later sessions, but the basic series of events remained constant. Barney would recall further elements of his examination, the taking of skin samples via scraping, the creatures running their hands over his body in a way similar to that described by Betty. Again, this motif of medical examination, which would become a standard trope in the abduction narrative, spoke to a number of basic matters. It placed the abductee in a subservient position, rendered them as an object to be observed and assessed, and underlined the fundamental embodiedness of the experience. Aside from moments of pain, it is rare that we are so aware of our bodies as organisms than when the object of medical scrutiny. The examination

motif also speaks to a relationship between human and alien that is distinct from the earlier alien-human communication nexus. Whereas the spectral interlocutors of those earlier moments knew humans better than humans knew themselves, the gray evidences a fundamental lack of understanding concerning the human in many matters. As noted abduction researcher Budd Hopkins relates, “There’s really no way we can tell what they understand about us. Their understanding might be incredibly subtle in some ways, but miss on some other major things. There’s no way to know.”²⁶⁹ The collection and assumed collation of biological data speaks to the positivist desire to render the human transparent. Under the eyes of the gray the individual case is reduced to its role in some overall pattern. In the abduction scenario the human is rendered as an object of empirical analysis. Whereas previously, the phenomenon—ghosts or flying saucers—had been the object of analysis, in the abduction scenario it was the human that came under the lens. Arguably all the stories that fed into the displaced utopian imaginary were stories about humans groping for self-understanding but in the case of abduction it is explicitly so. It was as if after empirical analysis utterly failed to make any sense of the saucers the tools of empiricism were cast back onto the human. This was certainly the case in skeptical ufology, especially in cases of close encounters of the third kind, where debunking explanations shifted from the outer world—temperature inversions, refractory properties—to the inner. The point of analysis became not “what are these objects in the sky?” but “what is wrong with the people who see such things?” In abduction, not only was the lens of empiricism cast back onto humans, it was done so by non-human entities. This was also not without precedent. The space brothers after all had been observing earth and its human inhabitants for many millennia. The difference with abduction was that rather than—as was the case with space brothers—the analysis being in

²⁶⁹ “Interview with Budd Hopkins,” in *UFOs and the Alien Presence*, ed. Michael Lindemann (Santa Barbara, CA: The 2020 Group, 1991) 164-165.

the service of freeing the human spirit, it was—in a more faithful rendering of the positivist ethos—in the service of achieving mastery over an object.

Barney was never to recall his experience with the level of detail exhibited by Betty's account. The sense that the creatures placed some sort of device over his genitals received no further elaboration aside from a strange physical manifestation.

Barney brought up the fact that the small circle of warts that had developed in an almost geometrically perfect circle around his groin some four months after the incident at Indian Head had become inflamed after his therapy with Dr. Simon had begun. As the conscious memory of what had been revealed under hypnosis came back to him, he became aware of the recollection that in the examination on the craft, a circular instrument had been placed at exactly the same point where the warts had now appeared. He wondered: Had these been caused by the examination and the instrument used? Barney was also intelligent enough to realize that the opposite could be true: The warts might be a psychosomatic symptom connected with the feelings experienced under hypnosis. And yet, Barney reasoned, they had initially appeared back in 1962, when he had no conscious memory of the events aboard the craft. Now, in 1964, during the session, they became inflamed (242).²⁷⁰

The attention paid to genitalia and matters of reproduction is another consistent motif throughout abduction accounts up to the present day. Males report sperm extraction while female abductees report egg implantation, pregnancy and mysteriously disappearing fetuses six weeks into the pregnancy. This focus further reduces abductees to bio-units—humans as breeding stock. It also raises the specter of the alien-human hybrid.²⁷¹ One operative scenario is that the grays are a dying race and that to perpetuate themselves they must create a hybrid creature with some other type of being. The race that would succeed them, and assumedly us, would be a hybrid of gray and human—both but neither.

One related observation concerning the gray both strikes an interesting tension with the anal/genital focus of abduction and exhibits a suggestive parallel to the ghosts of Spiritualism.

Abductees identify aliens as male and female but they are unable to describe any differences in body shapes or characteristics between the two sexes. Neither sex has apparent genitals or secondary sexual characteristics. The area where genitals would be

²⁷⁰ Fuller, 242.

²⁷¹ Budd Hopkins' *Intruders* (New York: Random House, 1987) first broadly introduced the genetic hypothesis into UFO discourse.

on a human is smooth and rounded. Similarly, there appear to be no buttocks or rectum on an alien. Rather, abductees report a ridge where the buttocks would be.²⁷²

The same article from which the above is drawn later suggests that the aliens neither breathe nor eat. Like the angels or spirits before them, the grays seem to have been freed from the grosser manifestations of physical being. Abductees though, unlike their media predecessors, are subject to an experience that is decidedly body centered.

Other details that emerged during later hypnotic sessions include a series of questions and confusions raised by the e.t.'s in "conversation" with Betty. (I place conversation in quotes because Betty and Barney, as well as antecedent abductees, report that aside from a kind of slash, the grays have no discernible mouths.) You will recall that Barney claimed, "I was told in my mind that I would forget what happened." The grays communicate via telepathy. The questions the e.t.'s raised with Betty run contrary to other accounts most notably that of Whitley Streiber, author of the best selling *Communion*, abductee and mainstay of the abduction community. Streiber's understanding of abduction is one in which, recalling the space brother myth, the aliens evidence a deep connection with both their individual human abductees and humanity writ large. Betty's captors were confused by basic conceptions that Betty struggled to articulate. At one point in her examination, they had her open her mouth and began pulling at her teeth. A certain amount of confusion arose when they found that her teeth were not removable. Barney's teeth came out upon close examination so the e.t.'s assumed that Betty's teeth should come right out as well. Betty explained that Barney had dentures fitted following a mouth injury. She went on to explain, when asked what dentures were, that as people get older they often have their teeth replaced. This led to a series of questions: What is older? What is age? What is time? In attempting to explain time Betty referred to the passage of earth around the sun. The e.t.'s seemed unable to understand what she meant by her reference to these celestial bodies.

The question, "What do humans eat?" led to a series of further questions as well. What are vegetables? What is yellow? This set of basic confusions points to a fundamental

²⁷² David M. Jacobs, "Aliens and Hybrids" in *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, ed. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1994) 87.

contradiction within discourses of the alien. These discourses include notions that there is some deep and abiding link between humans and extraterrestrials—that we have in fact been under observation for thousands of years. Humans were created from alien genetic material. Aliens have been observing human civilization for many millennia and have a great stake in the future of those civilizations. Aliens are building an alien-human hybrid race. Aliens coerce particular emotional responses from their human subjects. Thus a picture emerges wherein the alien both knows humans and their emotional and physical makeup exceedingly well and simultaneously exhibits a comic level of confusion over such basic things as teeth and time. In cases where communication does occur between occupants and abductees, “time, lifespans and the individuality of humans seem to be recurrent topics” of confusion.²⁷³ Similar to the sense that recurs across case studies of abduction, in which the alien seems both strange and familiar to the human subject, humans are both known and utterly foreign in the eyes of the alien. This mutual lack of recognition stands in stark contrast to earlier scenarios and suggests a fundamental shift in the displaced utopian imaginary. Even Streiber’s accounts oft times suggest a cross between familiarity with and simultaneous confusion about human matters on the part of the gray. In *Communion* he describes one visitation in which a gray appears to him wearing an absurdly outsized “cardboard” suit in the style of a 1930’s movie gangster.

The displaced utopian imaginary has functioned as a critique operating from some imagined Archimedean point—a critique leveled from beyond the pale, from other planets. The tale of long term surveillance from afar suggests a displaced version of humanity’s own long history of reflexivity. If you imagine these narratives as a way of commenting at a distance on humanity’s long and arduous inquiry into the human and the nature of the self, the commentary

²⁷³ Thomas Bullard, “The Rarer Abduction Episodes” in *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, ed. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1994) 72.

seems to have suggested that humans simultaneously knew a lot about themselves and operated with fundamental gaps in that understanding. As already noted, the story of long term surveillance by aliens renders humanity itself as the object of empirical inquiry. In the case of the space brothers the outcome of such surveillance was concern over humanity's potentially destructive ways and the offer to show humanity the way to earthly paradise. But in the case of abduction, what is highlighted is the inherent violence of empiricism and the suggestion that even with many years (if not centuries or millennia) of studied observation that aliens still really don't know humans. The suggested critique, of course, is that empiricism offers only the illusion of knowledge. Framed by the implicit critique of the displaced utopian imaginary, perhaps it would be more to the point to say that empiricism offers knowledge without wisdom.

MESMER RETURNS

It was only through hypnotic regression that the Hill's gained direct access to their abduction experience. The emergence of the hypnotherapist as a central figure was another point of departure that marked the shift from contact to abduction as primary alien contact narrative, bringing us full circle to the themes of mesmerism that open this dissertation. The configuration of abductee, therapist and alien recalled an earlier triangle, one central to the opening chapter of this dissertation. In the discourse of alien abduction, all three components, alien, abductee and hypnotherapist are necessary in the production of meaning. The three function together as a sort of machine or assemblage. The alien constitutes a field of Otherness that the abductee, enfiguring quotidian reality, passes through. The hypnotherapist functions as the catalyst for the release of the energies or meaning accrued via the abductees passage through the field of the Other. Through the hypnotherapist's intervention, the abductee's nocturnal experience of the

impossible is brought into the “light of day.” The realm of Spiritualism enlisted a similar triumvirate in its production of meaning. The mesmerist, medium and spirit anticipated the later assemblage of abductee, alien and hypnotherapist. The mesmerist induced the trance state that allowed the medium passage through the field of Otherness embodied by the spirit. Both triangles spoke to the coming together of rational and irrational as a way of freeing up the energies of spirit. The hypnotherapist and mesmerist stood in as representative of active, masculine force and consciously applied technique—the world of Positivism. The medium and abductee both represented passive, feminine force and *received* wisdom—the world of spirit as embodied in the world of matter. Both alien and spirit represented a reality that somehow superseded or escaped the world of strict rationality and the visible.

All three components of the assemblage were marginal figures. The dead and the alien were marginal for obvious reasons, emerging as they did from realms beyond. The marginality of the spiritualist medium was discussed at great length in the first chapter of this dissertation—a figure moving between the worlds of the living and the dead, women acting in mannish modes, figures of great sensitivity and delicate constitution. The abductee evidenced a similar kind of sensitivity. What statistical skew does exist in terms of *who* gets abducted points to a number of qualities that recall the medium. One study suggests that abductees may be “alike in being of relative high intelligence with a richness of inner life and creativity... [with] a weak sense of identity—particularly sexual identity, they displayed a vulnerability in the interpersonal realm.”²⁷⁴ All of these characteristics suggest that abductees, much like the classic media of Spiritualism, were and are border dwellers—in between in many senses—and thus more readily equipped to enter into spaces that are both/and, neither/nor.

²⁷⁴ David A. Johnson, “Personality Characteristics of UFO Abductees” in *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, ed. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1994) 317.

The mesmerist and hypnotherapist both operated in the borderlands of science—their procedures and effects articulated in the language of science but with always something of the taint of quackery attached to them. Hypnosis, the trope that most readily connects the alpha and omega of this dissertation, has suffered and continues to suffer from the taint of quackery. In its most maleficent incarnation, embodied in figures such as Svengali or Rasputin, the hypnotist is imagined as a figure of great will and presence of mind. As one character exclaims in *Trilby*, the novel in which the character of Svengali appeared, “He [Svengali] mesmerized you...They get you into their power, and just make you do any blessed thing they please - lie, murder, steal - anything! And kill yourself into the bargain when they’ve done with you!”²⁷⁵ Or as Madame Blavatsky of Theosophical fame would have it:

Do you not see the tremendous evils that lie concealed in hypnotism? Look at Charcot’s experiments at the Salpêtrière! He has shown that a quite innocent person can be made to perform actions quite against his or her will; can be made to commit crimes, even, by what he calls Suggestion. And the *somnambule* will forget all about it, while the victim can never identify the real criminal. Charcot is a benevolent man, and will never use his power to do harm. But all men are not benevolent. The world is full of cruel, greedy, and lustful people, who will defy detection and pass through the midst of us all unpunished.²⁷⁶

Blavatsky went on to comment on the broader implications of this danger in a fashion that appears to bear as much upon the phenomenon of abduction as it does on hypnotism: “Yes, Sir! Witch tales in this enlightened age! And mark my words! You will have such witch tales as the Middle Ages never dreamt of. Whole nations will drift insensibly into black magic, with good intentions, no doubt, but paving the road to hell none the less for that!”²⁷⁷

While the abduction, or post 1961, phase of contact discourse increasingly lacked a central, charismatic figure in the form of the classic contactee, the hypnotherapist, a much more

²⁷⁵ George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (London: Penguin Books, 1994) 48.

²⁷⁶ H.P. Blavatsky, *Dynamics of the Psychic World: Comments by H.P. Blavatsky on Magic, Mediumship, Psychism and the Powers of the Spirit*, ed. Lina Psaltis (Wheaton, Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1972) 28.

²⁷⁷ Blavatsky, 28.

scientifically sympathetic figure, assumed that position. The contactee functioned as a direct interlocutor with alien intelligences. In the case of abduction, although the abductee experiences direct contact, the abductee is often unable to fully recall—much less communicate—the substance of that contact. The abductee requires the hypnotherapist to complete the circuit of communication, just as many spirit mediums required a mesmerist. Even if the abductee can recall elements of the experience, the meaning of it all remains elusive. As in classical psychotherapy, the dreamer needs help in recalling the dream and in discerning the meaning therein. Thus the privileged interlocutor, the communicative fulcrum, in the case of abduction is not a figure centrally located in the experiential web of alien contact, as in the case of the contactee, but a figure that resides rather in a space of clinical remove. As the experience of contact grew increasingly embodied and concrete, via abduction, the process by which the experience was understood became increasingly abstracted. The degree of clinical remove on the part of the hypnotherapist varied from case to case. The earliest example of Dr. Benjamin Simon, the hypnotherapist in the Hill Case, represented a fairly complete clinical distancing. Simon was initially not at all sympathetic to the belief that the Hills had *actually* been abducted while remaining sympathetic to the understanding that the Hills *believed* that they had been abducted.

The hypnotherapist functions in a classical psychoanalytic mode. Acting as psychopomp, the therapist guides the abductee through the nether regions of repressed self-knowledge. During the process of regressive hypnotherapy, prior to the therapist's full revelation of what emerges under hypnosis, the analysand is shielded from this lost self-knowledge. It is while under hypnosis that the abductee most closely resembles the spiritualist medium, conveying previously hidden communiqués in a trance state, unaware of what they reveal. However, these

communiqués emerge not from the land of the dead but from a twilight realm of impossible experience. It is not the banal proclamations of departed kith and kin that the analysand communicates, but rather their own embodied, yet alienated, experience. Uncannily echoing the demands of the alien abductors the patient undergoing hypnosis is repeatedly told by the therapist that they have nothing to fear, they are safe and more importantly, they are not to remember anything upon awakening. In a very real way, the analyst is the daytime face of the extraterrestrial intruder—the abduction is made consummate by the therapist. After beginning the process of listening to taped sessions of their hypnosis a telling exchange occurred between the Hills. “‘I certainly,’ Betty laughed, ‘hope that Dr. Simon isn’t really a spaceman!’” Barney’s rejoinder recalled his response to Betty’s query, posed immediately after the craft took off at the end of their encounter, as to whether he now believed in flying saucers. “‘Don’t be ridiculous!’”²⁷⁸

In the context of the broader abduction discourse, the hypnotherapist occupies a priestly, or in concert with the abductee, shaman-like, position. It is the therapist who opens the avenues that make it possible for the abductee to dive deep and recover his memories of the experience. It is the therapist who helps the abductee process and suture his trauma. In early cases, such as the Hills, the primary goal of hypnosis was such a suture and the hypnotherapist seemed less interested in providing some *raison d’être* for the phenomenon. This is explicable in part by the very fact that there was no established set of narrative tropes to draw upon at this point. The operative assumption was that any events that had occurred were either strictly subjective or that some quotidian explanation would suffice in contextualizing the analysand’s experience. It is also important to note that the relationship between therapist and “client community” changes

²⁷⁸ Fuller, 259.

considerably over time. While in earlier cases, the relationship between therapist and any UFO “community” was tenuous at best, as the abductee phenomenon grew both in terms of scope and notoriety, hypnotherapists would emerge who were considerably more invested in the question of ongoing alien presence and contact - Budd Hopkins and David E. Mack in particular.

Both Hopkins and Mack are central figures in post-abduction ufology and thus deserving of a brief biographical note at this point. While both public imagination and research interest within ufology turned increasingly toward the supposed phenomenon of alien abduction in the years following the Hill case, it was the publication of Budd Hopkins’ *Missing Time* in 1981 that fully ushered in the abduction era of both ufology and the displaced utopian imaginary.²⁷⁹ Hopkins (b. 1931), whose primary vocation for much of his life was that of artist, became involved in the study of UFO phenomena both through personal experience—a multiple witness, daytime sighting in 1964—and through investigating and reporting a later New York-based multiple witness sighting in the pages of *The Village Voice*. Hopkins became increasingly involved in abduction research throughout the latter half of the 1970’s and published his findings, based upon his own efforts at hypnotically regressing abductees, as *Missing Time*. With his publication, Hopkins articulated many of the central elements of the abduction myth, asserting

1) that abductions are not random events; (2) that they occur periodically over an abductee’s life, starting in early childhood; (3) that the abductors subject their victims to intrusive medical procedures (such as the insertion or removal of small devices thought to be monitoring or tracking mechanisms); (4) that the abductors, typically small gray-skinned humanoids, treat their captives with cold indifference on the whole; (5) that the purpose of abductions may have to do with alien interest in human genetics; and (6) abduction experiences may have happened to “tens of thousands of Americans whose encounters have never been revealed.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ New York: Richard Marek Publishers.

²⁸⁰ Jerome Clark, “Extraterrestrial Hypothesis and Ufology,” in *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial* (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 214.

David E. Mack, a Harvard trained and based psychiatrist, is perhaps the most “legitimate” proponent of the reality of alien abduction. Given his longtime interest in “non-ordinary” states of consciousness, his oft-stated distrust of the “western mind” and his collaboration with such unorthodox researchers as Stanislav Grof (early psychedelics researcher and founding figure of transpersonal psychology), he still draws skepticism from debunkers. While initially skeptical of the work being done by Bud Hopkins, Mack became increasingly interested in the question of abduction after meeting with Hopkins and some of his subjects. Mack’s 1994 *Abductions*, based on his clinical work with abductees, was widely read and reviewed.²⁸¹ While Mack was introduced to abduction studies by Bud Hopkins and thus is in some sense the former’s protégé, the two part ways on a basic issue. While Hopkins maintains that the phenomenon of abduction is at best negative and at worst nefarious, Mack maintains that the overall effect of abduction a potentially utopian one. Both, however, continue to agree on the reality of abduction and, more importantly to our current discussion, the centrality of hypnosis in revealing the meaning of the phenomenon. As in all of the cases previously discussed, the rational mind must first be disarmed via trance for material that is banished by materialist hegemony to surface.

The events that transpired during the Hills’ two hours of lost time were revealed over the course of six months and twenty sessions of hypnotherapy. The content of these memories revealed some changes in the human-alien communication nexus— changes that emerged with the coming together of the themes of the saucer and agents of change from afar. The most novel of these is the emergence of terror as a constant and central experiential component in alien-

²⁸¹ See Steve Dykes, ‘Abduction’: *Close encounters of spiritual kind* (The Boston Sunday Herald May 8, 1994) 46; Susan Dewan, Aliens Attempt to Save Earth (Los Angeles Times Book Review, August 17, 1994) 13.

human encounters: the terror of being seen, the terror of the Other, the terror of being reduced to an object. All of these motifs had been in place as early as Spiritualism—the spirits watched the living, they were not human, the medium was rendered flat and blank, a screen for the projection of another’s will. But strangely enough, the séance room was not a place of fear. Wonder, yes. Agreeable shivers, yes. But nothing like the terror described by the Hills and the many that have followed. The encounter with the gray functions not as a moment of clarity or grace but as one of horror and dissolution.

ABDUCTION AS PARANOIA

The tension between Hopkins and Mack over the net effect of abduction captures one of the basic tensions of the displaced utopian imaginary. The displaced utopian narrative contains within itself the seeds of its own dystopian doppelganger. While the utopian imaginary in its positive phase connotes a sense that things are moving toward some desired end state, the dystopian fears that the end approaching is one of horror. The displaced utopian imaginary often illustrates the proximity, if not simultaneity, of the dystopian and utopian. While Dorothy Martin’s contacts informed her that atomic explosions have opened up the channels of communication between humans and the galactic federation, thus bringing us one step closer to utopia, those same explosions herald another potential end, one of utter destruction. While Spiritualists trumpeted the beneficent effects of closing the gap between the living and the dead, mainstream commentators deplored the popularity of Spiritualism as a sign of cultural decadence and occultists (Madame Blavatsky included) argued that the supposed spirits of the dead were in fact “elemental” spirits whose council was not to be trusted. The phase of the displaced utopian imaginary that emerged with alien abduction pushed the conflation of the utopian and the

dystopian, or in the language of Northrop Frye, the apocalyptic and the demonic, to its (il)logical extreme.

The abduction scenario and the broader explanatory models offered to make sense of that scenario evidenced an increasing paranoia. This paranoia, like the phenomenon as a whole in the years following 1962, is both continuous with the tenor and content of responses to UFO's in the first 15 years following World War II and also clearly indicative of fundamental shifts in that response. To understand the structuring mechanisms of that paranoia, one must note a thematic in the years following the Second World War that runs counter to the one limned in chapter three of this dissertation. While the pre-war themes of the benevolent space brothers continued to play out in the flying saucer narratives during that period, they were paralleled by Cold War themes of dehumanization and threats to individuality.

One explanation for the appearance of saucers over American skies that competed with the extraterrestrial hypothesis was that said saucers were an aerial extension of the Soviet menace. The initial hypothesis following the Arnold sighting was that the saucers were Soviet secret weapons.²⁸² The line of paranoia that connects the contact and abduction eras flows less from a believer's perspective than from the understanding that the saucers might be a Soviet secret weapon and the use of the alien as an allegory for the immanent threat of Soviet-style communism. It is within the Cold War discourse about communism's ostensible drive toward dehumanization, the collapse of free will and the enslavement of the individual that the clearest precedents can be found for the fears attendant to the later less sanguine interpretations of the alien presence and agenda.

The fear that saucers might be a communist ploy found its fullest articulation within the

²⁸² Curtis Peebles, *Watch the Skies: A Chronicle of the Flying Saucer Myth* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1994) 9.

realm of mass culture, most specifically science fiction cinema. It was here that the link between aliens, saucers and the red menace was most convincingly forged. The story of post war science fiction has been the object of sustained critical inquiry in such studies as M. Keith Booker's *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War*.²⁸³ Films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (a nicely literal anticipation of alien abduction) capture the unease of the uncanny, in which the self, while still outwardly recognizable, is rendered alien. It is this displacement of the purely physical conundrum of unidentified flying objects with stickier metaphysical questions of self, sentience, and recognition that most effectively capture the shift to abduction.

While negative interpretations of the presence of unidentified aerial objects in the skies of America can be understood as a reflection of misgivings about the communist threat in the years immediately following Kenneth Arnold's 1947 sighting of unidentified craft over the Cascade mountains, as abduction became the central mode of extraterrestrial/human contact, the source of that threat was increasingly imagined as cosmic rather than terrestrial, with the imagined threat of the extraterrestrial operating not as metaphor but concrete referent. In addition to the displacement of standard fears about communism—loss of freedom, dissolution of self—onto alien presence, the scale of that threat was expanded to a scenario in which the relation between humans and aliens was not merely contemporary, but part of a process that had been unfolding throughout the history of human kind. This process, in its most elaborate form, was marked by a long term surveillance and intervention in which humanity was the object and the alien the actor, a scenario which should by now be familiar given the earlier discussions of Blavatsky's Great White Brotherhood and the space brothers of the Ballards and Adamski.

²⁸³ M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001).

In the space brother scenario, the surveillance under which we unknowingly labored was benign. Our spectral overseers worked to nudge us toward realizing our potential as a species and away from squandering our birthright. So, in the paranoid version, why are we being watched? In one scenario, the watchers/abductors are beings whose home planet and genetic line are exhausted. They want nothing less than our blood and our land. These aliens are bent on either sapping or usurping the earth and its inhabitants of its vitality, whether through the creation of an alien-human hybrid whose emergence will eclipse both “parent” species (a scenario whose resonance with fears of the end result of miscegenation is abundantly clear in science fiction novels like Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis*) or through a broader pattern of extracting the vital life force of the earth as living organism (as per Wilhelm Reich’s notion that UFO activity is directly linked to the process of desertification, the ongoing encroachment of desert onto surrounding, arable land - either through extraction of orgone energy, or through dispersal of deadly orgone rays).²⁸⁴ This evil alien force is deadlocked in battle with the forces of good. The general understanding is that this longstanding, ongoing battle is between the grays and the Nordics (the latter of whom we have met in their guise as the space brothers), and has earth as its unwitting battleground and humans as its unwitting proxies.

The ambiguity evidenced by varying accounts (sometimes the Nordics are the bad guys and the grays the good, sometimes they work in collaboration) of this battle both parallels and feeds upon the ambiguity seen in the attempts to bring meaning to the abduction phenomenon. Are the horrific accounts of abduction evidence of a malefic force bent on the sowing of madness, dissipation and ultimately, destruction? Or do they point rather to a long-term plan for humanity’s ultimate transcendence of its own terrestrial and embodied enslavement? On the face

²⁸⁴ Octavia E. Butler, *Dawn* (New York: Warner Books, 1987); Octavia E. Butler, *Adulthood Rites* (New York: Warner Books, 1988); Octavia E. Butler, *Imago* (New York: Warner Books, 1989); See <http://www.orgonelab.org/> for info on current Orgonomic work on desertification.

of it, the abduction experience as described by abductees is difficult to conceive of as benign. The experiences and level of trauma described by abductees seem to indicate an inexplicable and apparently random spread of terror. How then is it that so many leading public figures engaged with the abduction phenomenon can point to the abductions as not merely benign, but salutary?

As we have seen, the discourses that circulated around alien contact in the years preceding the emergence of the abduction phenomenon drew largely on previously established concerns and understandings—concerns and understandings that arose out of the nineteenth century precedents earlier discussed. The ideas and ideals associated with Spiritualism and Theosophy, as well as with the various progeny of these two movements, centrally informed the ways in which the post-World War II saucer boom was understood among believers. The notions of an imminently imperiled earth, of an occult source of wisdom, carried by beings whose central concern was the salvation of humanity and of mysterious contacts between those beings and chosen individuals in an effort to spread the wisdom that will bring about the aforementioned salvation—all of those basic constructions were maintained in the post-World War II era. So how is this utopian understanding of visitors from outer space conjoined with the apparently dystopian advent of abduction and the gray?

One place to begin addressing this question is with noting that one of the abiding attributes of the UFO and its attendant discourses is its tendency to encompass diametrically opposed categories, a tendency that would allow for the *co-presence* of utopia and dystopia. Dr. Benjamin Simon, the therapist with whom Betty and Barney Hill underwent hypnosis, noted that this type of collapse is the hallmark of the logic of the unconscious. He stated in one of his last meetings with the Hills “The rules that operate for the conscious mind won’t operate for the unconscious. In the unconscious mind, consistency means nothing. Past and present don’t exist.

Everything is now. The past is now; the present is now; the future is now. Opposites exist together without any incongruity whatsoever. Things *are* and *are not* all at the same time [emphasis in the original].”²⁸⁵ The logics of dream and myth, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, centrally inform the displaced utopian imaginary. Myth, as defined by Northrop Frye, is centrally concerned simultaneously with both the “apocalyptic” and the “demonic.” The collapse of the binary utopian/dystopian is central to the way the UFO and the extraterrestrial are read culturally. The literature concerning the phenomenon (and here I am referring to literature that flows from a position of belief) tends to hew to either one or the other mode of understanding. The utopian view imagines the presence of alien visitors as a sign of benign intervention—an intervention that points the way to the full development of human potential. The dystopian view elaborates a vision of nefarious intruders, bent on the manipulation and exploitation of all humankind. Yet there is a third position, one that departs from the binary logic of either/or and construes the alien presence as *both* beneficent and destructive. It is this position that abduction brings to the fore.

The application of the myth of the benevolent space brothers to the terrifying and bizarre incursions of the grays seems, *prima facie*, absurd. The struggle to read the abduction phenomenon through earlier tropes of alien contact is both evidence of the constant human tendency to render the alien in terms of the familiar, a sort of cultural anthropomorphism and a more general continuation of the established tendency to rescue some stability, some maintenance of sameness from a fundamentally centrifugal scenario. The urgency of this maintenance is stepped up in the abduction scenario. The alien is no longer recognizably human. In fact, its residual resemblance to the human figure heightens rather than undoes its

²⁸⁵ Fuller, 278.

uncanniness. As a figuration of some potential human future, the gray suggests a transformation that goes beyond the borders of comprehension. The central trope that had heretofore grounded the centrifugal force of the nexus of alien-human communication—the survival of individual personality—more broadly, the survival of humanity as such—all but disappears in the abduction scenario. The mode of communication that plays out in the abduction scenario is no longer cooperative and reciprocal but highly coercive and largely unidirectional, with the aliens receiving but not dispensing information. Whitley Streiber recalls in *Transformation*, “At first I had called them ‘aliens,’ but there were too many things about them that suggested—if they were aliens—they knew us very well. I did not like the sound of the word *alien*. It conjured up an image of something so strange, so *apart* from us, that we would never come to understand its true nature, to achieve a relationship with it. *And I was desperate for understanding, desperate for relationship* [emphasis added].”²⁸⁶ Contact, in the abduction mode resists identification as it resists interpretation.

Streiber’s desperation highlights the existential stakes involved in the current iteration of the displaced utopian imaginary. At issue is not merely the future of humanity but the future of very category “human.” Rather than the volubility so evidenced by the dead of Spiritualism and the space faring benefactors of the Great I Am, the grays—by far the most common alien actors in the abduction scenario, in large part, offer no real communication—they resist interpretation. In reading the gray and alien abduction as metaphor for the current state of the utopian imaginary, it is tempting to read the gray’s reticence, its very “apartness” as indicative of an overall estrangement from the possibilities of radical social change. The fact that we cannot effectively communicate with the enfiguration of utopian possibility means that we are somehow

²⁸⁶ Whitley Streiber and William Morrow, *Transformation: the Breakthrough* (New York: Avon, 1989) 7.

effectively cut off from that possibility.²⁸⁷ This is a tempting conclusion to draw and one that has been drawn in a variety of contexts. Constance Penley suggests that the “dystopian tendency in American science fiction indicates an atrophy of the utopian imagination, our cultural incapacity to imagine the future.”²⁸⁸ Jodi Dean’s work on abduction argues that the dystopic nature of abduction points to a sense of powerlessness and disengagement.

Since people feel unable to act meaningfully, since they regard themselves as vulnerable victims of a technology beyond their control, they displace agency onto an alien other... The technological achievements once seen as the sign of progress and agency, a particularly masculine sign to be sure, are revealed as the very causes of human incapacity. The connection between masculinity and technology, moreover, could explain why men's abduction narratives are so explicitly sexualized. Terrified of losing their grip on their tools, they displace their fear of loss of control onto their own bodies, now feminized.²⁸⁹

M. Keith Booker argues that the paranoid fantasies of cold-war SF indicate an emergence of a post-utopian vision—a vision he claims achieved hegemony in what he calls “the long 1950’s” (1946-1964) and maintains this dominant position to the present day.²⁹⁰ A more oblique reading of the communication breakdown evidenced by abduction yields different results.

As material and social elements of past utopian dreams have come to pass—unprecedented material wealth, a relative increase in rights of minorities and sexual freedom—visions of perfection have receded into more obtuse ideals of freedom, largely freedom *from* the

²⁸⁷ For an engaging discussion of the ways in which abduction speaks to an increasing skepticism vis-à-vis the public sphere, see Jodi Dean. Dean touches on similar themes to those treated above, but does so in a way that claims a temporal specificity for the alien that I would dispute. “I am interested in discourses like that of ufology where participants think they speak and reason like everyone else, but everyone else finds what they are saying incomprehensible and irrational. I’m interested because this is the situation of America at the millennium.” (Dean, 6) Of course I argue that the application of the tools of the Enlightenment to matters irrational is an ongoing project—abduction is only the latest of such moments.

²⁸⁸ Constance Penley, “Time Travel, Primal Scene, and Critical Dystopia (on The Terminator and La Jetee)” in *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989) 121.

²⁸⁹ Jodi Dean, “Theorizing Conspiracy Theory” in *Theory and Event* V.4 #3 http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v004/4.3r_dean.html (accessed November 6, 2005); For an extended discussion of the emasculation of the American male, see Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: the Betrayal of the American Male* (New York: Perennial, 2000)

²⁹⁰ M. Keith Booker, *The Post-Utopian Imagination: American Culture in the Long 1950’s* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002).

carceral regime, surveillance, the dulling effects of mass culture. The prevalent *positive* freedom is often imagined as some sort of self-realization or self-abnegation. The gray and the whole process of dehumanization attendant in the abduction scenario point less to a revolution in society than to a revolution in self, a revolution difficult, if not impossible, to communicate directly. The figure of the Other in the displaced utopian imaginary—at least in the iterations discussed herein—constitutes a kind of perfected self. The dead of Spiritualism spoke of what we would become after passing beyond the veil. They were the promise of perfection beyond the grave. The space brothers represented that toward which we aspired—radiant, beautiful, at peace with themselves and the cosmos. If only we would follow their instructions we could be as they. The dead and the space brothers were recognizably human. If the grays, like their spectral forbearers are visions of our future selves and are barely recognizable to us, what does that mean? Part of the answer to that question lies in the recognition that the utopian ideals attached to the earlier iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary are consistent with a *Modern* ethos.

Visions of spirits and humans from other plane(t)s might reasonably be viewed as distinctly un-modern in that such visions are irrational. But the imagined future conveyed by these visions proceeded along rational lines. The future was seen as an extension of the present, the result of *progress* toward perfection. The movement toward the future, even if it did involve the assistance of beings that have no place in a rational world-view, was linear. It was all a matter of taking the tools and systems already available and using them in a way that was aligned with the logic of the cosmos. The vision of a perfected society, in which perennial problems of discrimination and unequal distribution of goods and labor were fully and finally addressed, was, within the modern myth of progress, a matter of becoming *more* human. It was a question of

reaching our innate potential. The humanist vision of progress was so convinced of the inevitability of human perfection that even the seemingly impossible presence of ghosts and spacemen didn't trouble it. They merely constituted further evidence of the ever-expanding range and capacity of human endeavor. Communication with the dead was the first step toward conquering death and thus time, communion with beings from other planets a further step toward conquering space.

The gray however is a different story. The figure and its connotations speak more to a declensionist narrative than one of progress. The figure itself with its ashen pallor and its name is suggestive of ill health, old age and thus death. Its resemblance to the human form is strictly vestigial, consisting of the basic layout of its facial features (though with mouth and nose all but gone) and bipedalism (though grays seem to float as much as walk). The operative narrative in which the creatures have exhausted their bloodline and must draw upon human genetics to survive further suggests a sense of withering demise. So, in that the gray stands in as a projection of the future of the human, perhaps, like the writing in the sand at the close of Foucault's *The Order of Things*, it signals the end of the Human as we know it.²⁹¹ While this would be disastrous from a Modern perspective, the Postmodern, or perhaps more accurately Poststructural, perspective invites such an end as desirable.

The fundamental problem with the Human from the poststructuralist perspective is the operative notions of the *subject* that reside within that construct. The impulse to problematize the "subject" has been a key problem in philosophy for over a century. The *bourgeois* subject in particular has come under extended scrutiny in a line of thought that extends from Nietzsche through Bataille and into the more recent work of poststructuralist theory. The operative

²⁹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

understanding is roughly that what we conceive of as the individual subject is largely the accretion of social convention—a carapace of attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and practices that originate “outside” the individual but are reproduced and lived by the individual in such a way that the individual imagines the traits, behaviors etc. that follow from this internalization as somehow originating from the self. In other words, what I think of as the “I” is in fact an assemblage of intersecting external forces. All this talk of inside and outside is merely a convenient metaphor in so far as the distinction collapses under the poststructuralist critique. This basic conception is operative in such theoretical constructs as Foucault’s understanding of the capillary nature of power and especially in his study of penality, as well as in Deleuze and Guattari’s body without organs.²⁹² Both of these constructs function to radically bring into question the notions of interiority so central to understandings of the stable subject. The basic argument is that the subject as such is an enabling fiction—a fiction that underwrites status quo property relations, modes of production and distributions of power. In short, the poststructuralist critique isolates the subject as a linchpin in the system of late capitalism. It should be no surprise then, that those who espouse such a critique would welcome the demise of the “Human.” The goal of the poststructuralist critique is, in many ways, the dissolution of the subject (a goal, which like the general philosophical critique of the subject, has precedents that run back to at least the mid-nineteenth century—in this case, to the efforts of the English Romantics and the French Symbolists). The gray exemplifies a certain shift in understandings of subjectivity that emerged over the latter half of the twentieth century.

²⁹² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

It is in this desire for dissolution—the centrifugal force that runs throughout the cases discussed in the preceding chapters—that we find the utopian thread running through the gray’s labyrinth, for the impulse behind this will to dissolve the subject is fundamentally utopian. But unlike the Theseus of old, the way *out* is *in*. The movement is not toward the destruction of the monster, but rather its embrace. For to move beyond the present order of things, to move toward some future radically different from the present, requires the courage to imagine and then inhabit a state of being that from our current perspective seems monstrous. This is Frederic Jameson’s point when he asserts in *The Seeds of Time* that the utopian impulse is itself monstrous.²⁹³ The figure of the Alien looms large in the landscape of the “post-human.” In the context of the Cold War, the alien functioned as exemplar of the soulless collapse of individuality associated with the communist menace. The pod people of the *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and the much later post-Cold War figure of Star Trek’s “borg” instantiate the collapse of the individual and the movement toward a broader shared identity. Notions of the sovereign subject and a free will geared toward self-fulfillment and aggrandizement are utterly destroyed with the collapse of the individual. Clearly, in the context of Cold-War discourse, this collapse is the *bête noir* of the battle between “free-market capitalism” and communism. The ostensibly universal goods of self-determination and free-will depend upon the fiction of the subject. In the absence of such a fiction, those universal goods become impossible if not meaningless. I argue that it is this subject, which according to the critique discussed above is the central barrier to the realization of utopian potentialities and the key fetish in individualist understandings of freedom, which is the target of abduction. In the broader logic of the abduction narrative, it is not so much a series of individuals who are abducted as it is the very idea of the modern subject.

²⁹³ Frederic Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University, 1994).

The menace of the extraterrestrial both assaults abductees' sense of coherent subjectivity and exemplifies the uncanniness of the individual's collapse. In terms of the latter, abductees, upon recalling their experiences, point out how the individual e.t.'s seem bound together, as if they were merely iterations of the same being. The grays, in particular, appear to constitute a sort of "hive-mind," in which apparently independent entities act and move in concert, not as a matter of choice, but as an expression of their very nature. With the exception of the figure of the "leader," grays are often compared to drones or worker bees. The grays are described as consistently emotionless and expressionless. They exhibit no transparency in terms of "personality"—the outward manifestation of individuality. This lack of expressiveness or affect is one of the striking things about the e.t. according to abductee accounts. It is surprising for abductees, if not shocking, to see such creatures locomote, as if volition were incompatible with the affectless "self-presentation" so often exhibited by the grays. Their very appearance also renders their animation uncanny. One correspondent of Streiber's notes that "They seemed to be made out of plastic, like one of those bendable action figures you buy at the store. They didn't seem to have any sort of 'structure,' as far as I could see, in terms of skeleton or muscles or anything like that. They didn't even seem like living creatures, more like animatronic puppets."²⁹⁴ This characterization recalls nothing so much as that exemplar of Freud's uncanny, the doll.²⁹⁵ To abductees, the gray's lack of affect suggests a fundamental lack of recognition. The e.t. not only fails to exhibit individualist traits, but fails to recognize the abductee as a "person." Abductees feel that the e.t.'s never see them as anything more than one iteration of "human." As Jerome Clark has noted, "(t)he humanoids usually behave in a manner that leaves

²⁹⁴ *The Communion Letters*, ed. Whitley and Anne Streiber (New York: Harper Prism, 1997) 189.

²⁹⁵ Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'" [*Das Unheimliche*] in *Standard Edition*, Vol. XVII, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955) 217-256.

abductees feeling like guinea pigs.”²⁹⁶ Or as one abductee put it, his experience left him feeling like “something in a cage, an animal, being a specimen.”²⁹⁷

Abductees do consistently report an exception to this rule of affectlessness. As discussed earlier, one sometimes finds included in the abduction scenario a creature that looks similar to the others, but is a bit taller (closer to average human height) and different in coloration (closer in color to a Caucasian human), a figure generally understood as the leader of the crew and often referred to by abductees as a “doctor.” This figure speaks directly to the abductee, generally without any apparent use of speech per se—the abductee simply “hears” the creature’s voice in her head. These taller e.t.’s offer consolation to the abductee; “You are safe. No harm will come to you. You will be returned safely and soon to your home.” One abductee recalls, “I remember one being, in particular, whom I perceived as male, who was always there. I knew him, and he was the only one who could always calm me.”²⁹⁸ This figure generally offers the only point of identification for the abductee. In fact, abductee accounts often refer to a very intense identification with them. Given the overall vertiginous nature of the experience, any offer of consolation and/or recognition would be a strong point of cathexis. Put differently, the only available point of identification in such a scenario would accrue a force born out of the desperate search for meaning in a context that eludes comprehension. These more communicative grays seem related to the abductee in some intimate way. They appear to have a deep and abiding knowledge of the abductee as if they had longstanding links with them. John Mack, in his overview of the abduction phenomenon relates, “(t)he attitude of abductees toward the leader is generally ambivalent. They often discover that they have known one leader-being throughout

²⁹⁶ Jerome Clark, *Abduction Phenomenon* in “The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial” (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 8.

²⁹⁷ John E. Mack, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1994) 85.

²⁹⁸ Streiber 1997, 102

their lives and have a strong bond with him, experiencing a powerful, and even reciprocal, love relationship. At the same time, they resent the control he has exercised in their lives.”²⁹⁹ Whitley Streiber describes experiencing contact with one such creature as if he were seeing a reflection of himself at the bottom of a very deep well. This experience suggests to Streiber that the tall gray is somehow an extension of some fundamental part of him—as if the gray were a projection of his anima, his spirit guide, his familiar. This sense of deep connection points to a collapse of the abductee’s sense of self as clearly delineated. The sense that the leader is both fundamentally alien and an extension of oneself is an experience that shatters any unitary sense of self, leading to an understanding in which the self exists in a multiplicity of forms and places—an understanding that shatters the subject that has been the object of such sustained philosophical inquiry and critique.

One way of reading the inscrutability of the gray is to posit that if humans are to reach for the utopian space over which so much blood and ink has been spilled, they must first become something other than human, something unfathomable to our current selves. This is the understanding that runs through the heart of the deconstruction of the human that begins with Nietzsche and continues through Bataille and then the poststructuralisms of Lacan, Foucault and Deleuze. The project of disassembling fundamental assumptions about humanity (and thus the attempt to disassemble humanity itself) is simultaneously the height of misanthropy and a labor of great and abundant love. It is misanthropy in the sense that it sees the intractable links between what are professed as the greatest achievements of humanity—reason, beauty, progress—and that which is most base and reviled—humanity’s capacity for destruction, the extremes of cruelty, the elevation of pleasure above all. It is humanity’s collective pretension to having transcended its animal origins that most grates as hypocrisy and most readily invites

²⁹⁹ Mack 1994, 23.

attack. Nietzsche writes of the blood and gristle that underwrite all civilization; Bataille writes of the palaces of culture that overlay and attempt to displace spaces of execution and abattoirs; Foucault writes of the fundamental dishonesty and hypocrisy of the movement from the auto-da-fé to the regime of the panopticon.³⁰⁰

The implicit and sometimes explicit utopian argument that runs through these writings is one that privileges the base (most particularly in the writings of Bataille). It is an argument that suggests that the movement toward transcendence is a downward one—that one must pass back through animality to shed one’s humanity. It is the desire for this collective shedding of skins, this wish to save humanity from itself by destroying it that most centrally expresses the alchemical admixture of love and hatred that defines the long and arduous disassembly of humanity. In the context of abduction, this disassembly begins in terror and trauma, which in turn brings us to the realm of psychoanalysis.

THE RETURN OF THE REAL

Classical Freudian psychoanalysis strives to gain access to that which is most hidden (a telos which clearly relates to the central goals of occultism). It is that to which we are most blind that most shapes who we are, according to this tradition. Experiences that fundamentally shape the psyche are repressed and thus hidden away from sight. It is through this very “hidden-ness” that the repressed gains its power to shape the psyche in uncontrollable ways. The goal of psychoanalysis is to bring the repressed to light, thus dissipating it through bringing it to conscious understanding. Taking a key term from Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of psychoanalysis, the analytic process functions to territorialize the elements of psychic life that

³⁰⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage, 1989); Georges Bataille, “Slaughterhouse” in *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, ed. Georges Bataille (London: Atlas Press, 1996); Foucault 1995.

constantly rush away from rational comprehension and control. Traditional psychoanalysis struggles to unearth and normalize those internalized and repressed experiences and sensations that trouble the individual analyst. At the levels of culture and society, and thus more in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari, psychoanalysis as world view and *techne* strives to normalize those collective experiences which traumatize and haunt collectively constituted and convened modes of being.

From Freud to Lacan, there runs a sense of an underlying chaos that precedes and runs tangentially to the successful formation of the Subject. That chaos, which Lacan dubs the “Real,” must be repressed for the integrated subject to emerge. The individual must reiterate the collective human struggle to escape the vagaries of animal being, thus Freud’s claim that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. While on the level of the individual, analysis can ostensibly exorcise the demons accrued through trauma, the Real persists as a substratum which forever, inescapably, threatens the integrated subject. At the collective level, the Real persists as a threat to the socially convened norms and practices that bind together society on a moment-to-moment basis. Any reemergence of the Real highlights the arbitrary and contingent nature of social facts.

One way of articulating the links between the Real, the dissolution of the self and the displaced utopian imaginary is via the concept of the Gaze. This seems especially appropriate given the proliferation of motifs of visibility in alien discourses—long-term surveillance, the emphasis on “sightings”—as well as the consistent mention of the power of the gray’s eyes as its most unnerving feature. This sense of the eyes of the Other exerting a special power is repeated throughout the literature, and recalls nothing so much as the eyes of the mesmerist. One example of the apparent powers of the eyes of the Other can be found in the case of Betty and Barney

Hill. Barney recalled his first glimpse via binoculars of the craft that he and his wife Betty had been observing at that point for several hours.

Behind the clearly structured windows he could see the figures, at least half a dozen living beings. They seemed to be bracing themselves against the transparent windows, as the craft tilted down toward his direction. They were, as a group, staring directly at him. He became vaguely aware that they were wearing uniforms. Betty, now nearly two hundred feet away, was screaming at him from the car, but Barney has no recollection of hearing this.

The binoculars seemed glued to his eyes. Then, on some invisible, inaudible signal, every member of the crew stepped back from the window toward a large panel a few feet behind the window line.

Only one remained looking at him, apparently a leader. In the binoculars, Barney could see appendages in action among the apparent crew at what seemed to be a control board behind the windows of the craft. Slowly the craft descended lower, a few feet at a time, as the fins bearing the two red lights spread out further on the sides of the craft, an extension lowered from the underside, perhaps a ladder, he could not be sure.

He sharpened the focus of the binoculars on the one face remaining at the window. His memory at this point is blurred. For a reason he cannot explain, he was certain he was about to be captured. He tried to pull the glasses away from his eyes, to turn away, but he couldn't. As the focus became sharp, he remembers the eyes of the one crew member who stared down at him. Barney had never seen eyes like that before.³⁰¹

Barney later stated, "I was told to close my eyes because I saw two eyes coming close to mine. And I felt like the eyes had pushed into my eyes."³⁰² This sense of being seen as invasive is a common trope in tales of abduction and as we shall see is one point of entry into the utopian implications of the phenomenon.

Travis Walton, another celebrated and controversial abductee, recalled that his alien interlocutors "had no eyebrows, no eyelashes. They had very large eyes—enormous eyes—almost all brown, without much white in them. The creepiest thing about them were those eyes. Oh man, those eyes, they just stared through me."³⁰³ One Streiber correspondent, whose communiqué is reprinted in *The Communion Letters*, recalls awakening and experiencing the

³⁰¹ Fuller, 16-17.

³⁰² Fuller, 118-119, 123-124.

³⁰³ Jerome Clark, *Walton Abduction Case* in "The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial" (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1998) 646.

sensation that her body was “under someone else’s control.” That someone or something else “had a very large head, no ears, a tiny mouth and enormous eyes. There was a power emanating from those eyes that seemed to fetter me into myself.”³⁰⁴ John Mack writes that “(b)y far the most prominent features are huge, black eyes... The eyes...have a compelling power, and the abductees will often wish to avoid looking directly into them because of the overwhelming dread of their own sense of self, or loss of will, that occurs when they do so.”³⁰⁵

The dissolution of self that seems to be one effect of falling under the gaze of the gray is also the effect of exposure to the Gaze. It is through the Gaze that the Real manifests itself. The concept of the Gaze posits that the primordial chaos from which humans have “progressively” distanced themselves via language, technology and social convention, continues to exist. Not only does it continue to exist but also it “watches” us intently (just as the ascended masters and extraterrestrials do). Full exposure to the Gaze poses the threat of annihilation (the results of falling under the baleful gaze of the gray include paralysis, loss of any clear sense of self, failure of the will, etc.). Drawing an analogy, one might look to the sun. The analogy of the sun may seem strained in that the sun is wholly visible while the Real is hidden. However, we know the sun less by direct visual confirmation—one cannot stare long at the sun without risking blindness—than we do by its effects. The sun serves as both source of illumination and potential annihilation. Just as without the floating sphere of ozone, the replenishing rays of the sun turn into cancerous vectors, the Gaze must be mitigated in some way if it is not to render destruction. The “screen,” as we shall see, provides said mitigation.

³⁰⁴ Streiber 1997, 108.

³⁰⁵ Mack 1994, 23. Of course the power of the eyes has long been part of the folklore of power and evil: the evil eye, the baleful glance, the eyes of the mesmerist.

The Gaze as philosophical and psychoanalytic trope functions both through the personalized other and the depersonalized Other. The former is exemplified in Sartre’s parable of the watcher in the park, while the latter takes on its most seminal form in Lacan’s discussion of the sardine can. Both of these examples are discussed by Norman Bryson in his essay “The Gaze in the Expanded Field,” an essay that I draw on extensively in the following discussion.³⁰⁶ Both formulations of the Gaze are central in defining psychoanalysis’ and the hypnotherapist’s relation to the visual economy of abduction and both are key to a structural analysis of the abduction narrative. Sartre describes entering a park and finding himself alone. “Everything in the park is there for him to regard from an unchallenged center of the visual field...The subject resides at the still point of the turning world, master of its prospects, sovereign surveyor of the scene.” In a second moment, this sovereignty is threatened. Another enters the park and the “watcher is in turn watched ... the viewer becomes spectacle to another’s sight.”³⁰⁷ Under the gaze of the other, the subject becomes object—opaque, emptied of interiority. Sartre further feared that the very possibility of freedom is undermined by the look of the other. “I grasp the Other’s look at the very center of my *act* as the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities.”³⁰⁸ Becoming an object of another’s gaze fundamentally undermines the subject’s sense of *self* and the self’s attendant capacities. The emotional responses to falling under the gaze of the Other as understood by Sartre are central to the abduction scenario. Martin Jay argues that “Shame can be called the transcendental emotional a priori of Sartre’s universe of threatening gazes, so pervasive is it in his description of the result of being seen.”³⁰⁹ One

³⁰⁶ Norman Bryson, “The Gaze in the Expanded Field” in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988).

³⁰⁷ Bryson, 88-89.

³⁰⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: a Phenomenological essay on Ontology* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966).

³⁰⁹ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 289.

abductee reports that during her experience—which involved observing “a ‘man’ and a ‘horse’ engage in sexual contact” and being anally penetrated by an alien figure—“she was given to believe...that the aliens were carefully monitoring her feelings of shame, guilt and humiliation.”³¹⁰ The sense of shame as central to the abduction scenario is also attested to by the centrality of the genitals, and later anus, to the abduction narrative. This focus on two classical loci of Freudian drives offers yet another suggestive link between abduction and psychoanalysis. Abduction constitutes an exposure to what Lacan refers to as the Real—“the realm of raw, unrepresentable fullness prior to the organization of the drives.”³¹¹ Given that the anal and genital are two primary seats of that very organization, their shameful and terrifying recurrence in the abduction scenario points to an encounter that reverberates at the most basic levels of being.

The account offered by Lacan to describe what he means by the Gaze does not hinge upon the subject being cast into opacity by entering into the field of vision of another subject. In Lacan’s account, it is not another human being that casts his own position of mastery into doubt—it is a sardine can. As recounted in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan was in Brittany, out to sea with local fishermen. Referring to a sardine can floating nearby, one of the men exclaimed, “You see that can? Do you see it? Well it doesn’t see you!”³¹² Lacan believed that, in some ways, the man’s statement was fundamentally untrue—that the object does stare back. Lacan’s insight was basically that to see the can as “sardine can” or even as “can” or “container” or “metal” was to “see” it through a semiotic veil. This moment of clarity experientially revealed to Lacan the gap between the physiology of vision and the socially

³¹⁰ David M. Jacobs, “Subsequent Procedures” in *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, ed. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1994) 65.

³¹¹ Jay, 350.

³¹² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1978) 95.

constituted modes of visibility. To recognize the can as such was to filter the act of vision through a habituated set of perceptual practices and understandings. Without these understood practices and understandings, the visual field would remain flat; the can would remain indistinguishable from the larger visual field of which it was part. The other key realization experienced by Lacan was that the object itself existed outside the network of meanings that Lacan refers to as the “Screen.” As Bryson explains, “Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses that make up visibility, that culturally construct and make visibility different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between retina and world is inserted a screen of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena.”³¹³ I would add further that it is not only discourses on vision that form the screen, but discourse per se, as a way of ordering raw perception, that constitutes the screen. The notion of screen is important both in that the manifestation of the e.t. is in some ways a rupture of the screen and also in that the screen informs and shapes the form the alien takes.

To see, for a moment, that “can” as a thing that exists outside of the screen of socially convened and naturalized codes of meaning, was experienced by Lacan as a moment of radical decentering. The moment in which the can is perceived as thing-in-itself is a moment in which the knowing subject is paralyzed. The can is no longer can, it becomes incomprehensible. As it passes outside the realm of possible knowing, it ceases to be object. As it passes outside the field of mastery, the object stares back. The moment in which the can ceases to be object is a moment in which the screen is ruptured and the Real floods through. The experience of elements of the visual field or of the visual field as a whole as unanchored by understood systems of meaning

³¹³ Bryson, 91-92.

casts the world, and the subject, into a vertiginous space, a space in which the both the “self” and “world” appear to be utterly arbitrary constructions.

Bryson argues that both Sartre’s and Lacan’s account of the gaze posit such momentary encounters as, rather than fundamentally disruptive of subjectivity, redemptive. “The je reemerges from its encounter with nihility, reinforced in its position as the center of its experience...the subject’s sense of being a subject is heightened, not undone.”³¹⁴ What does all this have to do with the hypnotherapist and alien abduction? Just as Sartre’s encounter with the other in the park and Lacan’s with the sardine can invoke a certain decentering of the self, so too does the experience of alien abduction. Just as both Lacan and Sartre try to frame the momentary encounter with the gaze as redemptive, hypnotherapy attempts to frame alien abduction as benign and enriching. In some ways the description offered by abductees indicates a space somewhere between Sartre’s watcher and Lacan’s can. The gray as figure seems to potentially harbor some subjectivity, given its humanoid form, while simultaneously it appears to be devoid of “personal” presence, appearing rather as some fundamentally inert machine blessed by locomotion. In that subjectivity is often equated with the capacity for emotion (humans who do not exhibit a full range of emotion or whose emotional responses do not hew to accepted standards are often described as inhuman or monstrous) and the gray often appears to be utterly devoid of emotion, its subjectivity is in doubt.

Through its apparent suspension of physical laws and its nightmare-like impact, abduction ruptures the screen of socially convened conceptions of reality. The abduction experience is a trauma in the most literal sense. The Greek root of “trauma” conveys the literal sense of wound. A wound is an opening where there is supposed to be closure. The German

³¹⁴ Bryson, 85, 86.

traum or dream further indicates the precision of the relationship between the abduction experience and trauma. The parallels of the abduction experience to dream are multiple. While the Hills were abducted from their car (one classic abduction scenario), abductees have increasingly reported being taken right from their beds. Interestingly, the statistical skew on automobile versus domestic abductions assigns the former as more typically the experience of males and the latter as more typically that of females.³¹⁵ In terms of abduction as an experience that troubles discourses of mastery it seems evidence of an uncanny precision that men are plucked from their cars and women from their homes. Such domestic abductions generally occur when the abductee is either just going to sleep or in the process of waking, the so-called hypnopompic or hypnogogic states, states that are directly adjacent to phases of high REM activity, which in turn correlate with active dreaming. The abduction experience evidences a variety of standard dream tropes, the suspension of physical laws, the sensation of flying, an overall sense of unreality or surreality, and the sense of profound dread which is oft-times felt most acutely in dreams. The links between trauma as wound and *traum* as dream are clear enough. Dream space is interstitial. It is an opening between spaces that we like to think of as discrete—between “reality” and “fantasy,” between waking consciousness and the “unconscious,” between the particular and the universal. The effect of abduction is to rupture the screen, creating an open wound through which the subject is exposed to the Gaze. The net effect is blindness, paralysis and forgetting. The role of the hypnotherapist is to help the analysand re-experience the trauma and to suture the wound through casting the experience as narrative and placing it within a frame of reference - the abduction scenario. The abduction experience is one that in many ways outstrips the capacities of language, which is part of how abduction

³¹⁵ Thomas E. Bullard, “A Comparative Study of Abduction Reports Update” in *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, ed. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1994) 45.

constitutes an extended exposure to the Real. The words of the abductee under hypnosis, the very act of description, comprise the stuff of the suture. The goal, in short, is to normalize an experience, the thrust of which is to shatter any commonplace sense of normality. The goal is to reconstruct the experience in such a way that “the je reemerges from its encounter with nihility, reinforced in its position as the center of its experience... [so that] the subjects sense of being a subject is heightened, not undone.” Through the process of hypnotic regression, the therapist attempts to reconvene the abductee’s sense of self as integrated subject. The reason this suturing cannot be entirely effective is that in accepting abduction as actual experience—a necessary step in integration—the world as it is understood by consensus reality is rendered fundamentally askew. As one abduction researcher has noted, “I...find that abductees usually want to believe anything else. The genuine abductee is constantly looking for other reasons, until they reach a point of acceptance.”³¹⁶ There can be no normalization of the abduction experience short of accepting a world where aliens exist, physical laws are subject to suspension, and time is so malleable as to be rendered merely conceptual.

The experiential components of the abduction scenario tear at the screen, exposing the abductee to the naked Gaze. The broader discourse of alien presence and contact, upon close examination, shows a proliferation of the thematic of the Gaze. The version of the tale that places the origin of the human species in the hands of extraterrestrials imagines that human beings have been subject to the surveillance of alien intelligence for as long as humans have existed. In this scenario, the progress, or lack thereof, of humanity is of central importance to the “space brothers.” The grays enact the theme of the Gaze. In the context of abduction, humans, subject to intense scrutiny and examination, are reduced to the level of object. They are so

³¹⁶ Patricia Shaw, “People with Unsubstantiated Claims of ET Contact” in *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference*, ed. Pritchard et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Press, 1994) 25.

reduced not in the relatively benign fashion of Sartre's watcher, merely by becoming an element in another's visual field, but rather more intensely. The example of the watcher in the park nicely captures a kind of narcissism specific to a media-saturated culture. The watcher in the park observes a vista that has been arranged for his or her delectation—land rendered as a packaged experience. This was clearly the intent of such landscape designers as Frederick Law Olmstead—the building of environments that serve to generate a particular kind of experience, an experience wherein the watcher enjoys a sense of mastery. Things in the park are arranged in such a way that they have a clear meaning—readily accessible to the observer. This sense of pre-arranged meaning and illusion of mastery are central to contemporary media culture. The end user has access to experience via an ever-proliferating array of media, all of which place the user in a position both powerful and pampered. Powerful in that they assume an apparently panoptic perspective on the world around them and pampered in that a world is presented to them in a way that their pleasures and presuppositions are catered to. The moment in which Sartre's watcher finds himself observed constitutes a crack in the narcissism promoted by the manufactured vista. The experience of abduction does so in a much more violent fashion.

The other whose visual field the abductee passes into is not another like themselves, as in Sartre's scenario, but an Other who is wholly strange. Some level of identification always tempers the paranoia that might follow a sense of being observed by another human. The potential motives of that other are tacitly understood. The abduction scenario presents little or no purchase for identification or meaning. As previously discussed, most contactees tended to report encounters with well-behaved, highly communicative beings who not only appeared in a clearly human form, but in forms that were highly appealing aesthetically—noble creatures with blond hair and high foreheads. Robust and beautiful, these beings were a far cry from the sickly

homunculi known as the grays. The only things “alien” about the beings such as those met by Adamski were their apparent perfection, their technological capacities and their ostensible point of origin, whereas in the case of the grays the proportion of familiar to strange seems the inverse. The humanoid form of the gray recalls the human but in a distorted fashion—huge eyes, vestigial nose, mouth and ears, four-fingered hands, apparently no true orifices—and it is its humanoid form that is the *most* familiar aspect of the gray. Otherwise, these creatures seem to offer very few points of identification.

The power relation between the abductee and alien Other serves to heighten the intensity of the abductee’s objectification even further. Abductees, unlike contactees, are wholly powerless. While George Adamski was hosted aboard a space ship, with all his of queries fully and politely addressed, and the reasons for his hosts’ attentions thoroughly explained, the abductee experiences no such niceties. In the now classic domestic abduction, the human interlocutor generally awakes in a state of panic—a panic that is intensified when he realizes that he is unable to move. One correspondent with Whitley Streiber illustrates both the sense of paralysis that abductees often experience as well as the power of the experience to not only crack open the facade of narcissism but explode the very self.

I reckon my head had been on the pillow for less than thirty seconds when, for want of a better word, it exploded—the only way I can describe that shocking sensation is that I thought a bomb had blown me to pieces and that “I” was nowhere and had ceased to be. After a few seconds, the vacuum of what used to be was filled with an entity of total evil. This evil thing so terrified me that I wanted to start fighting, until I became conscious that I was unable to move my limbs. Although I was screaming to my wife to wake up and help me, my lips barely moved and the screams were whispers.³¹⁷

It is the fear of erasure and replacement, so aptly illustrated by the preceding, that comprises the central motif of abduction. Paralysis—terror that reduces the abductee to his or her animal self—the rendering of the body as thing by invasive “medical” procedures performed against the

³¹⁷ Streiber 1997, 120.

will of the abductee—all speak to an erasure of self. Some unknown in turn replaces that self. In the previous quotation, the human interlocutor imagines that unknown to be “total evil.” Most abductees respond to their experience as a violent attack against their most intimate self, an alien invasion at the level of the psyche. Surely, the creatures that carry out such practices must be evil and in their invasion must render their victims evil as well. But the process via which abductees accept the reality of their experience involves an alchemical act via which fear, hatred and evil are transformed into love and acceptance. Many come to understand their alien interlocutors not as abductors, but as liberators. The fundamental transformation of the human called for by the utopian vision must by its very nature be violent. To become something Other could not be other than painful. The actions of the alien interlocutors in the abduction scenario constitute a sort of sublime wickedness in which the self is freed by its very destruction.

Just as the will to truth that drives the philosophical quest to unmask or deconstruct the “self” is fundamentally cruel, so too is the abduction scenario. Whereas the former strived for its goal via argument and performance, the latter does so in a distinctly Nietzschean fashion—via force. The response to this use of force, while initially one of abject fear, is ultimately a laying down of old conceptions of the self. This sacrifice of self in the face of some larger power may strike some readers as reminiscent of the fascist impulse. But there are important differences between the fascist impulse and laying down one’s “humanity” in the face of the overwhelmingly strange. The fascist impulse involves replication of the *same* in terms of the worst elements of humanity: deification of the will to power, greed and hatred. The movement of fascism is toward “purification” and concrete worldly ends—power, lebensraum, and eradication of difference. While one might justly refer to the end results of fascist policies as “inhumane,” what is duplicated through fascism is fundamentally human. In abduction (the

positive version), the call is for humanity to literally and metaphorically lay down its arms.

Duplication is not the “goal” so much as simultaneous transcendence and embrace of difference.

CONCLUSION

Whereas the utopian currents of the nineteenth century invoked a set of material transformations as the response to human suffering, those of the later twentieth respond to what has been understood as the pre-eminent disease of the latter century—alienation. Herein lies one of the fundamental ironies of the displaced utopian imaginary in the late twentieth century—it is through sundering one’s understood relation to self and embracing the alien that alienation is escaped. Each of the moments discussed in this document have involved an effort to bring the abject back into circulation. The abject is that “exorbitant outside or inside ejected beyond the scope of the possible, tolerable, thinkable... It lies there quite close, but it cannot be assimilated.”³¹⁸ The abject is a “constitutive outside—the unspeakable, the unviable, the non-narrativizable”³¹⁹ The world of spirit, the power of the feminine, surrender and dissolution as modes of practice—all banished to the margins as potentially disruptive of a dominant worldview that values masculine virtues above all. Positivism and its cognate forms valorized visibility, clarity, vigor and mastery and thus depended upon the abjection of the very content and modes of practice that Spiritualism and its offspring introduced back into public discourse. This set of practices and content is the constitutive outside of rational order.

Abduction also re-introduced the abject—both at the level of the abduction narrative and at the level of experience. Abduction marked a departure from those earlier moments, all of which stopped short of the disintegration promised by the contemplation of the abject and the

³¹⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 1.

³¹⁹ Judith Butler, “Arguing with the Real” in *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 188.

resultant exposure to the Real. The earlier visions articulated contemplable futures, ones that maintained a linear relation to the understood present. The occupants of those futures were recognizably human, albeit more luminous, perfected. The consistent offering of evidence for the survivability of human personality spoke to a desire for the achievement of utopia without the violence of substantial change at the level of the human subject. Abduction not only denies that promise of survivability, it denies the stability of personality on *this* side of the veil. Abduction allows for a thoroughgoing encounter with the abject, an encounter Kristeva famously described as fraught with “the weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant and which crushes me on the edge of non-existence and hallucination of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me.”³²⁰ While the moments that precede abduction pull up short of the precipice of self-immolation, abduction plunges ahead, offering no comforting vision of the future, only a vision of the unspeakably different.

Just as at the level of the subject, abduction moves beyond the type of scenario from which “the *je* reemerges reinforced in its position as the center of experience,” at the level of its broader dissemination as narrative, abduction moves beyond its predecessors as well. Spiritualism and the moments that follow from it all spoke to dramatic transformation yet papered over or abjected the very change that might potentiate or accompany that transformation—change at the level of the subject. Spiritualism offered an explanation of death, yet its argument for the survivability of personality and the sameness of the afterworld covers over the very thing it sought to explain. Judith Butler has asked whether “there can be a theory of contingency that is not compelled to refuse or to cover over that which it seeks to explain?”³²¹ In a related fashion, she asks of the abject “how might these ostensibly constitutive exclusions be

³²⁰ Kristeva, 2.

³²¹ Butler, 195.

rendered less permanent, more dynamic?”³²² Abduction is most certainly a theory (and practice) of contingency. To accept the reality of abduction is to accept the dramatically partial nature of our understanding of reality. As to the relative permanence or flexibility of object material, all of the moments of the nexus of alien-human communication discussed herein argue for the inclusion in public discourse of the constitutive outside. Abduction argues that the individual can engage in a full encounter with the object and return to the socially constituted world—not with the *je* reinforced but dramatically altered.

As a final key difference between abduction and its predecessors, let us return briefly to its relation to a positivist vision of rational order. Spiritualism and Theosophy and to a lesser extent the space brother religions imagined themselves as compatible with the science of their day. They functioned as an extension of scientific mastery into new realms—realms hitherto consigned to the vagaries of faith and superstition. The abduction scenario doesn’t acknowledge the hegemony of a positivist science so much as present a series of phenomena that are impossible in the context of a reality predicated on the principles of that hegemony. One could argue, in concert with my earlier assertion that abduction differs from earlier iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary as the post-modern differs from the modern, that this difference is in part a function of the fact that positivism’s hegemony has been far from untroubled in the decades since the Hill abduction. Perhaps the abduction scenario does not recognize positivism’s hegemony because of that hegemony’s erosion. Abduction presents a reality where the basic laws of physics (which alongside the fiction of the subject constitute the bedrock of “reality”) are suspended or altogether absent. Levitation and the passage of bodies through solid objects are commonplaces. Time is expanded, contracted and looped. Identity is sundered from its

³²² Butler, 189.

understood moorings, left to drift across multiple times, locations and configurations. Rather than seeking rapprochement with science, abduction presents its impossible outside.

Summary and Conclusions

Now that, with the preceding discussion of alien abduction, we have reached more-or-less the present day, I will offer some concluding remarks. I will first briefly revisit the themes that have consistently informed what, by way of shorthand, I have been calling the displaced utopian imaginary. The latter term, rather than proscribing some stable referent, gestures instead at a thread of utopian thought and practice that runs through modern American culture—a thread woven of both terrestrial and otherworldly concerns and sensibilities but neither wholly religious nor wholly secular. After discussing the themes that consistently inform this line of thought and practice, I will address the elements of the displaced utopian imaginary that lend it its dynamism. Along with a relatively stable set of themes, the displaced utopian imaginary also consists of dynamic and shifting narrative structures. The discussion of these dynamic elements will lead to a final discussion of the implications of the narrative shifts brought about by the emergence of the UFO and alien abduction in the second half of the twentieth century.

The passage of the displaced utopian imaginary over the latter half of the nineteenth and the whole of the twentieth centuries reveals both a set of consistent tropes and a series of dynamics that enact broader structural shifts over time. The displaced utopian imaginary is both consistent and dynamic. To reiterate, the displaced utopian imaginary concerns itself primarily with imagining the dramatic transformation of social reality—a transformation bringing about a utopia. The potential utopia is enfigured by a series of Others who have already achieved the

desired utopian state. The Others communicate their wisdom via particular interlocutors who are characterized by heightened levels of sensitivity and often ambiguous gender identity. Said interlocutors generally enter into some kind of trance state in order to receive communications from the Others.

The Others, with the exception of the “grays” of alien abduction, present themselves in a recognizably human form. They impart a message pointing out the shortcomings of current social reality and offering a vision of achieved perfection. While the Others are recognizably human, their humanity is tempered by its transcendence of animal being. Their proffered utopian vision often evidences a certain Gnostic disgust for the human body—leaving behind not only social imperfection but gross bodily need. In these visions, the utopian future will be free not only of inequity and need but also the body and its animal functions.

The explanations offered for this ongoing series of transmissions has been consistently framed in “scientific” terms. Spiritualists received transmissions from the other side via spiritual telegraph. Communication with the dead was understood by the faithful as in keeping with ongoing scientific advances. The emergent capacity to commune with the departed was viewed as further evidence of reason’s march to mastery. The emergence of the space brother religions maintained this sense of imminent mastery and added new devices to the technical armory of the displaced utopian imaginary—Pelley’s mental radio, the Ballards’ light and sound ray, and the surveillance described by Adamski’s contacts. All of the above spoke to the desire to materialize the spiritual, imagining a material technological bridge between the worlds of reason and spirit. The appearance of the UFO added an apparently mechanical transport that allowed the Other’s passage to Earth and provided a vehicle for the earthling contactee’s journeys to utopian possibility. Abduction constituted a sort of reversal, with technical expedients brought to bear on

the grays' inscrutable analysis of the human subject. At the end of a century and more of imagined devices offered as explanation and vehicle for the communing of mortal human and alien Other, the displaced utopian imaginary yielded an estranged vision of the human itself.

Two dynamics that attended the passage of the displaced utopian imaginary over the years discussed in the pages of this dissertation are the tendency toward the increasing strangeness of the alien interlocutor and the tendency toward the increasing embodiedness of the encounter between human and Other. In terms of increasing strangeness, the first spectral interlocutors discussed in these pages were the dead. While the dead were strange, they were separated from the living only by their passage to heaven. They had once been human and in many ways still were. Communion with the dead was no new affair—ghosts had haunted the Western imagination through all of recorded history. What was new was the systematic, ostensibly *technical*, and willed nature of the communication. The next discussed interlocutor was the ascended master. Ascended masters too had been human, but became Other via a process somewhat more mysterious than death. They had become Other via occult training and practice, clinging to their humanity in only the most tenuous fashion as western bodhisattvas—having reached enlightenment but making the conscious decision to remain bound to human affairs as teachers. The masters were not merely dead—in fact they were not dead at all, but rather ascended—suspended in some state between the mortality of the human and the immortality of the gods. The masters were more rarefied and decidedly less democratic than the dead, appearing only to those high in the occult hierarchy. They remained hidden in the fastness of terrestrial wilderness or in even less accessible interplanetary realms. It was the masters that provided the most immediate model for the next round of alterity. The space brothers were modeled primarily on the occult hierarchies articulated by Blavatsky and her followers. They

were, more or less, ascended masters from other planets. Here the strangeness factor was increased slightly in terms of point of origin—the masters of the space brother religions no longer hid away *either* in obscure eastern locales such as Tibet *or* on other planets, but resided exclusively off planet.

All of the preceding iterations of the Other, discussed in the first three chapters, while evidencing an increasing distance from the human, were still recognizable as human. While the use of trance, the intrusion of the other-worldly and the held-forth promises of dramatic social change all spoke to the disruptive, centrifugal energies of the displaced utopian imaginary—they did so via messengers fundamentally comforting in their familiar forms. Spiritualism promised the maintenance of individual identity on the far side of death. The ascended master and space brother promised the maintenance of species identity on the far side of some less defined but equally momentous change—a change that promised to affect not individual humans one at a time, but *all* humans in some simultaneous leap forward. All spoke to a desire for radical change without an accompanying willingness to leave behind the familiar contours of human existence. All spoke to the possibility of achieving perfection without altering the fundamental self—finessing the tension between the basic drives toward maintenance of self and subsumption by some larger body.

The second dynamic, the increasing embodiedness of the encounter between human and Other began at the far range of disembodiedness with the otherworldly travels of Emmanuel Swedenborg—the primary philosophical forbearer of American Spiritualism. Swedenborg, by slowing his respiration (you will recall, Swedenborg claimed he was able to respire “inwardly”) self-induced a trance state, via which he was able to astrally travel throughout the cosmos. In this instance contact played out in a fully disembodied fashion—with Swedenborg acting via his

projected consciousness—his “astral” body. The denial of bodily needs used by Swedenborg—the dramatic slowing of respiration-- has traditionally been a key method in the induction of the trance state. A broad range of traditions have long utilized fasting, sleep deprivation and exhaustion induced via ecstatic dancing or other means to achieve a visionary state. There is an implicit tension present in this set of methods, a tension between body and spirit. In order to access the spirit realm, one must deny or abjure the body in some fashion. This sense of body and spirit as irreconcilable would run throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century iterations of the displaced utopian imaginary. The general sense operative in the moments preceding the arrival of the saucer after World War Two, and ultimately the advent of alien abduction, was that the body in utopia would be somehow more ethereal and less visceral than on Earth.

Trance was also central to the communication between human and Other in the spiritualist tradition. In the case of the spiritualist medium, trance was generally either spontaneous—often as a function of age and gender—young girls being especially prone—or induced by a third party, the mesmeric controller. The encounter between medium and spirit was in a fundamental way embodied. Media were more or less possessed. They became embodied representatives of spiritual entities—a conduit for those entities’ expression. In another sense, the encounter was fundamentally disembodied—the medium was necessarily absent while the spirit was present. The self had to be erased to allow the Other to present itself. Much of the trappings of Spiritualism were primarily focused on establishing the *physicality* of the spirit presence. The floating instruments, sounded by otherwise invisible presences, the percussion of coded raps, the modulation of gravity both in its abeyance and amplification and the visible energetic fields of ectoplasm all spoke to the difficulty of closing on the basic selling point of Spiritualism—the *physical* reality of *spiritual* phenomena.

Reports back from the spirit realm tended to support the sense that while the afterlife maintained many of the contours of terrestrial life, it did so in a form stripped of the needs of the physical bodies. The needs for sustenance and elimination, for sex and clothing were all diminished and ultimately purged. The spiritual body, while wholly recognizable as an individual human was altogether less animalistic. Just as Christ left behind his human self in ascension so too would humans leave behind their animal selves.

In the cases of Blavatsky and Pelley, while communications were most often received via automatic writing and disembodied voices, both also received visitations from fully embodied messengers. With the Ballards and the space brother religions that followed them, embodied encounters between humans and extraterrestrial messengers increased in frequency. Rather than exemplifying a calculus via which self and Other could not be fully co-present—one having to be effaced to allow for the presence of the other—the space brother religions began to create a space that allowed for that co-presence. Of course the inherent terror of this co-presence was greatly mitigated by the graciousness and physical beauty of the space brothers themselves. Such an encounter was more readily sustained when the Other's presence occasioned sensual pleasure and ease of recognition. The combination of the tendencies discussed above, the increasingly alien nature of the Other and the increasing embodiedness of the encounter suggested a larger dynamic of burgeoning strangeness, a dynamic that would begin to shift the basic narrative structure of the displaced utopian imaginary following the end of World War II.

The end of World War II brought a new character to the fore—the flying saucer. A depersonalized, wholly space-age embodiment of the Other, the flying saucer cum unidentified flying object constituted both a further embodiment or materialization of the Other and a further estrangement of same. The UFO was more material in that it was evidently a machine, a product

of conscious design. It was seen by a wide variety of persons in broadly varying locales, both day and night. If it was a vision, it was one that manifested in an unprecedentedly public fashion and in the form of an apparently solid object. The saucer increased the strangeness factor both by its very public visibility and via the fact that it refused to stay still for any sustained examination and was ultimately resistant to any final interpretation. Whereas the space brothers and spirits before them were endlessly voluble, the UFO was characterized by silence both in its passage and its refusal to offer up an explanation for itself. It was highly visible yet wholly mysterious—the very epitome of the uncanny. The UFO, like the space brothers, allowed for the co-presence of the human and the Other—the fully conscious witness and the saucer both in the presence of each other. It was apparently the apparatus of empirical verification that could not be co-present with the saucer. As a figure that disallowed empirical verification, the UFO established itself as rationality's Other and as such dictated a zero-sum relationship with the latter. The presence of the UFO dictated rationality's absence and vice-versa.

With the advent of abduction, the encounter between human and Other became fully embodied and the level of strangeness reached a point whereby the experience of contact came to be defined by terror. Abductees are removed bodily from their cars and/or beds, taken aboard waiting saucers and subjected to decidedly body-centered ordeals. The figure of the alien in this scenario is most often what has come to be known as the gray, a figure defined as much by what is absent as by what is present. Bipedal with roughly humanoid facial features, the gray is similar enough to the human to set off its strangeness. The gray seems utterly lacking in a variety of ways. It seems to have no true joints, resembling the bendable toy figures equipped with a wire core rather than bones. Its mouth, nose and ears all seem merely cosmetic. With the exception of the leader or “doctor” figure, the gray is wholly lacking in affect. The grays are

generally silent, but when they do speak they do so without moving their vestigial, slit-like mouths. All of these lacunae create an overwhelming sense of unreality on the part of the abductee. While the previous iterations of the Other—the dead, the ascended master, the space brother—flattered human preconceptions of beauty and nobility, the gray offers no such concessions to human sensibilities. Here, alone, the line of communication between human and Other traced in this dissertation offers a figure that is truly Other.

As to the co-presence of human and Other in the abduction scenario, both are present in body, but the abductee enters into the engagement in a foreshortened manner. The fear engendered by the experience and discussed by many abductees after the fact is so intense that the powers of intellect are short-circuited. The abductee confronts his captor more so as an animal than as a human. The animal self that is left after the harrowing effects of abduction is also foreshortened in a way. The obvious animal response to a confrontation with a being wholly Other would be to flee or fight. The abductee, while highly desirous of such options is unable to act because paralyzed. It is unclear whether such paralysis is the result of a surfeit of terror or the result of actions taken by the grays (or some combination of both). The net result of the whole experience is an inability to think or act and a level of trauma that leads to memories of the experience being repressed by the abductee. So while the abductee might be physically and consciously present in the abduction scenario, she is rendered just as passive as the spiritualist medium by the terror of the experience.

Some abductees have suggested that the point of the experience is, over the course of a series of abductions, to conquer the fear endemic to the experience. The sense is that through coming to grips with the reality of abduction and mustering the ability to enter into the presence of the wholly Other in a fully conscious fashion, the abductee will enter into the higher state of

being that the experience calls her toward. In any event, whether as a function of the abductee's desire to regain some of the agency lost via the abduction scenario (you will recall the current nomenclature has shifted from *abductee* to *experiencer*) or as function of the overarching logic of the abduction narrative (read as our own desires viewed through the scrim of a fantastic encounter with the Other), the *point* seems to be that in order to confront that which is wholly Other without disappearing, one must surrender the desire for the cohesive self. More accurately, one must forgo the logic via which the self and Other are incommensurable.

This sense of moving toward a space in which the self and the Other can be fully co-present, jettisoning the logic of the Gaze, under which one is cast into the darkness of objectification by becoming the seen, is what drives the utopian reading of the abduction narrative. The wholly overwhelming strangeness of encounters with the grays is that which most distinguishes the abduction scenario from the earlier encounters discussed in this dissertation. The gray departs from the comforting contours of the human so richly embodied by those earlier Others. To address the question of why encountering such a figure as the gray without surrendering to either of the paired impulses of subsumption or eradication (a binary that parallels a series of like tensions discussed herein: centrifugal/centripetal, the desire for maintenance of self v. the desire for the return to the Real, the desire to enter into a dramatically altered set of social relations without giving up anything of the self) might be considered a worthy goal, let us turn to the final argument of this dissertation, an argument that recalls our ongoing discussion of identification and the abject.

The postmodern condition implies a highly mobile subject, one that encompasses, as Kaja Silverman has it, "an infinitude of contradictory identifications."³²³ Silverman argues in *The Threshold of the Visible World* that "while most of us are in fact quite peripatetic when it comes

³²³ Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996) 1-2.

to narrative structural positionalities, we are considerably less tractable when confronted with the possibility of bodily reconfiguration, especially when it would involve an indentificatory alignment with what is socially disprized.”³²⁴ This sense of a mobility open to a variety of “narrative structural positionalities” but wary of bodily reconfiguration was prefigured by the displaced utopian imaginary preceding World War II. Beginning with Spiritualism, and mesmerism before it, the movements discussed in this dissertation prized a highly mobile subject. Spiritualism favored most prominently a fluidity of gender. The medium was characterized by an indeterminate gender identity—women acting in mannish ways and men surrendering to their intuitive selves. Spiritualism as public phenomenon promoted the transit of women through the public sphere, making the virtues of domestic Victorian womanhood the basis of a public movement. The political stance with which Spiritualism aligned itself favored women’s suffrage, free love and a loosening of the bonds of matrimony—all causes that would free women from the constraints of a strictly foreshortened range of movement and action. The expansion of women’s potential field of action of course would in turn muddy the clear and rigid contours of masculinity. Spiritualism also supported the abolition of slavery—an action that would markedly increase the mobility of a massive population previously consigned to a highly restricted set of roles (house slave/field slave, uncle tom/buck—binaries as seamless as those confining women—Madonna/whore, married/spinster, fruitful/barren). And of course mediumship itself allowed for a kind of super-mobile subject, granting potential identities ranging from Aunt Minnie to Ben Franklin to Indian Chief.

All of the moments of the displaced utopian imaginary discussed herein were marked by fluidities of gender and class and thus an increasingly mobile subject. Even the retrograde politics of Pelley allowed for some loosening of gender and class demarcations—especially the

³²⁴ Silverman, 2.

latter. Pelley of course, like Theosophy before him, reinforced racial boundaries, adding mystical and world-historical wrinkles to operative racist ideologies. With the exception of Spiritualism, the displaced utopian imaginary as discussed herein has not favored “an identificatory alignment” with socially disprized bodies. The future human as enfigured in pre-World War II scenarios, and in those encounters after World War II that continued along the lines established by the space brothers, was over all radiantly beautiful and if not altogether white, at the very least Aryan. While the displaced utopian imaginary in many ways favored a highly mobile subject, it did so in ways that fell short of any transformation that would render the human unrecognizable or racially “inferior.” There were and are no brothers among the space brothers.

While it is often posited as a *postmodern* dynamic, it is arguable that an increasingly mobile subject is in fact a *modern* phenomenon. The emergence of a middle class, the sundering of feudal hierarchies, the processes of industrialization and urbanization, and the emergence of republican and democratic systems of governance all underwrote that increasing mobility. Following Silverman, it is perhaps the movement toward an increased mobility in *bodily* identification that better marks the postmodern and it is this turn toward the body that most marks the changes in the narratives of the displaced utopian imaginary following the second World War. The first avatar of communication between human and Other following the war was not only not white, it was not even human. The UFO appeared as an aircraft, but one that maneuvered in such ways that any human passenger or pilot would be destroyed by its very passage. Its very mobility was inimical to the human. The UFO has been imagined as, among other things, a living being.³²⁵ If so it was, and is, an order of being quite alien to terrestrial

³²⁵ On this peculiar notion, see especially Trevor James Constable, *Sky Creatures: Living UFO's* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978).

sensibilities, though one that would nonetheless mark an anticipation of the organic machine promised by current developments in bio- and nano-technologies.

The emergence of the so-called gray is even more marked by its increased focus on questions of the body. Here for the first time the imagined future of the human was cast in a form repulsive to human sensibilities. Not only does the gray not incite feelings of admiration and identification, it invites the opposite—loathing and abjection. Unlike the saucer, the gray offers a vague semblance of the human—bipedal, roughly symmetrical features. This resemblance heightens rather than undoes the gray's uncanniness. The gray *resists* identification both in its grotesque form and apparent emotional vacuity. The gray in itself does not suggest the mobility of the subject as much as its absence or its radical restructuring. In terms of an expanded field of play for race and gender, the gray seems to push that expansion to a moment of collapse or disappearance. The gray is apparently without race or gender—a figure that embodies the collapse or suspension of the distinctions entailed by those two categories. To identify with the gray is a struggle for those who encounter them, a struggle that seems to capture the emergent ability so prized by Kaja Silverman's treatise on the expanded field of love—the ability to identify with the socially disprized body.

In her essay *The Promise of Monsters*, Donna Haraway draws the reader's attention to the importance of "inappropriate/ d others" in imagining what she describes as a post-human future; "To be inappropriate/ d is not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives."³²⁶ Haraway argues that in order to envision a future that constitutes a radical departure from the present, it is crucial to both shift the perception of what counts as an agent and to seek out narrative structures that take us

³²⁶ Donna Haraway, "The Promise of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 299.

"elsewhere." The figure of the gray and its paths of circulation are both reflective and constitutive of a fundamental question: What does it mean to be human at a moment when the human-technology interface is moving perceptibly toward a zero point in which the "natural" and the "engineered" are indistinguishable? Part of the promise of the gray is the cultural opportunity to fantasize about moving beyond the boundaries set by "humanity" as it is currently construed. This opportunity is both welcomed and shunned in the context of emergent terrestrial technologies (witness both the boosterism and suspicion around genetic mapping and new nano- and biotechnologies). The alien functions as a repository and generator of cultural fears and desires concerning the potential futures of humankind. Shifts over time in the ways the alien is represented and shifts in the ways alien-human contact is structured and construed correlate with changes in American culture's imagination of both its own future and the future of humanity itself. In short, the gray functions as both condensation and elaboration of some of the deepest fears and desires of the present cultural moment, and cultural responses to the gray constitute a "trying on" of various potential modes of response to those fears and desires.

The ongoing erasure of the space between human and machine is only one example of a broader contemporary tendency toward the collapse of key socio-cultural boundaries. Much of what has been carried out under the banners of various "post" theories is centrally concerned with this sense of collapse. This theoretical work positions itself both as a response to perceived historical shifts (post-modernism and post-colonialism) and as a response to the sense that earlier theoretical projects had reached a point of stasis (post-structuralism). All of this work proceeds with the operative understanding that earlier conceptual models and modes of thought are insufficiently keyed to the needs of the moment. For the purposes of the present work, none of these earlier models are so problematic as the model of communication that depends on the ideal

of full transparency between interlocutors. In the near future, the world will be a place where one is confronted with humans who seem increasingly like machines and machines that seem uncannily human - a place where racial and gender distinctions are fluid to the point of near-uselessness - a place where corporate cultures and identities trump nationality and ethnicity. The very boundary between organic and inorganic threatens to collapse with nano-technological advances toward "intelligent" matter.

Clearly, this scenario of the near future is fraught with categorical crises. To face the world described above as it is, rather than struggling to map it with untenable distinctions, the development of modes of understanding that cognize difference without the promise of full transparency is centrally important. Critical engagement with a world of hybrid identities, smart molecules and practical telekinesis requires a "pragmatism open to both the uncanny and the practical."³²⁷ Such a world calls for a mode of engagement that allows for strangeness, a thinking that lets the Other remain separate. Confrontations with the Other based on the desire for full and final disclosure are fundamentally narcissistic and lend themselves to a violence aimed alternately toward eradication or subsumption. To engage the world that is opening before us with the desire for full transparency intact promises nothing short of disaster.

Spiritualism and its kith and kin all struggled both to imagine potential human futures and to articulate some rapprochement between a spiritual and a scientific world view. They did so by spinning out a series of narratives and practices that centered on engagements with the Other. While all of these narratives privileged dramatic change at both individual and cultural levels, they did so in a way that left underlying assumptions of the human intact, with the Other ultimately functioning less as a centrifugal figure than as one that flattered terrestrial

³²⁷ John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 22.

predispositions. Just as theory after World War II increasingly turned to a radical critique of the “human” and all its smuggled assumptions, so to did the narratives of the displaced utopian imaginary offer up increasingly estranged visions of the self. The challenge presented by theories of the abject and the post-human and by the horrific scenario of alien abduction is the challenge to re-imagine what it might mean to be human. It is a challenge we ignore at our own peril.

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