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# Unidentified Flying Objects, Photographic Aesthetics, and Moving Images

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film and Television Studies.

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# Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree.

# Abstract

Images of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) are the site of an acute crisis in photographic representation. The purportedly "authentic" UFO photographs that proliferated in the mid twentieth century are alleged to depict some unknown aerial activity operating just beyond the perimeter of scientific knowledge, yet courtesy of the visual ambiguities that maintain the UFO's essential unidentifiability, they typically reveal almost nothing of its actual nature. Despite these visual ambiguities, UFOs also quickly established themselves as an iconographical staple of popular entertainment cinema. Between their appearances in these two very different kinds of photographic image, photographic UFOs emblematise many of the key issues at stake in debates concerning the epistemology of photographic imaging. What is it we actually see in photographic images, and what can we hope to reliably learn from them? Why do some photographs seem innately comprehensible, perhaps even overburdened with association, while others seem to resist attempts towards their interpretation? Juxtaposing a range of competing approaches to photographic semiology from film and photography theory (including the modernist realism of Siegfried Kracauer's *Theory of Film,* and C. S. Peirce's conceptualisation of "symbolic," "iconic," and "indexical" signs), this thesis performs a theoretical examination of the unique aesthetic character of the photographic UFO, and what it is capable of revealing about the nature of the photographic image. Using close textual analysis of both still and moving, fictional and non-fictional UFO images, it is a consideration of how the UFO's self-reflexive semiotic unruliness functions variously favourably and unfavourably in the context of both art and evidence. Culminating with the formulation of a speculative theory of the photographic UFO's visual disruption, this thesis presents the UFO as an image that gestures to a range of representational possibilities beyond what are conventionally considered the limits of photographic representation and interpretation.

# Preface

On the 16th of December, 2017, an article published in the *New York Times* reported that between 2007 and 2012 the United States Department of Defense spent just under twenty-two million dollars on a partially classified investigation into reports of unidentified flying objects (UFOs) known as the "Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program" (AATIP).[1] The article was widely shared, and triggered a frenzy of speculation. That an investigation had been operating out of the depths of the Pentagon for five years, more than four decades after the termination of the well-documented string of studies into unidentified flying objects undertaken by the U. S. Air Force following the Second World War, proved revelatory to those interested in the history and politics of "ufology" (the study of UFOs).[2] If true, the news represents the most significant development in the field for decades, dramatically contradicting the U. S. Government's longstanding official stance on the subject (that unidentified flying objects are not a matter of government, military, or scientific interest).[3] However, close consideration of the manner in which the article presents this story reveals a more complicated picture.

It is significant, for instance, that the article eschews the familiar term "UFO," in

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[1] The piece caused such a stir that two days after its publication the *New York Times* published a follow-up article by Ralph Blumenthal offering an explanation of "how […] a story on U.F.O.s get[s] into *The New York Times.*" See Helene Cooper, Ralph Blumenthal, & Leslie Kean, 'Glowing Auras and 'Black Money': The Pentagon's Mysterious U.F.O. Program,' *New York Times*, 16th December, 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/pentagon-program-ufo-harry-reid.html> (Accessed 16th December, 2017), and Ralph Blumenthal, 'On The Trail of a Secret Pentagon U.F.O. Program,' *New York Times*, 18th December, 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/18/insider/secret-pentagon-ufo-program.html> (Accessed 18th December, 2017).

[2] Of the U. S. Air Force's historical studies of UFOs, most famous are Project Sign (1947), Project Grudge (1949), and Project Blue Book (1952), the latter of which ran for over sixteen years before terminating in December 1969.

[3] This is a sentiment most famously expressed in the findings of the Robertson Panel (a CIA-initiated scientific panel, led by director of the U. S. Army's Weapons Systems Evaluation Group, Howard P. Robertson, reviewing the U. S. Air Force's investigation of UFOs), and the recommendations of the Condon Committee (a similar, more protracted study run from 1966 to 1968 by physicist Edward Condon at the University of Colorado, examining both military and public UFO reports to assess the scientific import of the Air Force's UFO studies). Both groups concluded against the scientific value of studying UFOs, and the latter in particular played a central role in consolidating the negative public profile ufology struggles against to the present day.

favour of contemporary ufology's preferred alternative, "unidentified aerial phenomena" ("UAP"). An attitude stemming from the widespread scepticism surrounding the topic holds that the term "UFO" is more closely associated with the frivolities of popular entertainment than legitimate scientific enquiry. Employing the lesser known, though ufologically in-vogue "UAP," the article discloses its authors' alignment with ufology's endeavours to dispel the taboo enshrouding UFO culture (which typically involves attempts to sever the UFO from its popular media profile, and rejoin it with sober, scientific enquiry).[4] To similar ends, the piece also cites a range of "hard" scientific evidence, describing, for instance, how procedures conducted in AATIP's investigations included the examination of "metal alloys and other materials" purportedly recovered from UFOs, and physiological examinations of UFO witnesses.[5] Such practices are commonly described in ufological literature, and recalling them here fosters a sense that the story represents an official acknowledgement of the scientific legitimacy of the UFO phenomenon (which ufology has long awaited).

While the article might seem to court a familiar ufological portent, then (that military and government officials are preparing to publicly disclose knowledge concerning the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence), all it really discloses is the less exciting fact of the military's continued interest in determining the relative threat posed by unidentified objects in the sky. Accordingly, any credibility ufology seems to acquire as a result of the story is not essential per se, but conferred via association with military authority (ironically, the very same authority ufologists have historically distrusted). As such,

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[4] The connotations of certain common ufological terms, including the "UFO" and the "flying saucer," will be considered in more detail shortly (as the definition of the "UFO," in particular, plays a crucial role in the forthcoming discussion). Regarding the UFO "taboo," political theorists Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall provide a helpful outline of the sociopolitical contours of the "the authoritative taboo on taking UFOs seriously," in an article in *Political Theory* titled 'UFOs and Sovereignty,' that uses the UFO's potential extraterrestriality to expose the anthropocentrism of modern political sovereignty. See Alexander Wendt & Raymond Duvall, 'Sovereignty and the UFO,' *Political Theory*, vol. 36, no. 4 (August 2008), pp. 607-633.

[5] Cooper, Blumenthal & Kean, 'Glowing Auras and 'Black Money.''

rather than presenting any significant paradigm shift or break with tradition, the article mostly represents a continuation of an established ufological narrative: in the absence of explicit confirmation, ufologists perceive military or government activities as tacit acknowledgement of the scientific legitimacy of UFOs because it attracts publicity, and lends an air of legitimacy to the ufological cause. Indeed, perhaps the best evidence for this is that almost four years have passed since the story originally broke, and very little has changed (except, perhaps, some erosion of its credibility).

There is, however, at least one aspect of the story that is undeniably spectacular. Released in conjunction with the 'Glowing Auras and 'Black Money'' article was a tranche of audiovisual UFO "evidence" published on the *New York Times* website, consisting of two videos reportedly leaked by AATIP's former director Luis Elizondo.[6] Each consists of footage purportedly recovered from the Advanced Targeting Forward-Looking Infrared (ATFLIR) viewfinders installed aboard U. S. Navy aircraft, providing an audiovisual record of two notable twenty-first century UFO incidents investigated by AATIP.[7] One of the videos is described as depicting an unidentified aerial phenomenon observed by jets dispatched by the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier off the coast of San Diego on the morning of the 14th of November, 2004 (this video is unofficially titled "*FLIR1*") (see *fig. 0.1*). The other is said to depict one of many incidents involving

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[6] Elizondo's credentials have since been questioned, however. "There is no discernible evidence that [Elizondo] ever worked for a government UFO program, much less led one," one reporter writes. Elizondo has recently attributed these doubts to the Department of Defense "waging a disinformation campaign against him." See Keith Kloor, 'The Media Loves this UFO Expert Who Says He Worked for an Obscure Pentagon Program. Did He?,' *The Intercept*, 1st June, 2019 <https://theintercept.com/2019/06/01/ufo-unidentified-history-channel-luis-elizondo-pentagon/> (Accessed 1st June, 2019), and Alexandra Villarreal, 'Whistleblower who spoke out on UFOs claims Pentagon tried to discredit him' *The Guardian*, 28th May, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/28/ufo-whistleblower-pentagon-complaint/> (Accessed 28th May, 2021).

[7] The authenticity of the leaked videos was officially confirmed by the U. S. Department of Defense (in addition to a third video, titled "*Go Fast*," released in March 2018 by the To The Stars Academy of Arts & Science research and entertainment company), in a press release issued on the 27th of April, 2020. See U. S. Department of Defense, 'Statement by the Department of Defense on the Release of Historical Navy Videos,' *defense.gov*, 27th April, 2020 <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2165713/statement-by-the-department-of-defense-on-the-release-of-historical-navy-videos/> (Accessed 27th April, 2020).
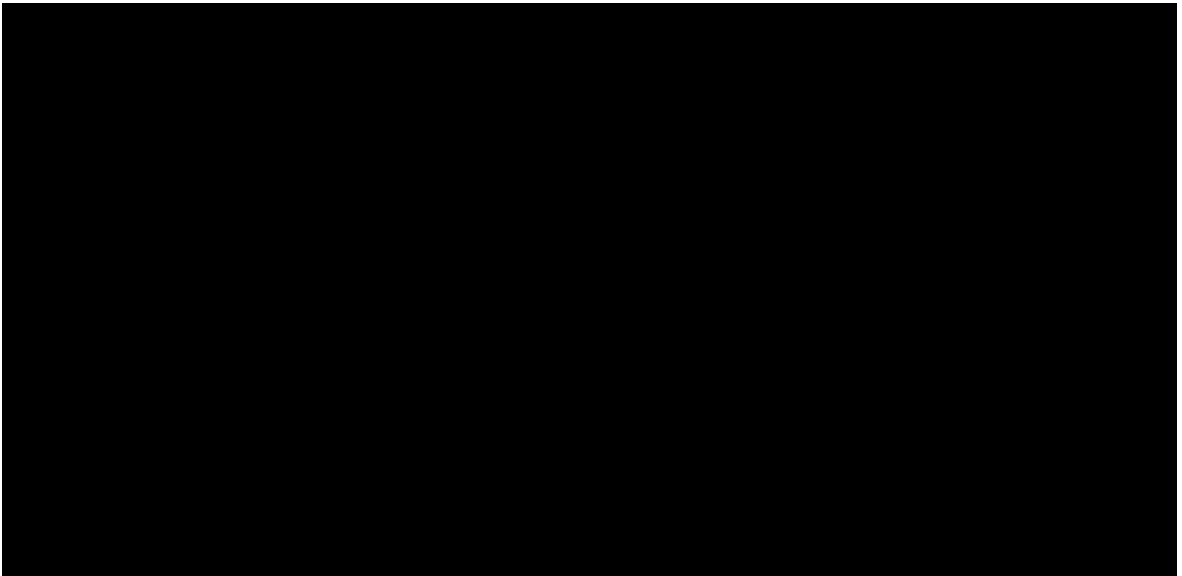
*fig. 0.1 (left): Still from "FLIR1."*

*fig. 0.2 (right): Still from "Gimbal."*

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unidentified aerial phenomena observed by jets dispatched by the USS Theodore Roosevelt off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida, on an unspecified date in 2015 (this video is unofficially titled "*Gimbal*") (see *fig. 0.2*). Both videos consist of emphatically digital (that is, pixellated, and annotated by the ATFLIR text display), black-and-white images, accompanied by subtitles for their partly redacted audio tracks, reproducing radio communications between the pilots involved in the incidents. The objects depicted in both videos appear as asymmetrical lacunae, featureless blotches moving steadily above the clouds as the ATFLIR system tracks them with limited success. Most strikingly, *Gimbal*, the longer and marginally clearer of the two videos, appears to depict the object rolling around an axis while traveling at incredible speed, while *FLIR1* depicts its object shaking off the ATFLIR tracking system by suddenly accelerating out of the frame.

Whatever the actual nature of the objects they depict, these videos explicitly situate the UFO at the site of a crisis in photographic representation. These images, taken with the highest specification of photographic viewing devices, capable of negotiating both the visible and the invisible (the infrared radiation beneath the horizon of ocular visibili-

ty) in "real-time," with insurmountable accuracy, are shown not only as incapable of helping identify these objects, but unable of even depicting them with any precision or stability. As the videos toggle between infrared ("black mode") and visible light ("white mode"), zooming impotently in and out, they offer a dramatic demonstration of the limitations of photographically-augmented vision.[8] If, as Marshall McLuhan suggested, photography is among the many technological "extensions of man [sic]," an integral component in the media sensorium responsible for arbitrating hegemonic belief, then how is one to understand these images that undermine the most firmly established ideas of photography's relationship to human perception and knowledge?[9] Or, to pose this question another way: What exactly does one see when looking at photographic UFO images? This is not to ask what the objects these images purport to evidence might be, but rather to ask what aspects of these images ensure that they evade ordinary photographic comprehension? Furthermore, if these images refuse to function like normal photographic images, then how do they function? What are they capable of achieving (beyond, that is, negatively influencing faith in the acuity and veracity of photographic representation)?

It seems reasonable to assume that these are images of reconnaissance—probing out into the world to return with actionable intelligence—yet here, the surrogate vision of the ATFLIR device, in spite of its technological sophistication, answers less questions than it poses. The representational failure of these videos seems to present photography not as a means of explanation—as it is sometimes thought of elsewhere—but as a

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[8] Indeed, sceptical video analysts have since convincingly argued that the seemingly anomalous characteristics of the "UFOs" depicted in the *FLIR1* and *Gimbal* videos are precisely attributable to particular limitations of photographic looking, and specificities of the ATFLIR apparatus. Sceptic Mick West argues that the rotating appearance of the craft in *Gimbal* is not a product of the object itself rotating, but an artefact of a rotating mechanism in the ATFLIR camera, an effect exacerbated by lens flare (that the asymmetrical shape of the object, as distorted by lens flair, renders its apparent rotation particularly striking for its ostensibly nonaerodynamic structure). See Mick West, 'I study UFOs – and I don't believe the alien hype. Here's why,' *The Guardian*, 11th June, 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/11/i-study-ufos-and-i-dont-believe-the-alien-hype-heres-why/> (Accessed 11th June, 2021).

[9] See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Routledge, 2001).

means of *exploration*. These videos restore in this way some of the mystery associated with the early reception of photographic representation. They serve as a reminder that media mystification and its associated superstitions are not solely the reserve of older, less knowledgeable, overly credulous, or unsophisticated viewers (figures like the apocryphally startled audience at the premiere of the *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* [Auguste & Louis Lumière, Société Lumière, France, 1895], and Uncle Josh of *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* [Edwin S. Porter, Edison Manufacturing Company, USA, 1902], among other denizens of the more parochial histories of photography and cinema).[10] Having metamorphosed to comport to contemporary technology and viewing habits, these anxieties persist well into the present day, and in its frustration of conventional photographic semiology the UFO is capable of providing a unique vantage point upon such questions of the epistemological vagaries of photographic imaging. Maybe, then, with examination of precisely how the UFO lends its form to the photographic unknown, it will be possible to acquire a better understanding of photographic ambiguity? After all, first and foremost, photographic UFO images reveal that it is still possible to be confused, intrigued, and perhaps even frightened by photographic images; that photography is still able to offer tentative peeks into the unknown, tantalising glimpses of that which eludes the grip of a satisfying explanation.

Given that this is the case, it may seem paradoxical that one of the widest and most influential outlets for the consideration of this exploratory approach to photographic imaging via UFOs is popular moving image entertainment (not least because this appears to run contrary to the fact that popular entertainment media is often theorised as

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[10] W. J. T. Mitchell offers a persuasive account of the extent to which this is the case. In his 2005 book *What do Pictures Want?*, Mitchell writes: "the double consciousness about images" (by which he refers to the manner in which viewers so readily "vacillat[e] between magical beliefs and skeptical doubts, naive animism and hardheaded materialism, mystical and critical attitudes" in their approach to images) "is a deep and abiding feature of human responses to representation. It is not something that we "get over" when we grow up, become modern, or acquire critical consciousness." See W. J. T. Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 7-8.

*fig. 0.3: Still from* The X-Files, *Episode 10.1 "My Struggle" (2016). The tangibility of the analogue UFO photograph is quite literally highlighted with a red marker-pen scribble circling the UFO.*

having a clear economic investment in avoiding representational ambiguity).[11] For instance, a year prior to the *New York Times'* AATIP exposé, the reboot of the enormously popular police procedural/science fiction television series *The X-Files* (USA, Fox, 1993-present) debuted with an unusual introductory sequence. The very first shot of the series offered the distinctly antiquated spectacle of a hand—that of Special Agent Fox Mulder (David Duchovny)—assembling a stack of analogue UFO photographs on top of foolscap folders emblazoned with FBI insignia (see *fig. 0.3*). Since much of what follows in the episode "updates" the series for the 2010s—most notably via overdetermined references to digital services like YouTube and Uber—it is perhaps surprising that the programme should, in its opening moments, offer a representation of its principal attraction (the mysterious activities of its malevolent extraterrestrial threat) as mediated via conspicuously outdated analogue technology. This is, however, largely consistent with the dominant form taken by representations of UFOs in popular film and tele-

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[11] This notion is epitomised by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristen Thompson's characterisation of the "Classical Hollywood Style," a form of representation that sought to eschew ambiguity, and retain an anthropocentric, spatiotemporally unified narration, in the service of a clearly-defined narrative, posited as the dominant style of mainstream entertainment film representation during the Classical Hollywood period. See David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, & Kristen Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985).

vision. UFO narratives frequently foreground representations of the role of representational media (chiefly photographs) in the acquisition of UFO evidence, and such instances typically depict UFO photographs as blurry, irresolute, ambiguous images like those of the ATFLIR videos, images that struggle to convince, but are difficult to dismiss. Integrated into a narrative framework, these images are presented as objects, and it is significant that their connection to the paranormal seems to accentuate the properties of the media via which they are represented. This is most apparent in the hard tangibility of analogue photographs, physical artefacts, as easily cherished as destroyed, that even acquire an almost monetary character in these contexts, like evidential banknotes (Mulder's pile of UFO photographs serving as the ufological equivalent of a stack of money in a rap video). Equally, however, the evidential economy of the paranormal serves to highlight the characteristics typically associated with digital media, whose immateriality is commonly framed in tandem with a mutability that seems to invite manipulation, and an ability to circulate with less friction (as in the algorithmic abstractions of high frequency trading, to extend the monetary analogy). As such, photo-manipulation, and data leaks also abound in *The X-Files*, and, for that matter, the wider screen UFO corpus.

How can one understand UFO images like those of the opening of *The X-Files* reboot, representative of an earlier period in ufology and UFO culture more broadly, in relation to those of the ATFLIR videos? Are they merely a wistful reflection on the lure of the analogue in the age of the digital? The whiff of the document? How the tangibility of analogue photographic evidence appears as an appealing antidote to the perpetual fugitivity of paranormal proof?[12] There is, undoubtedly, a deep stratum of analogue nostalgia running through ufology and UFO culture, and it is in this respect that ufology

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[12] The fugitivity of proof is, of course, a recurring theme in *The X-Files* franchise, which Rodney Hill examines in detail in a 2012 essay. See Rodney Hill, '"I Want To Believe the Truth Is Out There": *The X-Files* and the Impossibility of Knowing,' in J. P. Telotte & Gerald Duchovnay (ed.), *Science Fiction Film, Television, and Adaptation* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 115-26.

can be seen as reflective, perhaps even amplificatory, of wider media trends, channelling

the widespread analogue fetishism of the present moment into its own interests and con-

cerns. In the assimilation of analogue media associated with digital remediation, the

pathological return to analogue photographic media observable in ufological media—

books, films, television—is symptomatic of the broader, digitally-facilitated cultural *hy-*

*perthymesia*, celebrated and lamented in equal measure, whereby the digitisation of ana-

logue media preserves its gross audiovisual characteristics while circumventing the con-

straints its physicality has historically posed to access.[13] This, of course, enables a cul-

tural turn in which these audiovisual artefacts—previously considered neutral, perhaps

even undesirable—acquire an auratic quality that engenders the nostalgic analogue

fetishism often imbricated with rhetorics of paranormal evidence. Certainly, there is an

argument to be made for the manner in which the sensible traces of analogue specificity,

the scuffs and scratches that betray an entropic objecthood, lend an authenticity to mate-

rial that otherwise challenges credulity.[14] But what if this represents something more

complex than mere nostalgia, or the desire to convince? What if the traces of mediation

abundantly apparent in the digital's exacting reproduction of the imperfections of ana-

logue media represent a particularly acute expression of aesthetic peculiarities integral

to the UFO as an image? What if certain interpretative frameworks developed in con-

junction with, and more closely associated with the specificities of analogue photogra-

phy, are enmeshed with the UFO as an image, and the endurance of these analogue

forms can be attributed to a skeuomorphic naturalisation of the UFO's elusive and dis-

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[13] For an extended consideration of the endurance of analogue aesthetics in the digital era, see Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to its Own Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011).

[14] This suggestion might account for the prominence of analogue media aesthetics in the recent glut of "true crime" documentaries, most notably those concerning serial killers. These films and television series (such as *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* [USA, Netflix, 2019]) regularly preserve traces of analogue mediation in their presentation of audiovisual source material, seemingly asserting the absolute specificity of the events described, the audiovisual traces of analogue mediation serving to accentuate the sense of contingent causality inherent to the subject matter.

ruptive visuality (that the familiarity of their comparatively hazy, and imprecise images renders the frustrating qualities of the UFO image more visually digestible)? But most importantly, what if, more than the physicality, and naturalised trustworthiness of analogue media lending itself to ufology's substantiation of evidence, UFOs might somehow aid an attempt to understand how analogue photography acquired this naturalised trustworthiness, helping unpick the remnants of these attitudes from contemporary attitudes towards photographic media (including the moving image)? These, alongside a number of additional questions concerning the role of media in the representation of UFOs, and the role of UFOs in the representation of media, are the focus of this thesis.

## *1. Introduction: Uses of the paranormal*

There is a dual signification at work in the representation of paranormal phenomena. Representations of the paranormal simultaneously present both the entity or event in question, and a number of philosophical ideas or questions their formulation may be understood to express. This tension is integral to representations of the paranormal. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes in his study of the figure of the monster, the paranormal "signifies something other than itself," and the notion that paranormal manifestations might metaphorically represent more than just their immediate appearance features in almost every discourse associated with readings of paranormal phenomena.[15] At the same time, the paranormal demands to be taken literally. Ignoring the specificities of its manifestations can be a terrible mistake. As Eugene Thacker writes of horror: "It is the *literalness* of horror that makes it horror; it is not "as if" an unnamable, tentacular, other-dimensional entity were feasting on your soul—it really is. [...] The allegorical is [...] in service of the literal, and not the other way around."[16] The same is true of paranormal representation. Why a UFO, a ghost, or Bigfoot, and not anything else, if not for some irreducible specificity central to the very essence of these particular figures? Considered together, the former, variously metaphysical and/or ethical concepts often presented as the impetus for claims concerning the paranormal, can be observed as precisely structured into the latter, the formal and narrative structures associated with specific phenomena.

Consider, for example, the figure of the ghost, and the notion of haunting. Haunting, the depiction of a ghost caught in a cycle of tortured repetition, is both a literal phenomenon—a restless spirit caught halfway between the realm of the living and the

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[15] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses),' in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (ed.), *Monster Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 4.

[16] Eugene Thacker, *Tentacles Longer than Night: Horror of Philosophy,* vol. 3 (Winchester: Zero Books, 2015), p. 16. [Emphasis in original.]

realm of the dead—but also, simultaneously, an expression of the anxieties from which the concept of the ghost may conceivably have been wrought: guilt, the mysteries of consciousness, the unthinkable infinitude of death.[17] The same is true of the endless retreat of Bigfoot, ever evading capture as it moves deeper into the forest, further from civilisation. At the most immediate level, this describes the migratory tendencies of a cryptozoological entity. On another, however, it serves, like haunting, as a reification of the ideas that sustain Bigfoot's intrigue: the unconquerable frontier of the natural world, and the persistence of the inexhaustible mystery of the wilderness, even as it physically recedes.

To describe this as a dual signification is to stress the importance of refusing to reduce paranormal representations to either of these two registers exclusively. One cannot exorcise a ghost with exegesis, or capture Bigfoot in a metaphor, but equally a ghost is never just a ghost (a disembodied spirit), and Bigfoot is never just Bigfoot (the reclusive, mystery hominid, most famously depicted in the 1967 "Patterson-Gimlin" film).[18] A sensitivity towards this dual signification in accounts of paranormal phenomena serves as a corrective to these equally common yet diametrically opposed simplifications, attitudes that credulously embrace the actuality of the paranormal, and those that reject it out of hand. Typically bolstered by little more than derogatory claims directed at the other, both are equally blinkered to this most significant attribute of the paranormal. Considered for what they have in common, however, they each gesture to an elu-

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[17] Of course, Jacques Derrida famously mobilised the figure of the ghost in his conceptualisation of "*hauntology*," the ontological state of neither presence nor absence expressed in the "logic of haunting" invoked in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*. ("A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism.") See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.

[18] The "Patterson-Gimlin" film is an amateur film, shot in 1967 by rodeo riders Roger Patterson and Bob Gimlin at Bluff Creek, a tributary of the Klamath River in the Six Rivers National Forest, Northern California, depicting Bigfoot glancing back at the photographers as it ambles into the woodland. Though widely discredited, it is arguably the most famous purportedly authentic photographic representation of Bigfoot.

sive kernel of elucidatory truth that resides at the heart of paranormal representation. This can be arrived at by asking two questions (each sharing a common answer). First, why might literal interpretations of paranormal phenomena have persisted into present day despite working, with increasing difficulty, against the tide of hegemonic rationalism? Second, if paranormal phenomena are strictly allegorical, then why do so many people go to the trouble of routing their ideas—often concepts that could be easily explicated through any number of alternative means—through the metaphysical chicanery of a supernatural explanation?

The answer to both these questions, and the driving force of this study, is that the chief function of the paranormal is to resist and disrupt. As outside, and beyond (*para-*) the ordinary, and accustomed (*-normal*), expressions of the paranormal pose an inherent challenge to received wisdom and the uncritical acceptance of established ideals. Representations of paranormal phenomena delineate the borders of an assumed normal order, only to narrate the process of their transgression, forcefully prompting reconsideration of the assumptions that allowed one's expectations to be so thoroughly overturned.[19] Persuasively accounting for both the unlikely endurance of its popular appeal and the subversive potential of its hegemonic digressions, then, appreciation of the dual signification of the paranormal ensures that phenomena like ghosts, UFOs, and Bigfoot—whether real or imaginary—are understood not only as extraordinary manifestations, but as simultaneously channelling powerful undercurrents of conceptual unsettlement.

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[19] This description of the structural logic of the paranormal recalls Tzvetan Todorov's famous analysis of "the fantastic" in literary fiction. Regarding the logic underpinning the representation of the fantastic, Todorov writes: "In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he [sic] is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. […] The fantastic nature is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event." Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: NY, Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 25.

The dual signification of paranormal phenomena is not limited to any prescribed combination of literal and figurative attributes, and as such, there are many ways in which the UFO of the present study enacts its disruptive effect. In particular, it is the contention of this thesis that the UFO—its essential *unidentified*-ness posing an inherently visual challenge—unsettles, particularly profoundly, many of the common assumptions concerning the photographic image and its perceived aesthetic and epistemological affordances. As such, this thesis demonstrates how the conceptualisation of the UFO as a paranormal phenomenon provides a uniquely potent fusion of audiovisual figuration and conceptual disruptiveness in relation to photographic representation. If, as the dual-signification of paranormal phenomena asserts, the UFO's paranormal characteristics are constitutive of its conceptual disruptiveness, and vice versa, it is essential that this study provides a thorough definition of the UFO through its many historical iterations, and an overview of relevant concepts from photography theory whose boundaries the UFO stands to butt against. Only once a familiarity has been established with these two subjects can questions of what the UFO might reveal of photography be considered. Accordingly, these are the principal objectives of sections two and three. The first examines the UFO, how it was originally conceived and how it has since been reimagined. The second considers photography, established historical attitudes toward it, and the vast gulf between what it is commonly perceived as capable of, and its actual abilities.

## 2. "UFOs"

Conventionally—which is to say *ufologically*—"UFO" describes the object(s) witnessed in a UFO sighting. Though this definition has provided ufology with a functional definition for many decades, it is not without fault. Historically, it has caused many well-documented difficulties across a range of disciplines, ufology not excluded. As historian David Jacobs notes, "[s]emantic rigor was not a characteristic of the debate over UFOs," and this lack of rigour extends all the way back to the original conceptualisation of the "UFO's" definition.[20] These nebulosities of the "UFO's" original formulation are also partly responsible for many of the unique visual properties that make UFO photographs such unusual images. For this reason, this thesis will ask not how these imprecisions of the ufological approach can be recast, or smoothed over, but rather how the inherent imprecisions of the "UFO"—in all its asymmetricality, rupture, and contradiction—might productively disrupt conventional assumptions commonly made of photographic imaging. Identifying attributes of the UFO that lend themselves to such a task will be an ongoing project throughout this study. However, it is first necessary to examine both the origin of "UFO" as a term, and the specificities of its conventional ufological application. Considering how, and indeed whether, this conventional definition succeeds in aiding ufology's acquisition of knowledge regarding the nature and existence of anomalous aerial activity will help prepare for the task of identifying the properties (and lacks) that shape the UFO's relationship with photography.

The exact origins of the term "UFO" remain unclear, though it is believed to have originated in the late 1940s around the beginning of the first major Air Force flying

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N. B. Since the following discussion concerns the relationship between the nature of UFOs and their definition, it is important that the UFO as an image/object, and the "UFO" initialism as the term/concept most commonly used to describe it, remain easily distinguishable. For this reason, the former will henceforth be referred to without quotation marks (UFO), and the latter with quotation marks ("UFO").

[20] Jacobs' book, an adaptation of his 1973 PhD thesis, is arguably the first major academic study of UFO culture. David M. Jacobs, *The UFO Controversy in America* (New York City, NY: Signet, 1976), p. 2.

saucer investigation effort, Project Sign (1948-1949), as the U. S. Air Force's operational replacement for another less formal term which preceded it by a few months: "flying saucer." The origin of the term "flying saucer" is considerably better known. It was a media invention inspired by reporters Bill Bequette and Nolan Skiff's account of pilot Kenneth Arnold's sighting of unidentified flying objects over Mount Rainier, Washington, on the 24th of June, 1947.[21] Interpretable as conflating Arnold's description of the motion of the objects (as gliding like "saucers skipped over water") with their physical appearance, Bequette and Skiff's phrasing of "nine saucer-like aircraft" led to many subsequent accounts reporting the craft as "flying saucers," stoking public curiosity, and ushering in the "flying saucer" era.[22] Captain Edward J. Ruppelt, director of the Air Force's subsequent UFO studies after Project Sign, Project Grudge (1949-1951) and Project Blue Book (1952-1969), makes perhaps the most credible claim for having invented the "saucer's" successor, "UFO" (an initialism of "unidentified flying object"), though it is considered more likely that it was coined by an Air Force employee, and Ruppelt was simply the first to sanction its official use.[23] In the Air Force, "UFO" was

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[21] Ufologist Jacques Vallee notes that the first documented use of the term "flying saucer" actually appears as early as 1878, though this cannot truly be identified as the origin of the term in its modern usage, as it was only used once in relation to an isolated incident reported by a Texan farmer named John Martin. See Jacques Vallee, *Anatomy of a Phenomenon: UFOs in Space* (London: Tandem, 1974), p. 1.

[22] Considerable variation exists among the many reproductions of these quotations found in ufological literature. Bequette and Skiff's original newspaper article is difficult to locate, and accounts of the specificities of Arnold's original eyewitness testimony are typically anecdotal, if not outright apocryphal. These particular iterations are taken from Brenda Denzler's *The Lure of the Edge*, an academic study of ufology considered as an emergent religion, as its methodological rigour exudes a greater sense of reliability than any ufological alternative. Denzler attributes her quotations to "John Spencer, s.v. "Arnold, Kenneth; Sighting By," in John Spencer, *The UFO Encyclopedia* (New York: Avon Books, 1991)." See Brenda Denzler, *The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), p. 6.

[23] The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that ufologist Donald Keyhoe was the first to use the "UFO" initialism in print, in an article published in a 1953 issue of *Air Line Pilot* magazine. The entry reads: "1953, D. E. Keyhoe in Air Line Pilot Oct. 9/3 "The UFO was estimated to be between 12,000 and 20,000 feet above the jets."" But this should not be misunderstood as identifying Keyhoe as a contender in the quest for the term's true origin. Having spent much of the late 1940s and 1950s interviewing Air Force staff in his reporting on the U. S. Air Force's UFO investigation programmes, it is more likely that Keyhoe picked up the term during his time spent with Air Force personnel as opposed to creating it himself. Keyhoe was instrumental in establishing the paranoid, conspiratorial tone that would later characterise much ufological literature. See Edward J. Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (New York City, NY: Cosimo Classics, 2011), p. 6, Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'UFO *n.1*' *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://0-www-oed-com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/Entry/208543> (Accessed 22nd May, 2020), and Donald Keyhoe, *Flying Saucers are Real* (New York City, NY: Gold Medal Books, 1950).

considered superior to "flying saucer" as it was perceived as having less predetermining connotations. "[T]he term 'flying saucer' is misleading when applied to objects of every conceivable shape and performance," Ruppelt wrote. "For this reason the military prefers the more general, if less colorful, name: unidentified flying objects. UFO (pronounced Yoo-foe) for short."[24] On account of its late debut, and "less colorful" nature, for many years "UFO" remained a secondary, more specialised term, while "flying saucer" reigned unchallenged popularly. The fact that the first film to feature UFOs, *The Flying Saucer* (Mikel Conrad, Colonial Productions, Inc., USA, 1950), took the more popular term as its title is exemplary of this early preference.

In spite of their apparent differences, there is at least one significant commonality between the "UFO" and the "flying saucer," one that is quickly revealed with comparison to some of their less-remembered predecessors. Consider, for instance, the "mystery airship" panic of 1896–1897 (in which citizens across the United States witnessed a mysterious dirigible-like structures piloted by mysterious humanoids), the "foo fighters" of the Second World War (UFOs observed by U. S. fighter pilots, over Europe and the Pacific Ocean), and the "ghost rockets" of northern Europe and Scandinavia (streaking lights repeatedly witnessed over Sweden, Finland, and Norway throughout 1946).[25] Though at one time each of these terms occupied equivalent terminological territory to "flying saucers" and "UFOs," none broke free of their regional and institutional specificities to achieve wider cultural significance in quite the same way. One could put this down to the fact that "mystery airships," "foo fighters," and "ghost rockets" each describe particular phenomena rather than airborne anomalies more generally (though the

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[24] As Ruppelt indicates, the term was originally considered an acronym, though it is more often treated as an initialism in the present day. Ruppelt, *Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, p. 6.

[25] "Green fireballs" is another term for a specific form of anomalous aerial activity reported in the southwestern United States from the late 1940s onwards, though its use did not predate "flying saucers" or "UFOs." The phenomenon elicited its own dedicated Air Force investigation titled Project Twinkle, which ran from 1949 to 1951.

perplexing specificity of "flying saucer" admittedly complicates such a hypothesis), or that "airships," "fighters" (as in "fighter jets"), and "rockets," are all objects that belong in the air, casting the earthbound, domestic metaphor of the "saucer" as evoking additional, fantastical connotations. Nevertheless, as popular non-starters this trio of "saucer" predecessors attest to the manner in which the sensationalist "flying saucer" and the enigmatic "UFO" have more in common than may initially appear, chiefly evidenced by the manner in which their vagueness enables their wider cultural resonance. Indeed, by the late 1950s to the early 1960s, this vagueness also allowed the "flying saucer" and "UFO" to become popularly synonymous, each equally denotative of any unexplained activity in the sky (in spite of the former's noted predisposition towards disc-shaped, elliptical craft).

The fall of the "flying saucer," then, and the popular ascendence of the "UFO" occurred concurrently with the diminishment of the U. S. Air Force's interest in UFOs.[26] One can only speculate as to the possibility of a causal link in such a coincidence, but that the "UFO" had broken loose from operational military vocabulary by the time the Air Force ended their UFO investigations in 1969 is irrefutable. So much so that by the early 1970s the formerly institutional term had almost completely replaced the "flying saucer" in popular discourse. Consider, for example, the made-for-TV dramatisation of the 1961 Betty and Barney Hill alien abduction case, which was titled *The UFO Incident* (Richard A. Colla, NBC, USA, 1975), and debuted in a prime-time slot on a major

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[26] Though Project Sign began as a legitimate assessment of the defence ramifications of the saucer scare, it is generally reported that by Project Blue Book, the Air Force's activities had largely shifted to debunking UFO sightings, establishing a climate of scepticism and ridicule largely constitutive of the enduring taboo associated with UFOs and ufology. This progression is documented by J. Allen Hynek, one-time scientific advisor for Sign, Grudge and Blue Book, and further substantiated by a number of later authors. Hynek was also a dissenting associate of the 1953 Robertson Panel, whose conclusions recommended a PR campaign to deescalate public interest in UFOs. See J. Allen Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report* (London: Sphere, 1978), pp. 20-4.

commercial television channel.[27] Prior to the 1970s, use of the term in film and television was typically confined to smaller productions, with modest budgets, and more limited exhibition circuits. The drama-documentary *UFO* (Winston Jones, United Artists, USA, 1956), for instance (also billed under the more tentative, alternative title; *Unidentified Flying Objects: The True Story of Flying Saucers*), is one such example; a curious blend of fact and fiction capitalising on the original "saucer" scare by stressing the scientific legitimacy of the UFO phenomenon. Mixing authentic UFO film footage with reenactments of UFO sightings, and a dramatised framing device concerning the real U. S. Air Force press officer Albert Chop (portrayed by Tom Towers), the film failed to make a lasting impression, and remains largely forgotten, especially compared to its fictional counterparts (including the other, significantly more famous and commercially successful UFO film of 1956, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (Fred F. Sears, Columbia Pictures, USA, 1956), released a month after *UFO*). Worth noting, however, is how *UFO*'s two titles both use the institutional term "UFO" to distinguish the film from science fiction fare, presenting it as having a closer proximity to the "truth." Its alternative title makes this particularly explicit, suggesting that the "UFO" represents the "true" anomalous aerial phenomenon, as opposed to the "flying saucers" more closely associated with film fiction. *UFO*'s titles are consistent in this way with what was by this time a growing association of the "flying saucer" with science fiction films, comics, and pulp novels, associations that only grew as the original "saucer" wave passed into historical remoteness, and largely stand to the present day.

Currently, many UFO investigation bodies advocate the protologism "UAP" (short for "unidentified aerial phenomena") over "UFO," in line with recent developments in ufological thought seeking to complicate conventional assumptions that these phenome-

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[27] *The UFO Incident* was first broadcast on NBC in the 21:00 "Monday Night At The Movies" slot on Monday 20th October 1975. See New York Times, 'Television this Week,' *New York Times*, 19th October, 1975, p. 145.

na are necessarily physical "objects."[28] Where the "UAP" might threaten the "UFO's" future in more specialist, ufological circles, it does not currently pose a significant challenge to the "UFO" in popular culture, and the decision to privilege "UFO" in this study stems from this fact. The "UFO" undoubtedly boasts the most widespread and enduring popular cultural circulation of any ufological term from the beginning of the UFO phenomenon to the present day. Since its mainstream crossover, this unruly initialism has been employed with such laxity that it has become all but entirely unmoored from its unabbreviated, militaristic origins, its synonymity with "unidentified flying objects"—at one time reasonably assured—no longer certain. Sandwiched between the retro "flying saucer" and the emergent "UAP," the "UFO" has acquired a far wider range of connotations than any equivalent term, "flying saucer" included. A vast interdisciplinary corpus congregates under the initials "U.," "F.," and "O.," constituting a rich repository of visual phenomena capable of disrupting conventional histories of visual epistemology. However unassuming its origins in military jargon, the "UFO" now represents the fullest and most comprehensive encapsulation of the cultural life of the aerial anomaly from the mid twentieth century to the present, far exceeding the journalese of the "flying saucer," and the scientism of the "UAP" (for now at least). It is for this reason that although the present study might conceivably be construed as sharing some common interests with the recent ufological developments associated with the "UAP" (at least in terms of how both seek to embrace the possibilities of approaching anomalous aerial activity with more ambivalent ontological expectations) it would be imprudent to jetti-

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[28] The roots of this thought are visible in the work of Jacques Vallee, whose prolific ufological writing exhibits a gradual shift away from the ufology of the 1950s and 1960s (often called "nuts-and-bolts" ufology), toward the paraphysical interests of what is called the "interdimensional hypothesis." The "interdimensional hypothesis" posits that UFOs are manifestations of activity taking place simultaneously across multiple "dimensions" extending beyond the three humans are capable of perceiving. It is not necessarily exclusive of the more familiar "extraterrestrial hypothesis" of UFOs, though it is considered in some ufological circles to account more persuasively for some of the stranger phenomena associated with UFO sightings. See Jacques Vallee, *Messengers of Deception: UFO Contacts and Cults* (Berkley, CA: And/Or Press, 1979), and Jacques Vallee, *Revelations: Alien Contact and Human Deception* (New York City, NY: Ballantine Books, 1991).

son the "UFO" in favour of any of its alternatives at this stage. It is precisely the flawed conception and cultural baggage of the "UFO" that present-day ufologists hope to shed with their use of the term "UAP" that this study seeks to interrogate. Its ambiguities and frictions carry the potential to radically disrupt the visual, and specifically the aesthetics of the photographic image.

## 3. Photographic images

Having defined the "UFO" in both its conventional definition, and that posited by the present study, attention can now turn to the images of interest—photographic images—and the task of situating them within the context of common sense understanding, and the theoretical frameworks that variously complement and contradict these beliefs. Chiefly, there are two questions that require immediate attention: First, why should this study—primarily an intervention into theories of the moving image, past and present—begin with an extended consideration of still, analogue photographs? Second, to what extent do photography and its attendant theoretical paradigms tesselate with UFOs, the "UFO," and the interests of ufology as previously outlined? The answer to the first question is relatively straightforward, as it is motivated by a simple methodological consideration, and the necessity of ensuring that the discussion remains sensitive to certain historical specificities. The second question is somewhat more challenging, but ultimately leads to where the consideration of photographic UFOs can begin.

To address the first question, it will be helpful to consider how Siegfried Kracauer approached the moving image in his *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (which will serve as a key reference throughout the thesis). Specifically, it is significant that Kracauer's discussion isolates the moving image's photographic foundations (cinema enabled, as it was, by Eastman-Kodak's development of flexible photographic film strips, replacing larger, more cumbersome, individual photographic plates, facilitating successions of individual exposures), from the cinematographic production and exhibition of *moving* photographic images. Distinguishing between the unique aesthetic contributions of both photography and its combinative animation, Kracauer suggests that the medium specific affordances of the moving image consist in the distinct, yet mutually complementary confluence of these two constituent elements. Photography is

the raw material from which a film is made; animation provides the illusion of motion, and allows for the organisation of photographic material over time. Because, then, photographic images represent the foundational unit of the cinematographic in this view—animation affording the representation of change over time, but doing so with photographic images as its material substrate—Kracauer suggests that the "basic properties" of photography "take precedence" over animation's "technical properties" when it comes to questions of moving image aesthetics.[29]

While in certain ways this is consistent with much of the film theory published in Kracauer's moment, it also runs contrary to many more contemporary and subsequent assessments of film as a medium, plenty of which focus on precisely the "technical properties" Kracauer deemphasises (Tom Gunning, for instance, has recently suggested that film theory's longstanding fixation upon the photographic basis of film has served as a continual distraction from the comparative productivity of considering animation film's principal medium specificity).[30] Most urgently, it begs the question of the nature of animation's role in moving image expression if its photographic base is fundamentally "responsible" as Kracauer has it, "for the cinematic quality of a film."[31] An answer to this question can be located by noting precisely what Kracauer asserts of the aesthetic disposition of the photographic image, and the implications of this if photography is to be considered film's principal aesthetic determinant. Kracauer regards the photographic image as exhibiting a distinct tendency towards "record[ing] and reveal[ing of] physical reality"; that because the photographic medium is capable of rendering representations of actuality with ostensible precision and detail, actuality serves as its most complemen-

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[29] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 28, 29.

[30] See Tom Gunning, 'Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality,' *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 29-52.

[31] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 30.

tary subject.[32] Kracauer suggests, therefore, that the recording and revealing of reality should also serve as film's principal objective. If film's "technical properties" should be in service of its "basic properties," then, the role of animation must be to complement the elucidatory potential asserted of the photographic image. (Another key aspect of Kracauer's film theory — and why it is particularly useful in the context of this study — is that despite his insistence upon film's affinity towards actuality, he never suggests that the photographic representation of actuality need necessarily bear a close visual resemblance to its referent.[33] In fact, he even suggests the opposite, proposing that films which do not visually resemble their subjects might even provide more useful representations of reality than those that do. Kracauer's realism is a modernist realism, unanchored to verisimilitude and more compatible, perhaps, with the *para*-normal aspects of photographic visuality, those that work outside convention with new representational forms.)[34]

The undergirding logic of Kracauer's suggestion that film's "technical properties" are in the service of its "basic properties" can be outlined with reference to a simple, hypothetical example. A still photograph might show a runner, recognisable by cross-referencing their stance, attire, and location, with familiar iconographies of runners and running. It might even show where they are running to or from, but it is unlikely to show both (unless they are running around a circular track). Nevertheless, such an image offers access to a rich repository of visual information that might have otherwise been irretrievable in other forms of pictorial representation. Where animation could serve such an image is in its ability to expand its representation over time, unlocking

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[32] ibid., p. 28.

[33] "Referent" is used here, as it is commonly in photography and film theory, to describe the original subject of a photograph, and is often conflated with that which the photograph is understood to represent, even as it is entirely possible that a photograph might appear to represent something other than that of which it was taken (as will be seen, quite clearly, in the case of UFO photographs).

[34] ibid., p. 58.

new possibilities for the kinds of information it could offer of the film's subject. It may be possible to analyse the runner's gait, determine their speed, or even, when the camera pans or tracks, observe in a single shot where the runner is running to, and where they are running from, none of which would be wholly comprehensible in a still image.

Consider, then, if the film of the runner depicted the runner leaving, and without visibly turning, arriving back in the place they originally left. This visual contradiction—likely achieved with the kind of cinematic illusionism associated with filmmakers from Georges Méliès to Maya Deren—is exemplary of what Kracauer calls the "formative tendencies" of the moving image, how film can use combinations of images to construct a representation of something other than a faithful representation of the referent.[35] Working against the photographic image's propensity for "record[ing] and reveal[ing] physical reality," such a film would produce an uneasy, disorienting effect, received variously pleasurably or displeasurably depending on the context of its presentation.[36] By contrast, if the runner's point of departure and eventual destination appear contiguous, consistent with the inferred direction of travel, this, Kracauer would say, is consistent with the moving image's "tendency toward realism," film successfully combining the rich, detailed images of photography with the more spatiotemporally complex representational affordances of animation.[37] This, in essence, is the titular "Redemption of Physical Reality" in Kracauer's *Theory of Film*; using the "technical properties" of the moving image medium to enrich the realism conventionally asserted of "basic" photography.

What, then, is the significance of Kracauer's distinction between film's photographic foundation and its supplementary animation in the context of the present discussion, and why does it motivate this study's preliminary focus upon stills? Primarily, it serves as a

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[35] ibid., p. 35.

[36] ibid., p. ix.

[37] ibid., p. 11.

convenient means by which to parse the multifarious ambiguities characteristic of photographic UFO representation, distinguishing between those produced in the cumulative succession of moving images, and those preceding animation, originating in its photographic base. Often it is the movement of a UFO (or the absence of movement) that appears as its most prominent anomalous characteristic in moving image evidence. When a UFO appears to move extremely fast, for instance, or hover impossibly still as everything else moves around it, these anomalous behaviours are only representable via animated images. But these more elaborate possibilities can distract from the anomalous characteristics of the photographic UFO that have no essential relation to moving image animation. UFOs typically appear diffuse, obscured by artefacts such as lens flair or photographic grain, or otherwise remain inscrutable, and as visual anomalies preceding motion, originating in the photographic base, these qualities require equal attention to those expressed through motion, and often call for means of examination distinct from those of the animated anomaly. Kracauer's assertion that cinema's "basic" and "technical" properties are each responsible for their own distinct aesthetic contribution to the moving image preempts this distinction between these two representational dimensions, as well as providing a helpful vocabulary for toggling between these two registers.

Kracauer's suggestion that the realist tendencies of the photographic take precedence over the formative tendencies of animation also describe the logic of evidentiality frequently invoked in ufology's examination of photographic UFO evidence. Even a cursory glance over the hours of purportedly authentic UFO footage readily available online reveals ufology's insistent return to the still, even as its most compelling evidence often seems to lie in precisely the motion it so often interrupts to luxuriate in individual frames, typically enlarged and visually enhanced. The same is true of countless UFO documentaries, which default to still images ostensibly to provide a more stable repre-

sentation of their prospective UFOs. Recalling antecedentary practices in ufological representation, most notably the projection of photographs via slide projectors, such indications of the elevated status of the still in ufology are both constitutive, and symptomatic of the fact that the ufological screen is a site where, unlike many other screen cultures, the still has never been subordinate to the moving image.[38] Like Kracauer's attitude towards film—and specifically its "technical" deference to photographic realism—ufology's attitude towards moving images similarly privileges the photographic properties of film, often implying that they are somehow more immediate, graspable, persuasive, and reliable than those supplemented by animation.

Though the present study also begins with a focus upon stills, it does so not because it is predicated on the same set of assumptions—whether tacitly accepting or myopically assimilating the prejudices of ufology—but rather for the opportunity echoing such strategies provides to assess the epistemological legitimacy of such assumptions. After all, it does seem (to some extent) that such an approach allows for easier access to information that may be otherwise inaccessible. When it comes to evidence, it is often necessary to itemise a complex assemblage into a catalogue of its constituent parts, as in the labelling of a crime scene, or—to elect a photographic example—the numbering of the frames in the Zapruder film. In this respect, breaking a film up into its individual images seems entirely fitting.

In other respects, however, this response appears significantly lacking. One could argue, for instance, that in its tendency to fixate upon the still, ufology's typical ap-

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[38] There are a number of socioeconomic reasons why this is the case, most notably that still photography was—at least until the development of consumer digital cameras capable of recording both stills and video—more affordable, and more accessible to a wider demographic of amateur photographers over the course of the mid to late twentieth century. As such, with a greater volume of still photographs than moving images, photographic slides served as a useful means of collecting and examining photographic UFO evidence. Many of the photographs in the Wendelle C. Stevens collection, for instance, one of the largest private collections of UFO photographs in the world, are photographic slides. See Anon, 'Wendelle Stevens Archives,' *Wendelle Stevens Archives*, Undated <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/UFO-Archives-from-Wendelle-Stevens.html?soid=1101200403214&aid=W4Fy3O8FU3c> (Accessed 6th July, 2020).

proach to moving image evidence reduces the film sequence to a modularised succession of stills, neglecting to attend to moving images as *moving* images. There is not a lot of film studies in ufology in this regard, and this lack of close attention to the specificities of a medium principally distinguished by representation in motion opens up a risk of oversight and misapprehension. The distinction between photographs and animation will be considered in more detail later as the thesis develops. For now, it is sufficient to note that there is both a cinematic and ufological precedent for a study of moving images beginning with a consideration of stills.

With the focus on stills accounted for, the necessity of beginning with a concentration on analogue photographs must now be addressed. There is a straightforward reason for this, one that might even go some way towards accounting further for ufology's faith in the still. Notably, as a mechanical and chemical process, and an ostensibly "direct" means of visual inscription (as opposed to the immaterial translations of digital imaging codecs), the analogue photographic process allows for a more readily comprehensive discussion of the photographic image as it passes through each stage in its production. This is crucial, as each of these stages is a distinct juncture with unique possibilities for the production of a UFO image. Reference to the analogue process ensures that each of these points remain precisely traceable, and nameable. Furthermore, given that the majority of significant historical UFO photographs were taken on film with analogue cameras, it should be entirely expected that discussing these images with any precision will require close attention to the specificities of the analogue photographic process. It is in this respect that sensitivity to the medium specific particularities of the analogue photograph is essential for maintaining historical accuracy—both technological and cultural—and sidestepping presentist fallacy in this consideration of a quintessentially twentieth century image.

As a historically contemporary technology, analogue photography is inextricably implicated in all of the canonical works of photography theory published in the mid to late twentieth century (a period coinciding with peak public interest in UFOs). This is a particularly interesting period in film and photography theory as it envelops the critical transition associated with the shift from modernism to postmodernism, and structuralism to post-structuralism. As such, an ancillary objective of this thesis is to substantiate the claim that the emergence of the UFO at this time was not coincidental. Perhaps the UFO is a mid century cultural manifestation that anticipates the instabilities of postmodernism and poststructuralism? If so, the analogue photograph is the most populous site of the UFO's grand postmodernist intervention, in addition to perhaps the most detailed surface on which the co-incidence of this critical juncture with the UFO phenomenon is visually inscribed. This is why, culturally, "UFO photographs" seems to most often refer to *analogue* UFO photographs. In short, to lay aside questions of the analogue image would be to ignore perhaps the most significant historical determinant of UFO aesthetics, a claim that will be substantiated in this thesis.

It is conceivable that the apparent stability of the still, expressed by ufology's perpetual return to still evidence, originates in a conflation of the stillness of the individual frame with close attention to the photographic image's material constitution. After all, when a film is presented in motion, usually via projection, the film mechanism is typically hidden, and the material substance of its images is lost to the flow of the animation. This is, of course, the basis of the "apparatus theory" of film, asserting that both the attraction of cinema and its insidious influence originate in its material configuration as a self-effacing illusory display. To still the moving image, then, is to be reminded of the physical constitution its typical function encourages viewers to ignore. It is for this reason that, as previously hinted, the aesthetics of analogue photography might also

partly account for ufology's fixation upon stills. To examine analogue film stills is to examine celluloid or acetate film cells. Its "frame" is not simply where the image ends, but a physical, plastic rectangle demarcating the border from one image to the next. It is in this respect that the ufological film still, routinely presented not only as an image, but as a media artefact or object, with frame and grain, seems to inherit a charge of authenticity from this analogue tangibility (though the legitimacy of this sentiment will shortly be complicated).

Significantly, none of this should be taken to suggest that analogue UFO images are any more interesting, or even substantially different from digital UFO images. In fact, as the discussion unfolds, it will become clear that UFOs are capable of revealing some surprising continuities between the analogue and the digital, challenging a number of assertions commonly made for as to how they aesthetically differ. In summary, however, this study begins with an examination of analogue stills because this provides space to consider the instrumental role of the "basic" photographic properties of the film image in ufological representations in isolation from the additional possibilities introduced by representation in motion. Becoming familiar with the aesthetics of the UFO image at the level of the still will establish a preemptive sensitivity to the limits of photography's involvement in the UFO's visual ambiguities, helping indicate where moving image animation provides additional opportunities for paranormal representation. The next section begins this process by undertaking a provisional appraisal of historical photography theory in consideration of how the beliefs that have accrued around photography, in both specialist and non-specialist capacities, appear to partially substantiate many of the curious claims commonly accompanying the circulation of UFO evidence (and particularly photographic images themselves, as physical, visual artefacts). Beginning to identify the qualities exhibited by the UFO image that frustrate these photographic assump-

tions—whether exceeding or subceeding ufology's requirements—alternative interpreta-

tions of the UFO image will begin to come into view. It is these possibilities, those that

lie adjacent to ufology's evidential investments, that most persuasively demonstrate the

unique aesthetics of the photographic UFO and its disruptive potential.

## *4. Epistemologies of photographic UFO evidence*

The extent to which many of the canonical post-war theories of the photographic image exhibit profound resonances with ufological visuality cannot be understated. This should not be surprising. If, as many rush to suggest of the UFO phenomenon and its attendant media cultures, photography theory is reflective, or refractive, of the milieu in which it was conceived, one would expect works of photography theory published in the period surrounding the emergence of the flying saucer to chart comparable episte-mological courses. Both amplify iconoclastic undercurrents flowing beneath the prevail-ing cultural consensus, often in unexpected ways. A number of passages in the canonical works of photography theory published by Siegfried Kracauer, Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, André Bazin, and Stanley Cavell (to name just a few) even read at times like works of ufology or parapsychology. When Barthes describes the photographic image as that which "touch[es] me like the delayed rays of a star," or Bazin likens photographic images to the Shroud of Turin, it is clear that these are no less idiosyncratic thinkers than ufologists, drawing connections to the cosmic, mystical, even the paranormal, probing into the vagaries of visual experience to ask what, if anything, lies beyond these mysterious appearances.[39] In fact, the intensity with which these writers invest their faith in some fairly dubious epistemologies of the photographic image might even be considered analogous to certain ufological claims. In a recent survey of historical pho-tography theory, Diarmuid Costello observes that this depth of conviction, a faith in the testimonial potency of the photographic image, distinguishes thinkers of this era from that of the later, more cautious writing on photography.[40] It is for this reason that the forthcoming analysis of UFO photographs predominantly centres on these theorists,

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[39] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography,* trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 81, and André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960), p. 14.

[40] Diarmuid Costello, *On Photography: A Philosophical Enquiry* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 42.

whose most influential texts span, broadly speaking, the 1940s to the 1970s, coinciding with the emergence and popular ascendence of the UFO. Though they by no means represent any kind of monolithic consensus on the subject of photographic epistemology, Kracauer, Barthes, Bazin, et al's writing is significant for the manner in which it can be readily interpreted as obliquely supportive of ufological enquiry, and the legitimacy of UFO experiences more broadly. This is not to suggest that any of these figures would necessarily approve of the claims ufologists make about UFO photographs, and certainly few, if any, publicly expressed any interest in the subject.[41] It is, however, to say that approaches to photography in work from this period are constitutive of a bedrock of approaches to the photographic image that aid in the task of theorising aspects of UFO photographs, likely because these ideas influentially determined attitudes towards photography in the period.

At the heart of both photography and ufology—and brought into alignment in UFO photographs—is the question of how an observer ought to approach the task of understanding an essentially unknowable apparition. To this end, as the vociferous debate surrounding UFOs attests, any totalising view of the relative trust invested in photography in any particular historical moment will invariably neglect to account for the unceasing tug-of-war between belief and scepticism essential to negotiation of the vast mosaic of images that constitutes the world of photography. When one speaks of historical understandings of photography in this respect, one really speaks of vast, intersecting theoretical strata tracing back all the way to the technology's origins, in which varying degrees of credulity vie against competing suspicions. The discourse surrounding the UFO pho-

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[41] This is true at least as far as ufology as a subject, and line of enquiry is considered. There are notable instances of UFOs and UFO-like images appearing in these texts, however, including Sontag's discussion of alien spacecraft in her famous essay on science fiction cinema 'The Imagination of Disaster,' and Barthes consideration of the role of the "ship" in a manner complementary to, if not literally concerning, the science fiction spacecraft, in an essay on the fiction of Jules Verne. See Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster,' *Commentary* (October 1965), pp. 42-48, and Roland Barthes, 'The Nautilus and the Drunken Boat,' in Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), pp. 65-68.
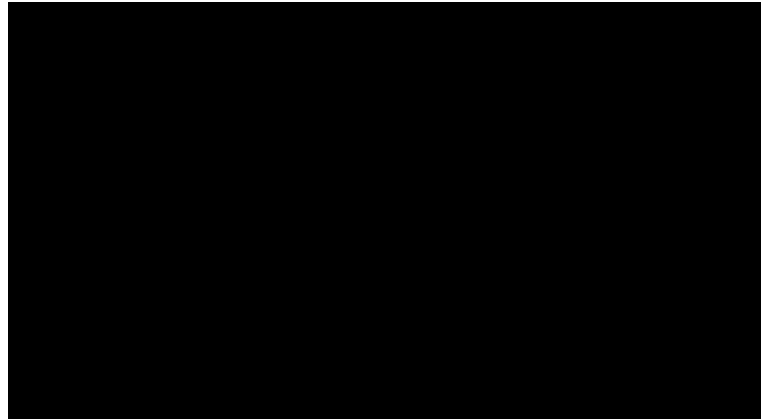
*fig. 4.1 (above):* "Mother Ship Releasing Scouts #1." *Photograph by George Adamski (USA, 1955).*

*fig. 4.2 (below):* "Spacecraft in flight at night." *Photograph by Howard Menger (USA, 1959).*

tographs publicised in the 1950s by figures like George Adamski, and Howard Menger (see *fig. 4.1* & *fig. 4.2*)—commonly known as "contactees," who made highly publicised claims concerning their purported interaction with extraterrestrial beings—is exemplary of this fact. That these crude, borderline abstract images were capable of sustaining the careers of Adamski, Menger and their publishers (in addition to no small number of sceptical ufologists seeking to debunk their claims), clearly attests to the dialectical social surface inextricable from photographs as media artefacts. The UFO photograph is a site of dramatic conflict between "believers" and "sceptics," of both ufological and photographic varieties.

The UFO circulates among a wide range of cultural spheres, and there are many different kinds of UFO images of which photographs are just one, including illustra-

tions; diagrams; advertisements; art; and architecture. The connotations of UFO images differ substantially between these diverse representational contexts. Where some UFO images predominantly attract (pseudo-)scientific interest, others appeal to broader, non-specialist audiences. Where the former, associated with the (mis-)use of reason and empirical observation, remain culturally marginalised, the latter, typically more spectacular, can be enormously popular, a popularity that rises and falls in cycles. Crucially, however, appeal to each of these reflexes is discernible, to a variable degree, in every UFO image, and this is an important aspect of the UFO's unique ontological status. The UFO image boasts a unique capacity for occupying an especially diverse range of coordinates in the wide threshold between hard fact and pure fiction, without ever losing touch with either pole entirely.[42] Where, then, do photographic UFO images fall on this spectrum?

Unless they arrive couched in an obvious fiction, like all purportedly paranormal photographies, UFO photographs are typically presented as evidence for some hitherto unknown paranormal activity. This is something UFO photographs share with all forms of paranormal photography. There is, however, one discontinuity UFO photographs exhibit in relation to paranormal photography more broadly that is revealing of their unique epistemological status. As paranormal historian Rolf Krauss notes, at the point photographs are used to attest to the existence of ocularly visible paranormal phenomena (as opposed to implicating photography in the visualisation of something ordinarily invisible) "we [move] out of the field of transcendental photography […] and [cross] over into the field of normal photography."[43] In other words, UFO photographs might

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[42] The image of the UFO is comparable in these ways to the image of the dinosaur that W. J. T. Mitchell examined at the height of dinosaur fever (the mid 1990s) in *The Last Dinosaur Book.* See W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[43] Rolf H. Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow: The Role of Photography in Certain Paranormal Phenomena: An Historical Survey,* trans. Timothy Bill & John Gledhill (Munich: Nazraeli Press, 1995), p. 116.

depict paranormal phenomena, but photographically speaking, they are fundamentally ordinary, banal even. The photographs are not themselves paranormal, they are "normal" photographs of para-"normal" subjects. In other words, unlike spirit photography, where the photographic medium itself is credited with some exotic function (e.g. that photography is a psychic, or paraphysical medium, as much as a technological medium) the claims made by ufologists regarding photographs rest upon the altogether less esoteric assertion that photographic images produce comprehensible visual representations of objects ocularly observable. Since UFOs are visible, and photographs—unlike certain other kinds of pictures—trace their image from an optical impression of that of which they are taken, it follows that it is not only possible to create a *likeness* of an actual UFO, it should ostensibly be possible to produce what some might consider a *direct* likeness of a UFO via photography. Herein lies the appeal of UFO photographs compared to other kinds of UFO images, both popularly, and among those who investigate UFOs. Unlike painting, for instance, which, at a remove from its subject (via the painter's hand), is capable of facilitating any number of deviations from the original optical impression, photography is generally considered to produce reasonably faithful visual representations of actuality from the apparent substitution of the observer's vision for that of the camera's. In this view, if a photograph appears fantastic, it is because its subject was fantastic, not the means of representation. (While some might take this to mean photographs serve as a more reliable record of actual UFO encounters than, say, eye-witness testimony, this thesis, will go on to show how it is inadvisable to assume that UFO photographs are any less fraught with uncertainty than other means of representation.)

The unique status of the UFO photograph among paranormal photographies can be further specified with comparison to another form of paranormal photography that simi-

larly foregoes proclamations of photographic paranormality in favour of drawing upon photography's representational affordances. Ectoplasm photography was a form of late nineteenth century spirit photography in which a human medium (usually female), would be photographed in darkness using fast exposure flash photography, to reveal images depicting the violent expulsion of "ectoplasm" from their bodily orifices. Ectoplasm was presented as a physical manifestation of spirit energy, appearing in the form of a viscous ooze (which mediums commonly preprepared using materials such as gauze, and newspaper), often assuming the form of crumpled human faces. As Karl Schoonover writes, the emphasis placed on the perceived visual acuity of the photographic apparatus in ectoplasm photography expresses an increasing awareness of photography as a "keenly sensitive registration process" in the late nineteenth century, innovations in exposure speed and flash photography enabling the conception of a paranormal phenomenon assembled around the notion of "the camera's ability to record what is otherwise too fleeting for eyesight to register fully."[44] Where UFO photographs differ from ectoplasm photography is that their representational appeal does not typically hinge upon technical aspects of the photographic process's facilitation of their production. Unlike ectoplasm photography's process-oriented, technologically-facilitated retrieval of ocularly imperceptible impressions via instantaneous exposure, UFO photographs generally seem to ask to be considered technologically unremarkable substitutes for acts of witness that could just as well take place independently of photography. Photography presents itself in the UFO photograph, not as a means of achieving *qualitatively* distinct visual evidence, but as an opportunity to bypass the UFO's notorious ephemerality by producing a *quantitative* record of this comparatively rare visual occurrence. If at the turn of the nineteenth century ectoplasm photography seemed to promise

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[44] Karl Schoonover, 'Ectoplasms, Evanescence, and Photography,' *Art Journal*, vol. 62, no. 3 (Autumn 2003), pp. 35, 31.

that photography was capable of revealing what had previously remained hidden, by the mid twentieth century UFO photographs seemed to suggest the very opposite. Their declaration that it may be possible to capture images of actual paranormal activity on film is undercut by a substantial caveat; that these representations offer no unique access to the objects and activities they depict. UFO photographs may ostensibly provide a stock of primary source material on the UFO phenomenon more stable than the supposedly unreliable accounts of UFO witnesses, but the images present no photographically-derived novel insight into the nature of UFOs as anomalous aerial activities.

This is partly due to the UFO photograph's propensity towards obscurity and irresolution. In photographs, UFOs commonly appear—courtesy of such photographic expressions as motion blur, irresolution, and artefacts such as lens flair, and photochemical aberrations—as unsatisfactory blotches, resisting detail and definition. UFO photographs are uniquely expressive in this way of the fundamental questions concerning photographic representation. They *present*, but they do not *identify*. They *show*, but they do not *tell*. UFO photographs serve to remind viewers of this fundamental epistemological challenge posed by the photographic image, even if the same viewers generally feel capable of filling in the gaps of this photographic ambiguity when it comes to photographs of more familiar subjects. In fact, curiously, the UFO photograph's tendency toward irresolution might even render the claims ufologists make about UFO photographs more plausible (at least superficially). Despite their common incomprehensibility, these images might appear more credible than other similarly implausible images because they are afflicted by precisely the same visual byproducts of photographic imprecision that go unquestioned under more ordinary circumstances. If, in this regard, spirit photography and ectoplasm photography are paranormal photographies characterised by displays of representational control and order, where particular processes are

enacted that exploit certain technical properties of the medium to reliably achieve a consistent result, UFO photographs are quite the opposite. UFO photographs are images that wallow in the flaws and instabilities of photographic imaging, reflexively expressing its representational limitations.

Coupled with these visual ambiguities, ufology's indefatigable interest in UFO photographs reveals how photographic evidentiality is often established not by any inherently photographic, or even necessarily visual properties (e.g. naturalised figural "photorealism"), but through particular forms of sociocultural indexing, the production of photographic corpuses that legitimise hypotheses via networks of association. Here, photographic "truth," as Allan Sekula writes:

> …cannot be adequately reduced to the optical model provided by the camera. The camera is integrated into a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of "intelligence." This system can be described as a sophisticated form of the archive. The central artifact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet.[45]

Without such technical gimmicks as ectoplasm photography's fast exposure flash photography, UFO photographs derive much of their apparent evidentiality from this, what we might call *archival realism*. Photography produces visually indistinct images, and it is ufological thought that serves to bind them together according to otherwise insubstantial commonalities (that these are blurry images of objects that might be in the sky), conferring their legitimacy as UFO evidence. In this respect, while photography helps ferry these remote encounters into wider awareness, its images may be most evidentially useful when they are least conventionally *photographic* (that is, as the precise and detailed images of the "keenly sensitive registration process" exploited by ectoplasm photographers). After all, for a UFO to be a UFO it has to remain unidentifiable, and its fre-

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[45] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive,' *October*, vol. 39 (Winter 1986), p. 16.

quently hazy, indistinct photographic appearance ensures its otherwise potentially disruptive specificities can be ironed out in the course of its assimilation as ufological evidence.

However, viewing photographs is always a delicate balancing act of both identifying patterns, and appreciating uniquenesses. How else is a photograph distinct from any other image if not for the fact that it represents *particular* things, as opposed to generalised formulations of those things? A photograph does not just show *a* chair, it shows *that* chair, and this presents its own set of evidential possibilities for UFO photographs. Photographs are commonly presented as evidence because a certain received wisdom posits the act of inscription responsible for their naturalised visual realism as a distinct process of registration providing certification of the representation's veracity. In other words, photographs are often understood as sharing a closer, perhaps more truthful relationship with that they represent because they trace their image directly from it (unlike painting, whose manually rendered images are generally considered more elaborately mediated, and therefore at a remove from the referent). That photographic images are "realistic," in the sense previously described—which is to say *mimetic*; resembling the "real"—reinforces this conviction, but does not in itself contribute to such a belief.[46] For evidence of this, one need only consider that paintings, for instance, can also be mimetic (which is to say that they too often closely imitate appearances, and perhaps even provide an illusory substitute for first-hand perception) but do not—at least not in the same way—offer any guarantee that their image necessarily corresponds to the world as it exists beyond the frame. Equally, many photographs—including UFO photographs—

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[46] Among the most notable of those to challenge such naturalised notions of photographic realism is Joel Snyder. "I do not think it is possible to find features that are common and peculiar to all pictures that we classify as realistic," he writes. "Realistic depiction is conceptually and historically based upon the adoption of a model that permits both picture maker and viewer to demand and, indeed, to find systematic relations between picture and object of depiction. But this "object" is not simply "the way the world is," "the way the world looks," nor even "the ways we use our vision"; it is rather a standardized, or characterized, or defined notion of vision itself." See Joel Snyder, 'Picturing Vision,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Spring 1980), p. 503.

fall short of obvious mimesis. From experiments with photographic abstraction in early twentieth century avant-garde art, to recent innovations in specialised forms of scientific photographic imaging, non-mimetic photographs have always existed, even if they typically remain confined to more specialised cultural contexts.[47] Rather, then, it is with regard to the fact that a photographic image can be taken as representing an *impression*, only incidentally visual, produced in the exposure of a photosensitive surface to the referent, that photographs are understood as images *of* the world. It is this appendage of a *causal*, often *physical*, but *not necessarily visible* transaction, interpreted as a form of evidential guarantee, to an image only sometimes capable of providing mimetic representations of the visible world, that renders the photograph a potentially disorientating representational form. Applied to an image iconographically vacillating between hard empiricism and high fantasy, this intoxicating confluence of actuality and its reproduction sees the photographic UFO emerge as both a distinct representational outlier, running dramatically counter to conventional notions of figural verisimilitude, and exquisitely expressive of a number of important questions concerning photographic signification.

Given the challenges UFO photographs pose to both ufology and photography theory in this regard, it is fortunate that both subjects are largely constituted in distinct clashes among ardent believers and adamant sceptics. In fact, even a comparison of prevailing attitudes to photography between the two disciplines emerges strikingly oppositional. Where (as one might expect) the attitude towards photographic imaging in ufology is more credulous than that of other cultural spheres, by contrast, many of the most visible

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[47] In fact, many of these scientific, and avant-garde art practices have, historically, cross-fertilised with paranormal photography. Take the photogram, a photograph produced by exposing the photographic plate while it is in direct, physical contact with its referent. Photograms originated in early scientific photography where they were often used for taxonomical purposes, before later forming the basis of a number of late nineteenth century Spiritualist photographies. By the 1920s, the photogram had crossed over again, this time into the visual lexicon of avant-garde artists, most famously, Man Ray, and László Moholy-Nagy. For a detailed discussion of the convergence of photography, art, science, and the paranormal in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, see Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow.*

discussions in photography theory express a distinct scepticism towards the epistemo-logical legitimacy of the photographic image. Theorists like Kendall Walton, Joel Snyder, and John Tagg, for example, have all in the last fifty years offered rigorous and convincing arguments, from a range of ideological stances, against the photographic image's ability to offer reliable representations of the world, starkly contrasting with the claims commonly made in ufology.[48] Such a revolt is necessary, of course, due to the risks posed by the implicit trust routinely invested in photographic images. Just as the discovery of artificial perspective in the Italian Renaissance managed, in the words of W. J. T. Mitchell, to "convince […] an entire civilization that it possessed an infallible method of representation, a system for the automatic and mechanical production of truths about the material and the mental worlds," so too, arguably, has photographic imaging insinuated itself within the veridictional *modus operandi* of the modern mind, not least in ufological discussions.[49] Where more credulous disciplines like ufology seek to extend the epistemological grasp of the photographic image to advance its own en-quiries, then, generally speaking, photography theorists appear more concerned with reeling back the common overestimation of photography's evidential legitimacy.

As images that dramatically complicate established attitudes towards photography, UFO photographs force viewers to address the beguiling remainder of such previously described attempts among photography theorists to unseat the culturally-sanctioned authority of photographic signification. To what else do the persistent labours of sceptical ufologists like Philip J. Klass, and later Robert Sheaffer—who sought to delegitimise the images and wider claims of UFO proselytisers like Adamski and Menger—attest if

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[48] See, for instance: Kendall L. Walton, 'Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 11, no. 2 (December 1984), pp. 246-77, Joel Snyder, 'Picturing Vision,' and John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).

[49] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 37.

not the irrepressible *persuasiveness* of the photographic image?[50] The degree of sensitivity and meticulousness employed by UFO sceptics simply to dismantle the claims posited with even the most visually unimpressive UFO photographs illustrates the extent to which the desirous projections of the photographic image far exceed the parameters of the medium's inherent evidential legitimacy. To propose an answer, then—perhaps unsatisfactorily—to the question posed earlier of where the photographic UFO image falls on the spectrum from hard fact to pure fiction, the truth is that the most impressive photographic UFO evidence and the least convincing hoax are only as distinct from one another as the strength of their best ufological explanation. If UFO photographs reveal anything for certain it is that there is no essential relationship between the way a photograph looks and how it can be understood. The question of which properties of the photographic image account for this magnetism, and the various ways photographs are used to help legitimise ufological claims, is among the chief concerns of the first half of this thesis. What happens, *visually*, in photographic UFO images that allows them to sustain such profoundly opposing interpretations, and is it possible to formulate a theory of photographic UFO evidence that draws equally from both the best of ufology's credulity, and photography theory's scepticism?

As Rudolf Arnheim writes: "when it comes to truth the problem is no longer specifically photographic."[51] Providing evidence for truth claims is no inherent ability of the photographic image, and the assumption that it is is merely a byproduct of the conventionalised incorporation of photography into discourses of verification. Since the question of whether or not a UFO photograph actually represents some as yet unknown

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[50] Other notable sceptical ufologists include astronomer Donald Menzel, and aerospace historian Curtis Peebles. Philip J. Klass and Robert Sheaffer are specifically noted here because of the particular attention they pay to questions posed by UFO photographs. See Philip J. Klass, *UFOs Explained* (New York City, NY: Vintage Books, 1974), and Robert Sheaffer, *UFO Sightings: The Evidence* (New York City, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998).

[51] Rudolf Arnheim, 'On the Nature of Photography,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 1, no. 1 (September 1974), p. 157.

physical phenomenon in the skies over earth is only incidental to a discussion of photographic aesthetics in this way, it must be noted that the relative veracity of truth claims concerning UFO photographs, in and of themselves, is of less concern to the present study than questions of the range of expressive possibilities beside their disputed evidential function. Nevertheless, the fact that, from its very beginning, photography has been so continually framed as possessing an ability to substantiate truths—not least in ufology—make it inevitable that this dubious authority will encroach upon the forthcoming discussion. "Reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images," Susan Sontag writes, and despite many attempts made by philosophers to uncouple this interdependence, the cultural contributions of photography are routinely reduced to this narrow set of expectations.[52] This study will suggest that UFO photographs represent a site of considerable resistance to this notion. This is not because they are absented from such concerns, as it is plainly obvious that the opposite is true. UFO photographs, both sincere and insincere, are almost always made with the express intention of *authenticating* UFO beliefs and experiences. Instead, then, it is because the kinds of truth claims they are generally associated with—typically at odds with the hegemonic empiricism photographs are often credited with helping substantiate and perpetuate—have the effect of subversively cleaving the semiology of photographic evidence from its typical end functions, dramatically revealing the extent to which these long naturalised discourses of truth represent little more than ideological vestiges. The photographic UFO serves as a useful foil for conventional understandings of the photographic image as it helps reveal the epistemological doublethink of the conventionalised alignment of photographic representation with scientific empiricism (that photographs can serve as useful evidence, but only until they confront viewers with something that

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[52] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 153.

defies credibility, or cannot be adequately comprehended without the aggregative reference of Sekula's archival realism). Drawing upon the underlying representational capriciousness of photographic image to unsettle such associations, the UFO reminds viewers that photography is by no means innately legible, and stands amongst the most complex and confounding of all forms of representation, even as it is flattened out by conventional habits of reading. That UFO photographs appear so abundantly capable of seemingly substantiating even the most farfetched truth claims, subversively undermining the naturalised "truthfulness" of photography, reveals the possibility that these images may have other, less commonly appreciated aesthetic functions. The question, then, is not simply how UFO photographs fail to do what they are typically posited as doing, but how these failures might gesture to what else these images (and, by extension, photographs) might be capable of doing. (Though, of course, it is necessary to answer the former question, before attempting the latter.)

To do so, there are two significant historical sources, each associated with very different, yet equally significant modern thinkers, that can assist in the task of proceeding from what has already been considered by providing a more specialised vocabulary, and a more rigorous conceptual framework for tackling some of the key questions surrounding UFOs. First, two comments made by the psychologist Carl Jung in his writing on UFOs will be examined. Upon closer inspection, what initially appears as a dismissal, and a flippant joke made at the expense of UFO believers, will illuminate precisely what is entailed by the notion of evidence in the context of the conventional ufological approach to UFO photographs. Second, the semiotics of philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce will be addressed before they take on the essential role of providing both a vocabulary, and a provisional theorisation of some key concepts that will invaluably aid the forthcoming consideration of the intricacies of photographic semiology. Both of

these historical sources will go on to serve as consistent theoretical touchstones throughout the thesis.

## 5. *Jung's ufology & Peirce's semiology*

In an essay published just over a decade after the initial emergence of the 'flying saucer' as a cultural phenomenon, Carl Jung outlines a dream recalled by a young woman receiving psychological treatment for dissociative identity disorder while working as an actor in California. In the dream, the patient describes herself standing in a public square with a male friend, when:

> All of a sudden I saw something round and fluorescent coming towards us from way in the distance. I realized it was a Flying Saucer. I thought it was a ridiculous joke. […] I thought someone was playing a trick, then I thought it was real—I looked up behind me and saw someone with a movie projector. In back of us seemed to be a building, like a hotel. These people were up high and projecting this image into the sky.[53]

As the dream progresses, the patient finds herself in a film studio, toing and froing between conversations with two rival film producers, each of whom is making a science fiction film in which she is playing the lead.

Jung's analysis of this dream is exemplary of his approach to the subject of UFOs more broadly. He quickly dismisses the significance of the UFO on the basis of the dreamer's insistence upon its origin as, in Jung's words, "a cinematographic operation"; that it represents not an actual unidentified craft, or even a psychological projection, but a *cinematic* projection into the sky.[54] In fact, Jung specifically uses this dream to illustrate how UFO images are, in his view, not always best understood as representing the UFO phenomenon itself, and often serve as visual substitutions for other concerns. In this instance, he interprets the cinematographic UFO as an "exemplification" of a

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[53] Carl Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in The Sky*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Arc, 1977), p. 87.

[54] ibid., p. 88.

dilemma in the dreamer's love life; that she was caught between the affections of rival

suitors whose appearance in the dream is elevated to the authoritarian figures of the film

producers. He concludes:

> Any insight into the nature of the Ufo phenomenon is not to be expect-
> ed from this dream. The Ufo is used only as a sort of alarm signal,
> thanks to the collective excitement occasioned by flying saucers. Inter-
> esting or even alarming as the phenomenon may be, youth has, or
> claims, the right to regard the problem of "him and her" as much more
> fascinating.[55]

Jung's dismissal of the wider significance of the UFO in this oneiric encounter is

exemplary of where his interests diverge from that of both ufology, but also film and

photography studies. The visual is routinely relegated in Jung's psychology to the do-

main of the symptom, a phantasmic expression of some deeper, internal conflict, offer-

ing only indication of the patient's condition, and possible courses of treatment. Jung's

analysis is also characteristic of a wider academic reluctance to consider UFOs in visual

terms. This is most strikingly revealed when one considers that even in the fantasy of a

dream Jung denies the UFO any status in actuality (beyond the illusory visuality of the

cinema image). Jung's analysis might offer a persuasive characterisation of the psycho-

logical role played by the UFO in the patient's dream, but what is to be made of the ex-

egetic remainder of this psychological expression? What might this dream image reveal

of the interrelation of UFOs and cinema? The image of a UFO projected into the sky by

a film projector, an illusion oscillating between legibility as a construction and passing

for real, may only serve as a hollow "alarm signal" in Jung's psychology, but to a film

scholar, is nothing short of a provocation, an incitement to consider how UFOs and pho-

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[55] ibid., p. 91.

tographic representation have become entangled with one another, and what might be done to better understand this interrelation.

For instance, neither Jung nor the dreamer seem perturbed by the fact that this "cinematographic operation" does not make sense (at least not beyond a metaphorical level). Cinematically speaking, there is no screen in this scene, no surface for the projectors to cast their image upon. Of course, this is a dream, not an actual UFO report, and the usefulness of dreams to Jung's psychological analysis lies precisely in the fact that dreams are capable of holding such impossibilities, contradictions, and paradoxes in suspension. But taking the cinematographic dimensions of this dream seriously leads to the very opposite of Jung's conclusions. Since the UFO "image" described by the dreamer could not be attained with ordinary film projectors (as there is no screen to elicit a visual impression), then perhaps Jung misjudged his initial understanding of the dream? Who is to say that the UFO is not a visually-substituted "exemplification," or an "alarm call," but actually a very literal UFO in the sky over the dream's city square? In this interpretation, it is also possible that the direction of projection is inverted. The dreamer recalls seeing the UFO before they saw the projectors, so is it not also conceivable, given the equal implausibility of the projectors casting an image of the UFO onto a screenless sky, that the *UFO* is somehow projecting the cinematicity of the scenario? As the familiar image of the UFO tractor beam visually recalls the beam of a film's projector, is this any more of a stretch than Jung and the dreamer's initial interpretation?

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the dream, what is certain is that it offers a clear representation of the close association between UFOs and cinema that this study seeks to examine in more detail. Though Jung chooses not to take his interpretation down a cinematic path, there is at least one instance, elsewhere in his commentary on UFOs, that provides insight into the photographic implications of the UFO phe-

nomenon. It is this withering quip: "Considering the notorious camera-mindedness of Americans, it is surprising how few "authentic" photos of Ufos seem to exist, […] Ufos are somehow not photogenic."[56] Though this may at first read as a straightforward, sarcastic dismissal, with closer examination it is capable of providing a helpful distillation of ufology's orthodox position on UFO photographs. Two words from the quote stand out: "authentic," and "photogenic." It would be unwise to assume that Jung's definition of the terms necessarily corresponds with their conventional associations, so what they mean must be determined from the context of his original proposition. This, in turn, will prove a useful start in identifying some of the key questions conventionally asked of UFO photographs, from which it will be possible to discern how UFO photographs variously satisfy and frustrate conventional understandings of photographic signification.

Crucially, Jung does not suggest that there is a lack of UFO photographs generally, only that there is a lack of "authentic" UFO photographs. This is significant, as even by the time he sought to apply his methods to the problem of UFOs, a great many UFO photographs had amassed, but perhaps the majority of these did not meet his criteria of authenticity. With its conspicuous quotation marks, "authentic" seems to gesture here to certain absent qualities deducible with attention to the latter part of the quotation, particularly the word "photogenic." A logical inversion of the first half, the second half of the quotation offers the suggestion that UFOs themselves may be responsible for the dearth of authentic UFO photographs; that it is some characteristic of UFOs, and not photographs, that is to blame for this. The word "photogenic" seems to function here not in terms of its vernacular definition—as that which lends itself to the production of *desirable* photographs—but a rather more literal interpretation centred on the morpheme

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"*gen*" as denoting production.[57] Dispensing with the connotation of desirability, to be "not photogenic" seems to mean being *unconducive to the generation of photographs*. Reading this against the suggestion that the "camera-mindedness of Americans" makes the lack of "authentic" UFO photographs surprising, the inferences of Jung's "authenticity" creep into view. An "authentic" photograph in such a formulation would be a visual documentation of a sighting of a genuinely unidentified, yet "photogenic" flying object, a record of an encounter where it would be surprising if a "camera-minded" individual were to miss the opportunity to photograph it, as ostensibly, it is possible to do so. In other words, what can be deduced from Jung's understanding of the "authentic" UFO photograph seems, broadly speaking, to be the commonplace belief that photography possesses a capacity for meaningfully representing things from the visible world, and that something of the referent is recoverable, in some sense, from a visually legible photograph. But is this necessarily the case?

Here, the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce provides helpful assistance. Among many significant achievements—not least helping establish of semiotics as an academic discipline—from the mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century Peirce conceptualised a highly influential theory of signs that continues to incite animated debate.[58] Developed over no less than sixteen works, mostly published in scien-

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[57] The concept of *photogénie*, most commonly associated with the French Impressionist filmmaker Jean Epstein, is also a significant point of reference in relation to the "photogenic." *Photogénie* is somewhat nebulously defined, but is generally understood as an aesthetic quality attributable to novel optical phenomena exclusively attainable via the photographic apparatus, "that which is inarticulable, that which exceeds language and hence points to the very essence of cinematic specificity," to quote Mary Ann Doane. The spirit of *photogénie*, if not the concept proper, will become increasingly relevant as this thesis progresses into questions of both photographic specificity, and the viability of the photographic image as an extension of vision. Mary Ann Doane, 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema,' *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Fall 2003), p. 89. See also Malcolm Turvey, 'Jean Epstein's Cinema of Immanence: The Rehabilitation of the Corporeal Eye,' *October,* vol. 83 (Winter 1998), pp. 25-50.

[58] Widely considered the founder of the Pragmatic tradition in philosophy, Peirce began writing about signs in the late 1860s as an extension of his work on logic. His writing on signs precedes that of Ferdinand de Saussure—whose *Course in General Linguistics* is also considered a foundational text in the field of semiotics—and both are considered co-founders of the semiological discipline. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983).

tific journals, Peirce's semiology is rigorous and complex, though often open-ended, leaving room for interpretation.[59] It is, however, the foundational period towards the beginning of Peirce's semiological studies where his work, at its most broadly applicable, is most useful in the context of the present study. Of particular significance is Peirce's initial semiological proposition, outlined in a paper given at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1867 and published the following year, where he delineates how signification is divisible across three distinct categories: the "symbol," the "icon," and the "index."[60] These categories are of enormous historical significance—not least in historical debates concerning photography—as each, at times, has been elevated to an emblematic status in relation to particular media and forms of visual representation. Inextricable from its conception during the widespread commercial use of plate-based photographies, Peirce's triad exhibits a unique sensitivity to the nuances of the photograph's notoriously polysemic denotational register, in addition to providing a theoretical vocabulary for considering both the specificities of photographic representation, and its perceived discontinuities with other media. To demonstrate how, and the extent to which this is the case, it will be necessary to provide definitions for each of these three categories, indicating which aspects of photographic signification to which each chiefly pertains.

As arguably the most open of the three categories, the symbol is in some ways the least contentious of Peirce's sign types. It is broadly defined as a sign which acquires its meaning through association, and does not, therefore, necessarily bear a visual likeness

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[59] For a useful collection of Peirce's semiological writing, see James Hoopes (ed.), *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

[60] Peirce refers to icons as "likenesses" in this initial formulation of the categories, but often uses the term "icon" interchangeably in his later discussions of these concepts. He also refers to indices as "signs," though "index" has typically prevailed in subsequent consideration of the topic. Charles S. Peirce, 'On a New List of Categories,' *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 7 (1868), p. 294.

to that which it represents.[61] In visual terms, then, the symbol is an image that is not a literal representation of that signified, but rather its codified visual substitute. Notable examples of symbols include numbers, and the alphabet. Many kinds of words, including prepositions, names, and non-onomatopoeic adjectives and verbs are also symbols, in addition to a number of the pictograms commonly used in public signage. Photographic images are often interpreted as symbolic, not least in the fiction film, where the accumulation of representational patterns over a film's duration assembles an associative key for interpreting particular images non-literally.

An "icon" is a sign that represents via a visual similarity, or "likeness," with that represented.[62] From the perspective of the present study the most notable examples of iconic signs are, of course, photographic images, as they consist, most immediately, of pictorial representations that provide a visually mimetic correspondence with their referent. It is easy to see how the photograph is considered a prime example of an iconic sign, as in the course of its everyday use photographs commonly produce images that closely resemble their subjects. Nevertheless, many photography theorists have rightly questioned the extent to which this is truly the case (chief among them, Joel Snyder in his work on photographic realism in the late 1970s and early 1980s).[63] Though the semiotic legitimacy of photographic iconicity is routinely questioned in this way, a certain *intuitive* legitimacy appended to notions of photographic iconicity remains, the logic being that if it appears valid most of the time, then why not grant it on utilitarian grounds? This is one photographic assumption to which the UFO photograph poses a distinct challenge.

By far the most ambiguous of Peirce's three categories is the "index." According to

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[61] ibid., p. 295.

[62] ibid., p. 294.

[63] See Snyder, 'Picturing Vision.'

Peirce's original definition, indices are signs "whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact."[64] Rather than prescribing any particular *figural* means of signification, the index signifies via the product of a direct, causal interaction with its subject. Examples Peirce gives of indexical signs include (to quote a list helpfully assembled by Mary Ann Doane): "a footprint, a weathervane, thunder, the word "this," a pointing finger," and, of course, the photographic image.[65] But the precise nature of the semiological register that unites this range of signs is somewhat confusing. In photographic terms, indexicality seems to account for the manner, previously described, in which photographic inscription seems to offer an authenticating *guarantee*. Indeed, understood as a transactional process between the referent and its image, photographic inscription clearly involves some form of indexical signification that could ostensibly be capable of representing a meaningful correspondence from which certain truth claims might be substantiated.[66] But as Doane and others have pointed out, the bafflingly wide range of signs Peirce uses to exemplify the indexical sign seems to throw the precise nature of the photograph's indexicality—if there even is such a thing—into question.[67]

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[64] Peirce, 'On a New List of Categories,' p. 294.

[65] Mary Ann Doane, 'Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction,' *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2007), p. 2.

[66] Interestingly, the concept of the index as a useful means of approaching photography was significantly popularised in the late 1960s by film theorist Peter Wollen's book *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, though nascent forms of the concept's employment in this capacity are visible in the work of others prior to this point (most notably André Bazin). See Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972).

[67] In the context of its influence upon photography theory, Doane's work is a significant example among many studies that have problematised Peirce's infamously broad definition of the index, both before and after what is generally theorised as the severance of the indexical link in the wake of the digital revolution. Mary Ann Doane, 'Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction,' p. 2. See also: Rosalind Krauss, 'Tracing Nadar' *October*, vol. 5 (Summer, 1978), pp. 29-47, and Gunning, 'Moving Away from the Index.' Peirce and others have written elsewhere about the logical usefulness of the kind of indeterminacy often perceived as muddling his conceptualisation of the index. Regarding Peirce's discussion of vagueness, Tony Williamson notes that many common sense assertions are only made possible with a degree of vagueness. "[T]hat fire burns," for instance, "is certain only because it is vague. The belief is not falsified when fire fails to burn a stone, for it does not specify precisely what fire burns in what circumstances." Furthermore, Peirce himself wrote that the vague idea "extends to the interpreter the privilege of carrying its determination further." It is in this sense that the indeterminacy commonly considered to obfuscate Peirce's conceptualisation of the index, can in fact be considered consistent, in a certain sense, with his wider logical philosophy. See: Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 47, and Charles S. Peirce, 'Issues of Pragmatism' *The Monist*, vol. xv, no. 4 (October 1905), p. 487.

One might reasonably ask, for instance, whether the indexicality of the photograph is closer to the indexicality of a footprint, or that of a pointing finger? Certainly these are two chief contenders in photography theory, where the indexicality of the photograph has been variously theorised in terms of *trace-ness* (that, like footprints, photographs are indexical because they are signs produced via physical impression, in this case, with the light reflecting off the referent) and *deixis* (that, like a pointing finger, a photograph is indexical because it is a sign that gestures towards the referent).[68] These two possibilities will later prove central to disambiguating the semiotic unplaceability of the photographic UFO.

More specifically, much of the confusion concerning photographic indexicality seems to arise from the semiotic richness, and multivalency of the photographic image. Assuming that the photographic sign can be attributed with indexical denotation (leaving aside, for now, questions of the precise nature of this signification), it is entirely conceivable that a photographic image can meet the requirements of indexical signification, iconic similarity, and symbolic substitution simultaneously, and there is no guarantee that these three distinct values will necessarily correspond with any single, unified denotation. Kracauer offers a useful description of this in his *Theory of Film*. Discussing Jean Epstein's interest in the "pistol scene" common in American cinema of the 1920s (in which a character opens a draw, and pulls out a pistol), Kracauer revealingly ascribes the endurance of this convention to the fact that: "it does not just point forward to something that will subsequently happen but stands out as an image iridescent with multiple

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[68] Peter Geimer offers a useful discussion of the many interpretations of the index as trace in his article 'Image as Trace: Speculations about an Undead Paradigm,' and David Green and Joanna Lowry help define the deictic indexicality of the photographic image in their article 'From Presence to Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality.' See Peter Geimer, 'Image as Trace: Speculations about an Undead Paradigm,' *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 7-28, and David Green & Joanna Lowry, 'From Presence to Performative: Rethinking Photographic Indexicality,' in David Green (ed.), *Where Is the Photograph?* (Maidstone: Photoworks, 2002), pp. 47-60.

meanings."[69]

This "iridescence" is not exclusive to the pistol scene, but the pistol scene serves as an example of a particularly compelling distillation of the photographic condition in which distinct semiological registers coexist in the image, even when the relationship between them might conflict.[70] Indeed, the pistol scene is of interest to Epstein and Kracauer as it represents a particularly explosive eruption of interpretative possibilities, experienced cinematically as a thrilling ambiguity stemming from the photographic image's polysemic multivalence. Iconically, the pistol scene is just that; a character taking a pistol from a drawer. Films use photographic images to provide detailed visual representations of precisely this kind of uncomplicated narrative occurrence. Secondarily, it serves as a prompt, asking viewers to question who the character might be thinking of shooting, and why. But the pistol scene becomes more complicated at the point one considers its alternative interpretative possibilities according to Peirce's semiological triad. At the same time as the pistol scene offers its straight-ahead iconic depiction of a character pulling a pistol from a drawer, it can also gesture elsewhere via symbolic or indexical reference. One way this can occur is when the film crafts, or otherwise leaves open possibilities for the image's symbolic relevance, or associations. If, over a film's succession of images, or other instances of the pistol scene and associated iconography from other films, a code is constructed from which symbolic readings can derive, it may be the case that the pistol scene is better thought of less for its literal representation of a character obtaining a gun, than as a metaphor for assuming control, exercising power, or even a phallic gesture (and when is a film's representation of a gun not a phallic ges-

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[69] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 70.

[70] The following discussion concerns the decidedly non-ufological image of the "pistol scene" because, as will be examined later, the UFO's unique figural properties are interesting precisely because they resist discrete categorisation among Peirce's three semiotic categories. As such, it is not possible to introduce these concepts clearly in relation to a UFO image, and Kracauer's discussion of the pistol scene provides a clear explication of the semiological multivalency of photography, while buffering the initial treatment of these ideas from their later complication.

ture?). More elusively, that the film image is typically photographic, produced via its exposure to a particular place at a particular time, means that in addition to the two previous iconic and symbolic registers, the pistol scene can also refer, indexically, to the exact, material circumstances of its making. If the index signifies (whether by trace, or gesture) via a "correspondence in fact," recalling Peirce's formulation, then perhaps the foremost semiotic register of the pistol scene image can be attributed to its indexical signification of an actor on a set holding a specific prop gun.[71]

The pistol scene usefully demonstrates the extent to which Peirce's three semiotic registers can vary, potentially very wildly, from one to another. Here, in the same image, at least three distinct interpretative possibilities coexist, none taking obvious precedence over any other. This, after all, is the purpose of the word "iridescent" in Kracauer's original description. These distinct semiological valences coexist in the photographic image, and are only individually foregrounded by the viewer's own interpretational strategies (whether cognitively elected or structurally influenced), just as the iridescent plumage of a bird only changes colour as one's position in relation to it changes. This, of course, has many implications for photographic representation, and not only in the context of the moving image where iconic readings are typically privileged in cinematic convention. It also has many implications for the representation of the paranormal, as in many ways this describes the same semiological divergence in the interpretation of paranormal phenomena Cohen and Thacker previously warned of misjudging. Many of the challenges of reading photographic UFO images arise from the manner in which they complicate these semiotic distinctions, and Peirce's semiology provides an invaluable theoretical vocabulary for the discussion of the representational contradictions commonly seen in UFO photographs in this way.

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[71] Peirce, 'On a New List of Categories,' p. 294.

Returning, then, to Jung's dismissive remark, and combining it with Peirce's semiology, the UFO photograph's relationship to popular perceptions of the photograph's unique epistemological disposition is further specifiable. Working with the definition of "authenticity" as meaningfully referential, and "photogenic," as generative of legible photographs, one arrives once again at the bewitching combination of the photograph's referential guarantee appended to persuasively mimetic images. If these potential significations sound familiar, it is because, semiotically speaking, they comport quite comfortably to the Peirce-ian formulations of indexicality and iconicity, and their uneasy coexistence as described in relation to the pistol scene. What else, in the context of photography, is the indexical "correspondence in fact"—however nebulous in definition, and perhaps even visually illegible—if not some kind of "meaningfully referential" guarantee of "authenticity?" Similarly, it is difficult to conceive of a subject considered "photogenic" that is not capable of eliciting an iconicity sufficient to its recognisability in the photographs in which its image is recorded. If the photograph's capacity for evidence can be attributed to the epistemological legitimacy of these two key attributes, then it is here that one can expect to locate the unique aesthetic disruptiveness of the photographic UFO. As the thesis progresses the UFO will be revealed as uniquely capable of short-circuiting both photographic indexicality and iconicity, reflexively returning questions of the photograph's viability as evidence to the viewer's awareness. But if, as previously entertained, photography's ability to make truth claims is often predicated upon its referential guarantee (that may or may not be indexical in nature), as opposed to its potentially misleading mimetic resemblance (iconicity), then it makes sense to begin by examining the latter, so that it is possible to observe, with differentiable clarity, just how the former claims to honour the photograph's evidential guarantee. The focus of the first half of this thesis, then, offers a critique of the notion of the "authentic" pho-

tographic UFO, to use Jung's term. Can there ever be such a thing as "authentic" photographic evidence of UFOs, and if so, what might it look like? Of the three categories of signification and attendant interpretational possibilities associated with Peirce's semiotic triad, the icon and the index are of particular interest in these discussions, and the symbolic dimensions of UFO photographs (specifically in the context of moving image fiction) will resurface in the latter half of the thesis. So which of Peirce's semiological registers, if any, reliably serve to produce "authentic" UFO photographs, and how?

## 6. Iconicity

While it was previously suggested that iconicity plays a lesser role in substantiating photographic truth claims than the index, iconicity and photographic mimesis are nevertheless of vital importance to a consideration of how UFOs unsettle conventional semiologies of the photographic image. In order to appreciate this, it is first necessary to determine what, beyond more general formulations of iconicity, is distinct about *photographic* iconicity. Notably, the earlier implication that indexicality is more central to photographic truth claims than iconicity should not be mistaken for suggesting that photographs are incapable of denoting by means of visual similarity. Photographs can, and regularly do function successfully as signs in this way. So much so, that photographic iconicity is often overlooked or misapprehended, much like the many examples of iconic likeness in nature that eschew obvious referentiality in favour of receding into inconspicuousness. These various forms of mimetic camouflage—that of insects that physiologically resemble leaves, for instance—reveal that when iconicity approaches the condition of mimesis, it often passes entirely unnoticed. This is to say that when a sign resembles its referent to within a particular degree of close likeness, it can sometimes even be mistaken for the referent itself. Discreetly embodying its resemblance of an innocuous leaf, the mimetic insect is capable of evading its predators, or hiding from its prey.

In a sense, this particular kind of photographic mimesis describes a phenomenon Kendall Walton calls "transparency"; looking *through* a photograph, and seeing it for what it depicts (a person, a cat, a tree), as opposed to what it actually is (an *image* of a person, a cat, or a tree).[72] "Transparency" describes the manner in which the photograph is commonly considered analogous to a window, whose pane of transparent glass is

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[72] See Walton, 'Transparent Pictures.'

conceived of to allow viewers to look through it, at a scene screened off from them, causing as little obstruction as possible. This is not, of course, to suggest that viewers of photographs literally consider photographic images as windows, or mistake photographs for their subjects, but to acknowledge that photographs are often considered successfully mimetic to such a degree that, at the very least, the materiality and medium specific distortions of the photographic apparatus can be laid to one side in its everyday use and appreciation. This—essentially a verisimilitude—might be better understood, then, in terms of André Bazin's characterisation of photographic realism as an "asymptote of reality," the photographic image's projected extrapolation from the appearance of actuality, that nevertheless necessarily diverges from of total, isomorphic mimesis.[73] In a sense, this speaks less to the relative affordances and limitations of photographs then it does to the observer's willingness to participate in received notions concerning the correspondence of the photographic image to the visible world. If completing the circuit of photographic realism—bridging the gap between the photographic asymptote and knowledge of the world—requires the observer to take a leap of faith no less perilous than that of the leap to ufological belief, then one must ask whether photographic images are capable of contributing any meaningful substantiation of non-hegemonic belief? This and related questions will be addressed as the chapter progresses, but for now, the aspirant mimesis of Bazin's asymptote offers a provisional sense of the manner in which photographic images are typically understood as iconically denoting their referents by means of visual resemblance (though even at this early stage such a possibility appears significantly compromised).

What the gap between the never converging curve from Bazin's asymptote reveals is that implicated in any discussion of photographic verisimilitude is not just iconic suc-

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[73] André Bazin, '*Umberto D*: A Great Work,' in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 2, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), p. 82.

cess, but iconic failure. As such, while iconicity undoubtedly plays a crucial role in UFO images, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the UFO photograph is a prime example of a photographic image that owes its most substantial debt to the *failure* of photographic iconicity, before any successful, conventionally-verisimilitudinal mimesis. After all, if this were a discussion of photographic images that satisfactorily denote their referents via resemblance, there would be no corpus of photographic UFOs to consider, only photographs of planes, clouds, landscapes dotted with photographic artefacts, and any number of other images capable of supporting ufological misrecognition. Actual UFOs, by definition, have no fixed iconographical palette from which an iconic representation might reliably draw. There is, of course, a particular set of visual forms associated with photographic UFOs, ranging from pinpoint lights, blurred shimmers, ovoid silhouettes, and reflective spheroids, but this is merely an accrued iconography providing no hard demarcation of the figural boundaries within which the appearance of actual UFOs can be safely delineated. So long as it is capable of resisting identification, anything can appear as a UFO in a photograph. Rather, then, in accordance with the reorientation motivated by Bazin's asymptote, the principal significance of photographic iconicity in the consideration of UFO images is the extent to which it is capable not of successfully denoting the referent, but of visually *diverging* from it. In other words, conventional notions of photographic iconicity as an image's felicitous resemblance of its referent, capable of substantiating photographic truth claims, are less important here than questions of how photographs exhibiting a lack of fidelity with their referents attempt to substantiate truth claims with a compromised iconic correspondence.

Of course, the notion that photographic iconicity may be notable for its shortcomings as much as its triumphs is not in itself a novel proposition, and a number of writers interested in the epistemology of photographic images have reflected on this subject. For

example, in the earliest of his essays dedicated to photography, Siegfried Kracauer writes: "the photograph gathers fragments around a nothing."[74] If, in other words, photography is capable of representing anything, it is only the most contingent impression of the subject plucked from a flow of unceasing change. The image might resemble the referent at the moment of exposure, but there is no guarantee that this original context will necessarily be meaningfully recoverable by the time the image is ultimately encountered. In this sense, photographic iconicity may not be as reliable as commonly assumed. Other writers append similar observations with allusions to the generative potential of iconic failure; how iconic divergence in the photograph opens up possibilities for interpretative tangents. For instance, as Roland Barthes observes, the visual correspondence between the photographic image and its referent is "by nature tendentious."[75] The photograph, though assuredly representative of something, often presents a particular *view* of that thing, and accordingly, may be better thought of as expressive of a particular *interpretation* of the thing *(*a refraction), or even a particular spin on it, rather than a straightforward representation (a reflection).

This is certainly true of the cultural circulation and exchange of photographs, but one might also consider this remark in terms of iconicity, as a case can be made that the "tendentious[ness]" of the photographic image is as much a visual quality as an ideological one. If the photograph is "tendentious," prone to bias, if not outright distortion, "by nature"—as opposed to by association, or in practice—then Barthes is suggesting that this is a characteristic of photographic images themselves as opposed to approaches to them. Perhaps this is not an especially radical suggestion. Everyone has experienced taking a photograph and finding its subject not adequately represented in the resulting

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[74] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photographs,' in Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 56.

[75] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 87.

image, as taking a photograph is never a guarantee of accurate or intended visual denotation. (A common, quotidian example of this is having a preferred "side" when being photographed, an angle at which one believes the camera will be best capable of representing one's physical appearance.) More drastically, however, there are many photographs that appear to represent something entirely other than that of which they were taken. Whether via optical illusions, or altogether cruder obstructions (blur, lack of resolution, poor light conditions), photographic images are capable of transforming the referent into an image of something else entirely. As Vilém Flusser affirms, photography is intrinsically "connotative" in this way, and such images represent the full extent of photography's inherently "tendentious" visual character.[76] It is in this sense that even though many photographs achieve a successful iconic reference, photography offers no reliable *guarantee* of iconic correspondence (if just one photograph appears to show something other than its referent, then how can one reliably trust other photographs without some additional means of substantiation?).

Visually, this is attributable to the fact that the photographic image possesses the unique ability to concretise—which is to say both *hold still*, and literally *physicalise*—something akin to the moment Wittgenstein refers to as "the dawning of an aspect," a perceptual shift in which an observer's understanding of a visual experience is transformed, not in vision, but in interpretation, or more accurately, *perception*.[77] (Wittgenstein famously expressed this notion in relation to the "duck-rabbit" illusion, in which an illustration of a chimeric "duck-rabbit" remains visually the same, as an impression "produced in me"—that is, the mind of the observer—alternates interchangeably between perceiving a duck or a rabbit.[78] He referred to this distinction as the difference

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[76] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography,* trans. Anthony Mathews (London: Reaktion, 2000), p. 8.

[77] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 194.

[78] ibid., p. 199.

between "seeing," or *looking*, and "seeing-as," the contribution of the mind in the process of perception.) It is also in this sense that Barthes writes that photographs "are signs which don't *take*, [but] *turn*, as milk does."[79] Through some inherent vice of the medium, the images produced by photography—drawn from the appearance of the referent but now represent something else entirely—are generative of a range of alternative impressions that bear no essential relation to the referent. This transformational process through which the photograph, by apparently closing down and sealing in a particular perspective upon an object actually opens out its range of possible perceptions and interpretations is perhaps the "[native] surreal[ism]" Sontag identifies "at the heart of the photographic enterprise," or photography's "madness," in Barthes words, that "[s]ociety is concerned to tame"; its unprecedented ability to twist verisimilitudinal representation according to its own unthinking schemata.[80] This begs the question, why, if a photograph is always of *something*, but might not necessarily resemble this original source, should its meaning necessarily rest upon such a precarious correspondence? What alternative possibilities open up as the unreliability of photographic iconicity is embraced? Notably, in the context of the present study, the unreliable tendentiousness of photographic iconicity enables the generation of credible UFO photographs, even where there are no actual UFOs.

It is often assumed that "poor quality" photography (some combination of relatively deficient definition, focus, and/or exposure) serves the visual tendentiousness responsible for generating UFO photographs. This seems to be an inversion of the familiar logic, naturalised through consumer camera marketing, suggesting that as the "quality" of a photograph increases, so too does the likelihood that the image will satisfy the conditions necessary for accurate iconic correspondence with the referent. Equally, below a

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[79] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 6. [Emphasis in original.]

[80] Sontag, *On Photography*, pp. 51-2, and Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 117.

certain "quality," iconic correspondence may be frustrated and the photograph rendered iconically illegible, unplaceable, *unidentifiable*. But really there is no reliable correspondence between image "quality" and iconic accuracy. One is just as likely to encounter "poor quality" images that remain perfectly legible, as "high quality" images that remain inscrutable. A blurry photograph is just a blurry photograph, and there is nothing inherently mysterious about that. Instead, what actually happens in UFO photographs is decidedly more complex. Rather than attributable solely to "poor quality," more accurately, photographic UFO images are produced from an iconic failure, a divergence between the image and the referent (and it is always at the very least a divergence, as failure to figure the UFO in a legible manner, whether or not it depicts anything truly paranormal, represents in iconic terms a distinct refractive skew introduced by the photographic process). Iconic divergence produces UFO images in a number of different ways, all of which involve some obscuring of the referent, intentional or otherwise. A UFO might appear, for instance, out of some representational deficiency, such as over- or under-exposure, or motion blur. It might be caused by some feedback in the camera mechanism, or from the photographic process producing artefacts that could be mistaken for figures present at the scene of the referent. Furthermore, these possibilities might even be attributed to effects upon the optics of the photographic process exerted, as many contactees alleged in the early days of ufology, by unknown magnetic and/or radioactive emissions from the UFOs themselves.[81]

This iconic divergence occurs most spectacularly when a photographic image not only fails to denote that of which it was taken, but appears to denote (or, more accurately, *connote*) something entirely other than that which was, or seems to have been the photograph's original subject. With regard to UFO photographs, it is precisely this

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[81] This suggestion introduces a number of additional possibilities for the *indexical* signification of the UFO photograph, and will be considered in more detail shortly.
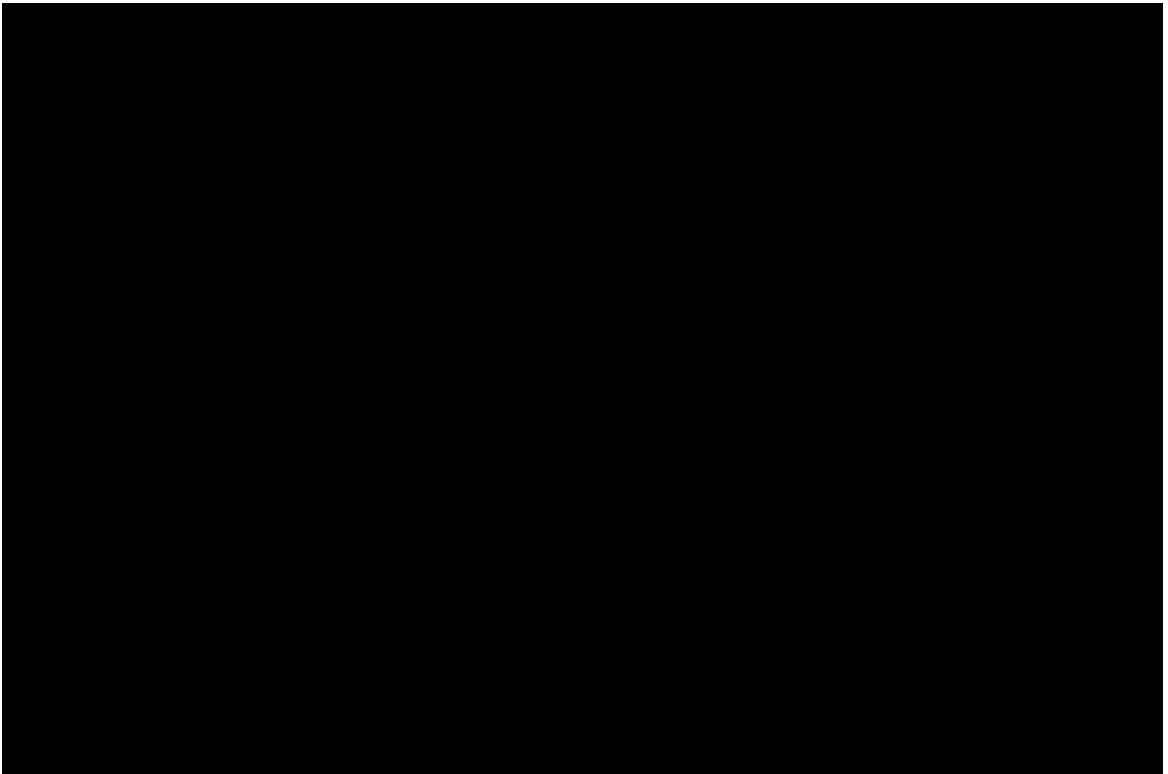
*fig. 6.1 (left):* "Scout Ship from Venus." *Photograph by George Adamski (USA, 1952).*

*fig. 6.2 (right): Ufologist Joel Carpenter's photograph of a Sears "De Luxe Lantern" pressure lamp (c. 1935-41), the cover of which Carpenter argues Adamski used in his UFO photographs.*

process that can have the effect of transfiguring, for example, an electric lantern into a Venusian spacecraft, as contactee George Adamski has been accused of in one of his UFO photographs (see *fig. 6.1*). In this image one can clearly see how Adamski used photography to manipulate the appearance of an entirely commonplace item—believed in this case to be the metal housing of a pressure lamp—into an image more than capable of sustaining a ufological interpretation (see *fig. 6.2*).[82] Squashed into a portrait orientation that shears off the sides of the object, which also appears abstracted against a featureless sky, rendered in low contrast, and peppered with specks of grain and other

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[82] In a self-published essay, ufologist Joel Carpenter convincingly notes that the purportedly extraterrestrial craft that features in a number of Adamski's most famous photographs, or more accurately "the main portion of the object," appears to be "the shade, or reflector, of a widely-available pressurized-gas lamp sold in the U. S. from the mid 1930s through at least the early 1940s." See Joel Carpenter, 'Preliminary Notes on the Adamski Scout Ship Photos,' *beamsinvestigations.org*, 2nd April, 2012 <http://www.beamsinvestigations.org/Adamski%20Scout%20Ship%20Hoax.pdf>, (Mirror accessed via <https://archive.org/details/JoelCarpenterMcMinnvilleUFOphoto>, 19th April, 2019).

photographic artefacts, photography's tendentiousness manifests in Adamski's image as a not-so-subtle unmooring of the referent from its ordinary sense of scale. In this illuminating example of how photography's visual limitations open up rather than close down possibilities for representation, one can observe how the aspects of the image that frustrate the "transparency" of conventional denotation produce a spatial ambiguity that allows the lamp shade to acquire the inferred visual characteristics of a flying saucer. Without perspective on the object as a whole, without frame of reference, or an unblemished visual representation, it is difficult to determine the true size of this object, that appears much larger—and more UFO-like—than what is most likely its actual referent.

Considered parallel to the ufological context, this image is an example of the photographs that fascinate Kracauer for the manner in which alterations of spatial reorientation, scale, and proximity between the camera and its subject, elicit unprecedented visual experiences ("new and unsuspected formations of matter") from no more than the visual textures of the everyday. "[S]kin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters," and lampshades transform into alien spacecraft. "Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before."[83] These images do not represent a departure from photographic realism for Kracauer, but rather a unique photographic realism unpredicated upon conventional iconic correspondence. For Kracauer, the photographic divergence from ordinary iconic parameters represents the dawning of an aspect; an excavation, via photography, of unforeseen dimensions of an object's actual appearance. In "Scout Ship from Venus," Adamski exploits this Kracauerian photographic realism, presenting iconic divergence not as a "revealing function," but rather as passing for a

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[83] Kracauer, *Theory of Film,* p. 48.

*fig. 6.3: "829." Photograph by Billy Meier (Switzerland, 1981).*

more conventional understanding of photographic verisimilitude, based in faith in pho-
tography's ostensibly accurate iconic "transparency."[84]

Compare Adamski's image with this photograph taken by the Swiss contactee Billy
Meier, which makes a more audacious, though arguably less successful attempt at a sim-
ilar manipulation of scale (see *fig. 6.3*). Here, like Adamski, Meier similarly leverages
the fixed frame of the still photograph to produce a forced perspective illusion devised
to depict a large UFO hovering over a van. The effect is significantly less convincing
than Adamski's photograph, even in the absence of the access available in Adamski's
case to what is likely the image's true referent. For one, it is clear upon inspection that
certain conspicuous details in the image that might otherwise have contributed to a
compelling UFO image by successfully obfuscating its true iconic reference, here have
the inverse effect of betraying the true spatial interrelations of the profilmic space. Most
notably, the discrepancy in focus between the UFO and its surroundings, and its lack of
a shadow consistent with that of the van's, seem to indicate that the UFO is really a

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[84] Significantly, this faith supplementing the limitations of photographic iconicity also forms the basis of
claims concerning photographic indexicality. This thesis will later consider how the extent to which a
photograph deviates from accepted parameters of iconic legibility is often inversely proportionate to the
strength of claims concerning the legitimacy of its indexical signification. Indexicality has a tendency to
creep in to discussions of photography as iconicity retreats. ibid., p. 46.

much smaller object, positioned closer to the camera than Meier's illusory framing at-tempts to depict. Though this perspectival inconsistency certainly charges the image with an eerie oddness, it does not establish any particular sense of visual credibility. Un-like Adamski's image, then, which remains sufficiently ambiguous, visually, as to present its ufological inferences more compellingly, Meier's image falls into a recursive oscillation between figure and ground, two mutually contradictory planes in the image (the UFO, and the surrounding scenery) continually displacing one another in a jostle for iconic preeminence, resisting integration within a single perspectivally-unified rep-resentation.[85] These perspectival discrepancies ensure that however much one might wish to accept this UFO, to do so would be at the cost of refusing the setting, a conclu-sion that makes no logical sense. More likely, then, if one accepts the image's setting, one can only refuse its UFO.

What this reveals of the role of iconicity in UFO photographs is that the most convincing UFO photographs offer more than just the tendentious potential of iconic frustration. If Adamski's photograph lacks visual credibility, it is because its otherwise compelling UFO lacks a legible setting. It could be anywhere, and with the loss of specificity comes a lack of credibility. Where Meier's photograph lacks credibility is that the setting it provides in an effort to bolster its credibility has the effect of displac-ing his UFO from a stable, iconically-coherent representational schema. Crucially, then, for photographs to present UFOs with an iconic credibility, it is vital that they exhibit not only an iconic divergence, but a very particular semiotic inconsistency whereby par-ticular iconic elements of the image remain ostensibly accurate while the figure of the

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[85] In addition to its significance in terms of the photograph's immediate perceptual characteristics, the concept of "figure and ground" is also notable here in regard to the reflexive response the image elicits in relation to the medium. The disorientating perspectival incongruity of Meier's image frustrates attempts to concentrate on the image (figure), drawing the viewer's attention outwards to the photograph itself (ground) (though this is, of course, an opposing view of this representational phenomenon to that of the writer who first conceptualised figure and ground in relation to media, Marshall McLuhan, who famously argued that "the medium is the message"). See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 7.

UFO represents an iconic diversion.

The most convincing UFO photographs are identifiable for their careful modulation of iconic legibility between different aspects in the image. For a UFO to appear as an unidentified flying object and not simply an illegible blot (or, indeed, something entirely recognisable), requires the contextualising presence of other more stable, identifiable figures. Typically, familiar elements in the image invite identification, while less familiar elements resist it, and it is out of this distinct visual dynamic that UFO photographs are formed. Wholly distinct and wholly inscrutable figures are held in a delicate suspension. The earthly sky appears not as a featureless colour-field, but is punctuated with gestures towards civilisation (telephone wires, rooftops, streetlights), or nestled among bucolic signifiers of the terrestrial horizon (clouds, hills, fields, trees), implicitly underscoring the peculiarity of the UFO's unidentifiability. The UFO works both with and against the landscape. It acquires both its abnormality, and its credibility from its association with these familiar iconographical cues (abnormality in its difference, credibility in its proximity). As a lacuna structured into otherwise densely figured surroundings, it appears alien in its distinction from the natural world (and from the naturalised representational order). Simultaneously, it leaches off the implicit credibility of these legible attributes so as to assert its purported actuality. The observer is compelled to engage with questions concerning the nature of the UFO in images like these because everything else in the photographs is so immediately recognisable. As Jane Marsching writes, UFO photographs "place the otherworldly into our world […] the ordinary world [UFOs] infiltrate is an indispensable framework" for the photograph's assertion of their extraordinariness.[86] The UFO infests the photographic image, a medium commonly associated with figural precision and innate comprehensibility, with an ambiguous abstrac-

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[86] Jane D. Marsching, 'Orbs, Blobs, and Glows: Astronauts, UFOs, and Photography,' *Art Journal* 62, no. 3 (Autumn 2003), p. 59.
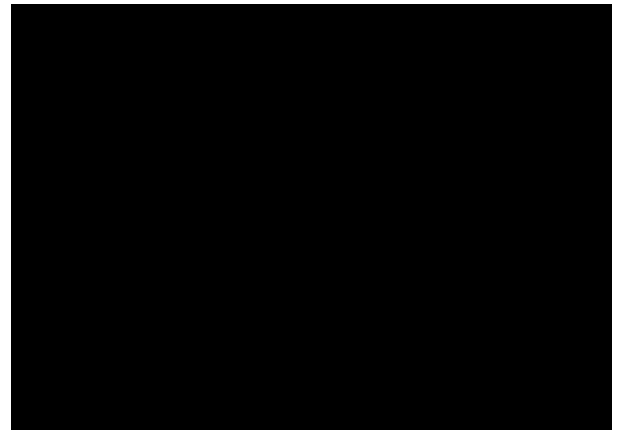
*fig. 6.4 (above):* Untitled. *Photograph by Steve Thompson (USA, date unknown). Its UFO better integrated with the landscape, this photograph appears more convincing than Adamski's or Meier's.*

*fig. 6.5 (below): "494." Photograph by Billy Meier (Switzerland, 1975). A more compelling UFO photograph of Meier's. This image was later used in* The X-Files *as the basis of Mulder's "I Want to Believe" poster.*

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tion that resists comfortable dismissal. Framed by the abundantly familiar, conventionalised representational regime of the landscape—the "text," as Simon Schama writes, "on which generations write their recurring obsessions"—the UFO is an outrageous affront to representational convention, placing a forceful demand on one's attention, whether one chooses to believe in them or not (see *fig. 6.4 & fig. 6.5*).[87]

But if this is the case—that a UFO image is made from a dynamic modulation of iconic legibility between different elements in the photograph—then how is it that UFOs are not overwhelmed by their surroundings, and dismissed as visual aberrations?

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[87] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York City, NY: A.A. Knopf, 1995), p. 12, quoted in Erika Balsom, 'Why are Artist Filmmakers Turning to Landscape?' *Frieze*, 16th April, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/why-are-artist-filmmakers-turning-landscape> (Accessed 16th April, 2018).

When Georges Didi-Huberman asks how to account for such figurally ambiguous elements in pictures, inscriptions like photographic UFOs that "[reach] us without our being able to […] catch [them] in the snare of a definition," he offers a helpful exegesis of the white space between the figures depicted in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* fresco in the San Marco convent, Florence.[88] As an element of an image containing only the scarcest traces of figuration, refusing iconic certitude, its liminal blankness represents, in Didi-Huberman's view, the stubborn remainder of iconographical approaches to interpretation. Unlike the white space in the Florentine fresco, which Didi-Huberman addresses precisely because of its inconspicuousness (that it, and elements like it, are typically overlooked in the appraisal of images), UFO photographs reframe such ambiguities with an unprecedented prominence. Refusing to furtively occupy the spaces between more outstanding elements of the image, these figural ambiguities are centralised (often literally, occupying the centre of the image), and brought to the fore in UFO photographs. Perhaps a more exact description of the peculiar iconic characteristics of the UFO photographs, then, is that they forcibly foreground the iconic ambiguities that otherwise tend to subsist in the more unassuming elements of images. It is in this way that the UFO, in its splinter-like intractability, wields a powerful grip on the viewer's attention, even as it evades iconic certitude. UFO photographs do not merely grant the possibility of hermeneutical scrutiny, in this respect, they goad it on, imploring the observer to try and make sense of what they see. Furthermore, UFO photographs also invest these ambiguities with a greater sense of presence, significantly elevating the stakes of these semiological uncertainties. Where a ghost, for instance, follows the visual logic of the semblance—a familiar appearance lacking substance, a hollow apparition—a photographic UFO is precisely the opposite, a visually deferred, obstinate *tangibility*. Unlike

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[88] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images,* trans. John Goodman (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), p. 17.

a ghost, whose comparatively detailed likeness lends itself to dismissal as a vision, illusion, or otherwise deceptive appearance (ghosts, particularly photographic ghosts, are often disregarded for being too comprehensibly iconic of people to represent anything more than tricks of the mind, or camera), photographic UFOs, less visually distinct but somehow more physically present, cannot be conjured away with anything less than an explanation persuasively accounting for every aspect of their atypical appearance. UFO photographs are anomalous as photographs in this way, long before the possibility that they are anomalous to science. They pose a challenge to science, but they also challenge the often contradictory attitudes surrounding iconic signification in photography.[89]

As arguably the most commonly invoked semiological register associated with photography—and therefore, perhaps, the most naturalised, and unquestioned—the iconic boasts a distinct reflex precedence over other competing forms of signification. Its basis in mimesis readily appeals to the common sense notion of likeness, and in this way, it is understandable that photography is frequently implicated in the ferrying of even the most farfetched truth claims into the realm of credibility. The promise of iconic signification—that a photograph resembles its referent—hurdles much of any initial scepticism towards the photographic image, often allowing distorted and misrepresentative images to acquire an air of legitimacy. The persistence of this preference can be put down to the fact that in many photographic circumstances it is simply unnecessary to question the legitimacy of iconic reference. If a photograph of Mum and Dad iconically conforms to what one knows of how Mum and Dad look, then why, under any ordinary circumstances, would a turn to any alternative semiotic register be necessary? Photographs referring to familiar, low stakes subjects routinely evade close scrutiny in this way. Worlds apart from Mum and Dad's intuitively familiar faces, the UFO's fundamen-

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[89] "*Challenge to Science*" is the name of a widely circulated ufological publication by Jacques and Janine Vallee. See Jacques Vallee & Janine Vallee, *Challenge to Science: The UFO Enigma* (London: Tandem, 1967).

tally indeterminate iconographical constitution serves as a fly in the ointment for this unspoken photographic pact. Because the UFO, by definition, has no fixed appearance (that is, beyond the cultural interpretations of UFOs as extraterrestrial craft, and other associated iconography), it short-circuits this conventional logic of iconicity in its adaptability to almost any conceivable ambiguity. Since photographs are so commonly considered capable of attesting to actuality through iconic reference, however, one can see how viewers might read into UFO photographs in such a way as to posit that what they appear to show, however vague, is a visual record of an actual UFO sighting. In this respect the iconicity of the photographic image of the UFO is really an assumed, *projected* iconicity, rather than any inherently iconic correspondence.[90] However tenuous such inferences appear in semiological terms, that viewers so habitually arrive at such conclusions is understandable given the naturalised logic of photographic iconicity, and, in this case, its logical inversion. One sees a UFO in a photograph and because it is accepted that photographs are images that generally offer reliable resemblances of actuality—at least to an extent, and in certain conventionalised ways—it seems reasonable to invert the logic of iconicity, and assume that these photographs are "authentic." If a UFO were to hover over Bryce Canyon or the Swiss countryside, *this is how that would look*, and for many this is enough to serve as a reasonable basis for photographic truth claims.

Such photographs of unfamiliar and, indeed, paranormal subjects lacking a fixed iconographical profile, trouble the familiar logic of iconicity conventionally responsible for determining viewers' relationships to photography in this way. Unlike family pho-

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[90] The term "projected," and concept of "projection" is drawn here from Ernst Gombrich's discussion of the degree to which representations require the observer to complete them in an act of creative inference. It is impossible for a representation to represent *everything* of its referent, so "projection" describes the act of filling in what is missing with an interpretative extrapolation based on the aspects available. See Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London: Phaidon, 1977), p. 171.

tographs, or other intuitively credible images of familiar subjects, paranormal photographs force reconsideration of the visual habits viewers take for granted. A common outcome of the circulation of images like these—those that provoke a response analogous to the psychological phenomenon of *pareidolia*, in which human perception arrives at sense experiences predisposed to identify familiar patterns in otherwise unrelated assortments of information—is that they serve as cautionary reminders of the tenuousness of knowledge derived from empirical observation. Perhaps viewers see what they interpret as UFOs in many more photographs than might credibly be thought to depict actual UFOs because they arrive at the task of reading photographs with a set of preconceived notions that guide their viewing down interpretative paths entirely unrelated to the referent. More dramatically, in some cases, such images even break down the assumed monodirectionality of mimetic representation (that because photographers take photographs, photographers are in control of their iconic representations), taking on a curiously omnidirectional, reciprocal character. Viewers assume that it is they who use the icon but, in paranormal images, the icon matches their gaze, and begins to work upon them. Michael Taussig describes something akin to this in *Mimesis & Alterity*. As Taussig's writes, that "the making and existence of the artifact that portrays something gives one power over that which is portrayed," is a common anthropological notion that extends, arguably, to many forms of representation, not least photography.[91] This is what Sontag observes when she describes how "[g]uns have metamorphosed into cameras" in recreational safari, for instance.[92] To take a photograph of something is, as is often said, to *capture it* on film, to pull it from its habitat and still it—like the auto-icon of a butterfly on a pin—so that it may be returned to over and over again from the same

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[91] Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 14.

[92] Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 15.

fixed perspective.

But such are the almost magical powers routinely attributed to mimetic representation that iconicity can often be seen to weaken the conventionalised attributions of power in such a relationship. Taussig offers a number of examples of mimetic representation in ethnographic studies, including representations that not only seem to "[acquire] the power of the represented," but even take on a distinct adversarial character against the observer.[93] Like the scrimshaw mermaid figurine Robert Pattinson's character keeps in his mattress in *The Lighthouse* (Robert Eggers, A24, USA, 2019), which seems to have the effect not of protecting the lighthouse keeper from the mermaid as intended, but of conjuring increasingly fraught psychosexual encounters with the mythical creature, some mimetic representations seduce, deceive, and otherwise endanger the users of icons. Mitchell observes that such paranoid tendencies in the observance of icons—wavering hesitantly between iconophilia and iconophobia—are commonly reduced to generalisations about those perceived as having undeveloped attitudes towards images (that certain viewers are not sophisticated enough to understand, and therefore remain in command of icons). He goes on to assert, however, that this "double consciousness about images is a deep and abiding feature of human responses to representation. It is not something that we "get over" when we grow up, become modern, or acquire critical consciousness."[94] In other words, while one may be well aware that these attitudes might be considered irrational, paranoid, and fantastical, Mitchell warns that even those who might typically consider themselves above such thinking habitually participate in such attitudes towards iconicity.

Writing much earlier than Mitchell, another figure interested in such tendencies

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[93] Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity*, p. 16.

[94] Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?*, p. 8.

towards the icon is the art historian Henri Focillon.[95] In a 1934 essay titled *The Life of Forms in Art*, Focillon outlines a theorisation of artistic form that serves as a helpful theoretical aid in both understanding how representational forms might encourage the previously described attitudes towards photographic iconicity, and further specify the UFO photograph's aesthetic peculiarities. With reference to a range of artistic traditions that, like UFO photographs, combine abstraction with more figurative elements (the re-organised body parts of the Gothic gargoyle, for instance, the intermingling of categories represented by the chimeric plant-animals in Romanesque ornamentation, or the interlaces of the Book of Kells), Focillon, in near-mystical prose, outlines a distinctly Platonic formulation of artistic "form," which, perennial and preceding figuration, echoes recursively through the history of representation as tendencies, sensibilities, and propensities, channelled into individual expressions through media. As if to evoke the parting of the skies and the appearance of a UFO, Focillon writes that form can be understood as "a kind of fissure through which crowds of images aspiring to birth may be introduced into some indefinite realm."[96] Focillon's conception of form is animated, alive even (as per the book's title), granted a life in the world (a "*birth*") via its attainment of any one of a potentially unlimited number of materialities (media facilitating representation). In the case of photographic UFOs, Focillon's conception of form seems to at least partly account for how the irresolute airborne anomalies, that abound in the history of representation, found, in their proliferating appearance in amateur photography around the mid twentieth century, a medium, and cultural moment through which

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[95] In fact, Mitchell implicitly cites Focillon as an influence in his *Last Dinosaur Book*. See Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book*, p. 54.

[96] Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art, trans. Charles B. Hogan and George Kubler* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p. 35.

their expression could be conferred a particular significance.[97] (Perhaps a similar claim could even be made for the imaginary UFO in the dream analysed by Jung? Maybe the UFO appeared to the dreamer in the form of a film projection, because film, as a photographic image, serves physically, and in a broader aesthetic sense, as both a stable base, and interpretative guide to such a fantastical image?)

Treating in aesthetic terms the variously iconophilic and iconophobic compulsions Taussig and Mitchell consider anthropologically, Focillon's morphology of artistic form persuasively accounts for both the manner in which UFOs persist culturally, even as they have no consistent point of reference in actuality, and what about the photographic UFO impresses projected iconicity so persuasively upon the viewer. As an imminent form, preceding mediation, the Focillonian UFO might never have had a physical existence outside the camera, yet in the case of a UFO photograph, it finds itself (or rather the viewer finds it) vividly, even credibly articulated with the culturally sanctioned verisimilitude of photorealism. Since its appearance in the photograph (and between the many photographs Focillon's form unites in the name of the UFO) is a kind of "birth," and these births often appear to occur spontaneously—the UFO having been generated or developed at some stage in the act of producing a photograph—how some might interpret these images as representations of independently agential, even sentient paranormal phenomena becomes quite understandable. After all, what is a supernatural phe-

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[97] Much has been made in ufology of the many paintings, woodcuts, and hieroglyphs (among numerous other examples), that despite long pre-dating the modern UFO phenomenon, appear to the modern eye as depicting airborne anomalies consistent with UFOs. Positing such interpretations of historical artefacts as anything other than presentist chauvinism is at best misleading, and at worst, outright fraudulent. It is also often racist, as many have noted, in its wilful misappropriation and conflation of temporally and geographically heterogenous cultural iconography. Nevertheless, the fact that the modern-day UFO phenomenon—tent-poled as it is by purported photographic evidence—can be seen to compel retroactive reassessment of an unlimitedly wide range of representational media throughout the course of human history, is testament to the degree of persuasiveness conferred upon the photographic UFO image. In such instances, the interpretative strategies native to the largely photographically-determined aesthetics of the UFO image are asserted (inappropriately) as the standard by which the interpretation of all other media representations is informed. See Alexander Zaitchik, 'Close Encounters of the Racist Kind,' *Southern Poverty Law Center, 2nd of January, 2018* <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2018/01/02/close-encounters-racist-kind> (Accessed 2nd of January, 2018).

nomenon if not an apparently anomalous occurrence that reoccurs often enough that one

begins to suspect it has some elusive, nonanthropocentric agency; chaos, to which one

applies methods of reading that produce patterns of significance? Focillon's form, then,

like paranormal belief, accords to the logic of an icon without empirical reference, and

an imagined, speculative iconicity (that of the art historical continuum in Focillon's

case). Between this—"the life of forms"—and the conventionally-attributed iconic legit-

imacy of the photographic image (how photography is considered distinct from other

media such as painting or drawing for the perceived fidelity of its iconic reference), the

UFO photograph presents a powerful semiotic concoction, persuasively encouraging

viewers to project its image upon actuality, however apparently farfetched its subject

might initially seem.

Later in the thesis another phrase from elsewhere in Focillon's essay will provide

further help identifying the unique properties of the photographic UFO. For now, how-

ever, Focillon's conception of artistic form offers vital insight into the iconic dimensions

of the UFO photograph, as it helpfully digests each of the individual strands of the

present discussion into a unified vision of the photographic UFO's iconic peculiarities.

In its parsing of representation into forms worked through media, Focilonian form re-

veals that the medium plays no insignificant role in determining the visual characteris-

tics of its subject. The abstract, hypothetical, perennial purity of Focillon's form stages,

in stark relief, the fact that photography does not *reflect* (as is commonly assumed), so

much as it *transforms*. Photographic UFOs appear the way they do because they are

funnelled through the aesthetic specificities of the photograph, and are distinct in this

regard from UFOs in other media. Furthermore, by breaking up the image into a matrix

of coexisting forms, Focillon reminds us that iconic fidelity in the photograph is not uni-

form across the image. Certain forms may lend themselves more readily to comprehen-

sible representation in the photographic image than others, and this can often (as in the UFO photograph) lead to some curious responses to photographs, including the making of extraordinary claims regarding what they are alleged to evidence. Most importantly, however, Focillon's concept of form gives shape to the way in which photographic UFOs disrupt conventional approaches to photographic interpretation to such an extent that many are willing to alter their beliefs, habits, and lives based on the perceived content of these images. The UFO, as a form, is an unruly icon, that often appears to have a life of its own. This is ultimately why a UFO photograph is more affecting than other forms of representation, inspiring such drastic thoughts and behaviour even as photographic UFOs are not in themselves any more credible than any other kind of UFO representation. Focillon's form reveals what projected iconicity, a routine habit in the viewing of photographs, has in common with paranormal belief—that both take superficial appearances that lack apparent explanation, and impose grand, yet essentially baseless existential claims in support of them—and how photography complements paranormal logic, not only through these conventional habits, but in its medium specific characteristics. Brought together, then, Focillon's form provides a helpful theoretical account of the fact that UFOs appear in photographs how viewers expect them to look in photographs, and how this consistency, combined with the credibility and naturalised verisimilitude conferred upon photographic iconicity, leads some to believe that photographic UFOs represent evidence of actual paranormal phenomena.

Contrary to ordinary photographs, in which viewers qualify images via assessment of their relative fidelity to the known referent, in cases of "authentic" UFO photographs the interpretational reflex of projected iconicity sees viewers calibrate their preexisting knowledge to the photograph. Where observance of conventional photographic iconicity is an essentially passive process of comparison, tracing correspondences between two

discrete data sets (the photograph and preexisting knowledge), projected iconicity represents an active willingness to assimilate the approximations of photography with existing knowledge, and it is seemingly all the riskier for it. Photography is culturally predisposed to encourage this behaviour through its associations with naturalised realism (though, as will be considered later, Focillon warns viewers of the dangers of making such assumptions). Indeed, the prospect of projected iconicity will arouse understandable suspicion among those who refuse to accept even the lowest stakes examples of iconicity as a legitimate avenue of evidential corroboration (and one might reasonably expect most contemporary photography theorists to belong to this group). Projected iconicity appears to rest upon the dubious foundations of, at best, thoughtless over-credulousness, and at worst, the closed-mindedness of presumptuous arrogance. Sceptical ufologists and popular scientists are quick to patronisingly dismiss the thoughts of ufological believers in this way; that UFO believers are gullible fools lacking the critical faculties required for distinguishing between representations of fact and fantasy, equivocating the distortions of the photographic with the empirical world. But, in addition to unfairly eliding the great many complexities in the epistemology of belief that might lead some to be more accepting of paranormal photography than others, such a view neglects to identify the potentially radical aesthetic possibilities the UFO photograph presents in this way. Surely the UFO photograph should not be dismissed on the basis that one of its common utilisations, in a very particular cultural milieu, is recruitment in the futile qualification of spurious truth claims?

How exactly the UFO photograph, as an image that promises accurate iconic transference even as it so dramatically departs from the conventional limits of plausibility, might be considered in terms of more radical, alternative possibilities will be considered in due course. Now, having considered the aesthetics of the UFO image at its most

obvious level (that of visual likeness), it is necessary to turn to photographic indexicality, identifying the specificities of this semiotic register and adjoining them to those already discussed of the icon, before determining what they collectively reveal of the UFO's unique ability to disrupt photographic representation.

## 7. Indexicality

Among the most significant historical arguments for the unique semiology of the photograph is the suggestion that, unlike many other forms of representation, photographic images participate in an existentially continuous relationship with their subject. In photographs, subject and image, the world and its representation, come into contact at the moment of the image's production, investing its images with a certification of authenticity. This point of contact, particularly when understood as occurring physically (as in analogue photography) is often thought to correspond with Peirce's formulation of the index. In this view, recalling Peirce's indices, "whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact," and do not necessarily prescribe any figural, iconic qualities, the photographic image is considered best understood as the product of a direct, causal interaction with its subject.[98] The photographic index unmoors photographic semiology from iconic likeness in this way. The extent to which an image accurately resembles its subject matters less than that it is, *in fact*, an image taken of its subject.

Considered appealing across a wide range of variously popular and specialist contexts, the notion of the photograph as an indexical sign is not, however, without significant complications. From the bewildering range of examples Peirce uses to illustrate the logic of the index, to the various conceptualisations of the index in terms of trace and deixis, and the common refutation of indexical signification with reference to digital images, the discourse on photographic indexicality is rife with disagreement. These disagreements primarily centre on questions of the nature of the photograph's correspondence with its subject, and how and whether there are legitimate semiological grounds for the photograph's authentication via indexical signification. Disambiguating these

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[98] Peirce, 'On a New List of Categories,' p. 294.

confusions is beyond the scope of this, and perhaps any individual study. What this thesis can offer, however, is a perspective upon the critical byproducts of allowing the UFO—an image fraught with semiologically disruptive indeterminacies—free roam of such hotly contested aesthetic territory. The UFO is uniquely poised to disrupt conventional photographic indexicality, as much, if not more than it has already disrupted conventional photographic iconicity, and the combination of what it is capable of enacting upon both will later serve as the basis of a new understanding of what these images might be capable of.

As previously noted, much of the theoretical confusion surrounding indexical signification arises from instances among purportedly indexical signs that also satisfy the conditions of iconic resemblance and/or symbolic substitution. A photograph is a prime example of such signs, and in light of all that has been considered of projected iconicity, one that poses a number of distinct challenges to conventional notions of photographic epistemology. The difficulties arising from such images are best observed in encounters with signs whose perceived points of iconic and indexical reference do not seem to align. Photography theorist Joel Snyder provides one helpful non-photographic analogy in which this is the case. "Suppose that in a fit of anger I smash a wall with a large hammer," he writes, "[t]he wall may dent, but there is no reason to conclude that the dent must bear a resemblance to the head of the hammer."[99] Though this helpfully demonstrates how easily iconic and indexical registers can diverge, what if Snyder's analogy can be extended further? Suppose someone attends a viewing of the house where Snyder smashed a wall with a hammer in 1980, without knowing he was responsible for producing the dent. The dent appears as a circular hole in the wall, surrounded by a rough crater where the plaster was broken. That this dent was produced by a ham-

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[99] Snyder, 'Picturing Vision,' p. 507.

mer at all is not denoted with any obvious precision, let alone that it was caused by photography theorist Joel Snyder lashing out in a fit of rage. As such, the new resident begins to speculate about the dent's true cause, and eventually settles upon a new explanation. That the dent resembles a bullet-hole in size and shape gives them second thoughts about the property, and they decide not to take the house.

Though this may initially appear as a flippant extension of Snyder's analogy, thinking it through to such a conclusion is necessary to fully appreciate how conflations of this nature, especially when tied to assumptions of evidence, pose distinct risks in relation to the semiotic richness of the photographic image. Indexically, Snyder's dent denotes that something has at one time impacted the wall in such a way as to leave a mark. That the dent resembles a bullet hole does not mean that the dent was caused by a bullet, yet between the misplaced confidence of projected iconicity and the persuasiveness of the indexical denotation of the dent, it is entirely conceivable that such an inference could be nudged closer to the realm of credibility. The farfetchedness of this hypothetical example should not detract from the fact that such assumptions—the conflation of projected iconic and inferred indexical valences, even as they diverge in actuality— are precisely the misapprehensions viewers so routinely bring to the viewing of photographic images. It is in this way that UFO photographs are a particularly stark example of the photograph's potent semiological concoction. Between the assumptions of projected iconicity and the indexical persuasiveness of the photographic sign, UFOs— which might never have existed in any tangible, literal sense—seem to find more than adequate evidential substantiation in the photograph.

Responding to the perceived distraction of iconic inference from the photograph's indexical "authenticity," many historical theorisations of photography retreat in various ways from questions posed by the semiotic multivalency of photographs and instead

come to lean upon the index in ways no less presumptuous than projected iconicity.

Specifically, many of the theorists credited with introducing a more formalised under-

standing of indexicality to the consideration of photography and film in the mid twenti-

eth century (that is, as opposed to earlier thinkers in whose writing the concept of the

photographic index was preempted), conspicuously gravitate towards examples of pho-

tography that exhibit a distinct ambivalence towards conventional iconicity. Consistent

with the modernist advocacy of a Greenbergian media essentialism, and other associated

refinements of expression, such tendencies proved highly influential, particularly in the

developmental stages of the discipline that would later become film studies. Such a po-

sition is exemplified by the gravitation of a critic like Bazin, in his essay 'Cinema and

Exploration,' towards a documentary where the representation of an expedition through

a blizzard is rendered visually illegible by the adverse weather conditions, but whose

iconic "faults," he suggests, nevertheless constitute a "negative imprint" attesting to the

events in question.[100] Instances like this, emphatically lacking the iconic legibility typi-

cally expected of photographic signification but nevertheless considered to bear "equal

witness" through the logic of the index, often appear among the most prized examples

of photographic indexicality on account of the uncharacteristically discrete nature of

their indexical semiology.[101] As Didi-Huberman writes of the blood stains on the Shroud

of Turin, it is the "noniconic, nonmimetic nature" of these images that "guarantees

[their] indexical value," "the signifying opaqueness itself reinforces the *it was* of an ob-

ject."[102] Seemingly unblemished by the photographic image's dubious iconicity, images

like those of Bazin's snowbound explorers afford observers space for all manner of ro-

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[100] It must be noted, however, that Bazin never actually used the term "index" in his discussions of what are often considered homologous concepts. André Bazin, 'Cinema and Exploration,' in Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, p. 162.

[101] ibid.

[102] Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain),' *October*, vol. 29 (Summer 1984), pp. 67-8. [Emphasis in original.]

mantic claims regarding the purity, naturalness, and non-ideologised signification of in-dexical inscription, that photography theorists have generally sought to demystify and deescalate.

The treatment of such rare examples, however—whether to valorise or criticise—remains an academic pursuit, informing only indirectly (at best) an otherwise broader, popular understanding of the indexicality of the photographic image, or perhaps more accurately, a culturally-determined valuation of indexical inscription.[103] After all, one does not require a knowledge of Peirce's semiotics or Bazin's film theory to have an in-tuitive appreciation for the manner in which a photograph of Mum and Dad is distinct from a drawing, painting, or any other medium which does not involve some direct in-teraction between the medium and the referent. This, which might be called the *vernac-ular index*, endures in a range of popular discourses to this day, largely as an appealing explanation for the allure of the analogue archive, and is just as influential in regard to UFO photographs as any academic formulation of indexical signification. The vernacu-lar index occupies a cultural position analogous to projected iconicity, as it represents a similarly naturalised interpretative succour, perhaps influenced in its initial articulation by more formal theorisation, but now sufficiently detached from any precise academic touchstones, and yoked to such familiar folk forms as the amateur photograph so as to seem intuitive, common sense. The appeal of such recourse in the case of UFO pho-tographs is obvious. With no reliable sense of what a UFO ought to look like, received notions of the photograph's indexical "correspondence in fact" serves as a suitable al-ternative for the viewer's legitimation of a UFO photograph, than that of the slippery,

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[103] A photograph might also be attributed a greater *value* in this way, contrary to the *auratic value* in Wal-ter Benjamin's famous formulation, by which the singular representational object of the drawing or paint-ing possesses a distinct cult value in its material uniqueness. The value of the vernacular index is consis-tent with Bazin's suggestion that the photographic image represents a significant technological develop-ment in the tradition of replacing things with representations of those things. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 221-244, and Bazin, 'The Ontology Of The Photographic Image.'

more readily falsifiable register of iconicity.

Significantly, this apparently natural, intuitive denotation of the index leads to a number of peculiarities of representation and interpretation pertinent to questions concerning photographic UFO evidence. Most notably, there is a certain frisson culturally appended to the photograph's indexical register, both academically and popularly, that might be described in terms of an *ecstatic* indexicality. Again, Bazin serves as a useful example here, emphasising the seemingly transcendental potential of photographic indexicality when he compares photographic signification in 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' to the Shroud of Turin, a religious relic, but also, notably, a proto-photographic artefact of dubious authenticity.[104] In other words, like the figure that appears in the marks of undetermined provenance stained into the Shroud of Turin, the indexical interpretation of the photographic index is commonly perceived as capable of substantiating elaborate and difficult to prove claims, even if its exact means of doing so evade precise description. It offers enough of a "guarantee" to bring the objects represented into the orbit of *belief*, but not necessarily that of *evidence*, per se (at least not in any rigorous, scientific sense). Like the Shroud of Turin, the UFO photograph presents a particularly direct expression of the semiological combination capable of eliciting such an interpretative response—it is an image considered capable of substantiating convictions that might not otherwise hold up on their own, through the promise of an indeterminate form, and a degree of physical connection considered more meaningful than its negligible iconic correspondence (after all, does the Shroud of Turin resemble Christ, or does it merely resemble western Christendom's historical envisaging of Christ?).

Interpretations of the photographic signification that endorse this ecstatic indexicality

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[104] Art historian Nicholas Allen has influentially posited that the Shroud of Turin may have been produced in the Medieval period with techniques that drew upon early understandings of photosensitive chemistry. Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image,' p. 14. See also Nicholas Allen, 'Is the Shroud of Turin the First Recorded Photograph?,' *South African Journal of Art History*, vol. 11 (1993), pp. 23-32.

often take particular interest in cases where photographs take the iconic paucity exhibited in Bazin's film of the explorers to unprecedented extremes. This has unique ramifications in the context of ufology. As Jodi Dean suggests, partly what is so unusual about contemporary UFO discourse is that it "doesn't even need UFOs: absence itself marks an alien encounter."[105] Dean is referring, most notably, to the ufological concept of "missing time," formulated and popularised by abductionist Budd Hopkins, in which a "forgotten period of time[,] usually an hour or two," is interpreted as evidence of a repressed UFO encounter (typically alien abduction).[106] But this notion of the ufologically-interpreted absence can also apply to UFO photographs, and in a manner explicitly exploiting the rhetoric of the ecstatic index. Here, George Adamski's "Mother Ship Releasing Scouts #1" serves again as a clear example of a photograph in which this appears to be the case (see *fig. 7.1*). In the image's high contrast, it is arguable that Adamski's "Mother Ship" appears less as a presence of any description, than an absence, a gap, nothingness ready to be filled. For an even more extreme example of this iconic lack, consider the photograph overleaf from the case files of Project Blue Book (see *fig. 7.2*). Text in the Blue Book report form accompanying the image informs the viewer that this is an infrared photograph of a UFO shot by a citizen of California in 1967, yet it appears almost entirely blank, save for a barely perceptible grey ring in the centre-bottom of the image. Such images highlight the manner in which the unique evidential regime of ufology—in which the absence of anything at all can be read as nothing less than evidence of the existence of extraterrestrial life—can be seen extending into the logic of photographic representation here. Could UFOs appear this way to the naked eye, as silhouettes, as nothingness? They could, of course, but would anyone

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[105] Jodi Dean, *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 46.

[106] "Abductionist" is a ufological term describing ufologists whose research principally focuses on the alien abduction phenomenon. Budd Hopkins, *Missing Time: A Documented Study of UFO Abductions* (New York: Richard Marek Publishers, 1981), p. 19.
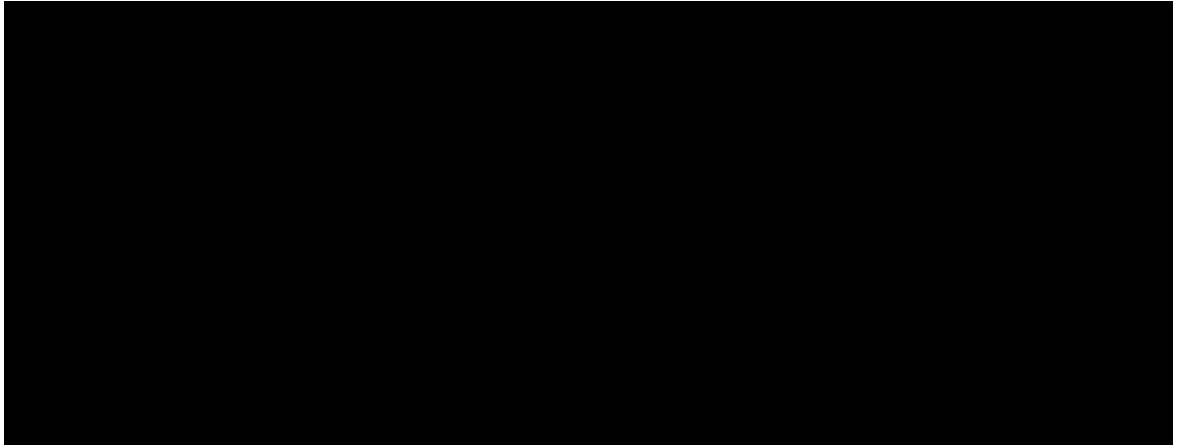
*fig. 7.1 (left):* "Mother Ship Releasing Scouts #1." *Photograph by George Adamski (USA, 1955).*

*fig. 7.2 (right):* Infra red photograph. *Photograph by Anonymous (USA, 1967).*

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even notice them? As such, the rhetoric of photographic indexicality (and it is a rhetoric, a conferred interpretative imposition; "a fantasy of referentiality" in Didi-Huberman's words) assures the observer that there is something significant here, only it cannot be clearly represented.[107] Like the blackness of Kazimir Malevich's "Black Square" (see *fig. 7.3*) that supplements its representational lack with the sheer presence of inscription (that, as Barthes suggests of photographic images, "*it fills the sight by force*"), as much as the blankness of these images might seem to negate their evidential viability, the photograph's purported indexical legitimacy compels viewers to invest their belief in what they claim to be.[108] Viewers are expected to draw from the charge of the indexical guarantee, deriving a UFO from the image. Photographic indexicality appeals to belief in this way, irrespective of photography's longstanding associations with empirical likeness, long before it satisfies the conditions of evidence, and UFO photography exists in a unique cultural position to demonstrate the full extent to which this is the case. UFO photographs reveal how notions of the photographic index enable viewers not only to bridge an epistemological gap from nothingness to somethingness, but from nothingness

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[107] Didi-Huberman, 'The Index of the Absent Wound,' p. 74.

[108] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 91. [Emphasis added.]
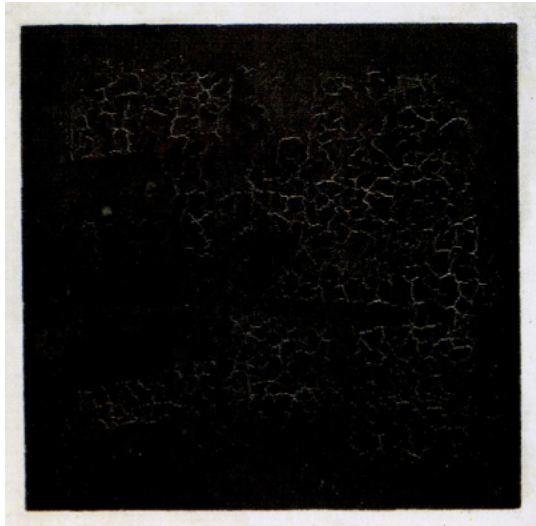
*fig. 7.3:* "Black Square." *Kazimir Malevich, 1915, oil on linen, 79.5 x 79.5 cm.*

to the wholly fantastical.

Both academic and vernacular understandings of photographic indexicality are consistent in granting the possibility of its legitimacy, but the question remains as to what exactly this signification truly consists. What explanation of photographic indexicality can be provided if the UFO photograph is to credibly assert its "authenticity?" Notably, both popular and academic approaches to the index—including the examples aforementioned—exhibit tendencies toward the index as a trace. The "imprint" of the explorers in the snowstorm in Bazin's expedition footage, and the photochemical impression of Mum and Dad in a photograph are both forms of indexical signification interpretable as forged in a physical interaction between the objects they purportedly represent. Their subjects reflect light into the camera lens, where it is directed onto photographic emulsion, producing an image. It is conceivable that such a logic might reasonably lay the foundations for the suggestion of the photographic image's ability to substantiate ufological truth claims. In this view, to have a photograph of a UFO is to have a physical, tangible impression of a UFO, semiotically akin to the plaster-casts of Bigfoot footprints cryptozoologists frequently brandish as evidence. Such an interpretation
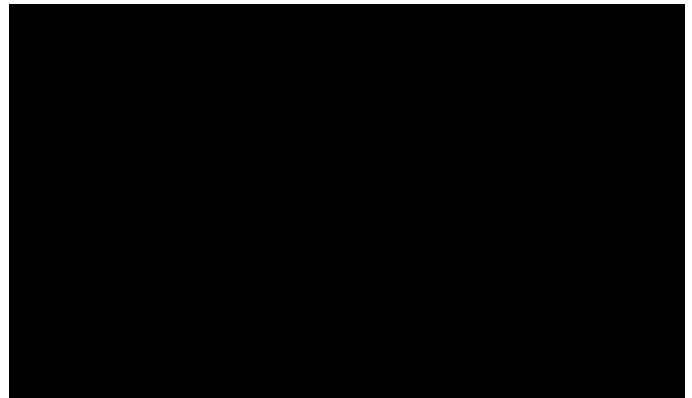
*fig. 7.4 (above): The "East Field Pictogram" crop circle, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire, July 1990.*

*fig. 7.5 (below): UFO witness Stefan Michalak exhibits a grid-like pattern of burns on his torso after a close encounter with two UFOs near Falcon Lake, Manitoba on the 19th of May, 1967.*

is also consistent with a number of other forms of ufological evidence, not least J. Allen Hynek's "Close Encounters" taxonomy of UFO sightings, where the difference between a "close encounter of the first kind" (or CE-I) and a "close encounter of the second kind" (or CE-II) is constituted in the distinction between a purely visual encounter, and encounters where "the UFO is observed interacting with the environment" and "physical effects are noted."[109] In fact, if photographs can be considered to bear an indexical trace inscription, a photograph of a UFO that otherwise leaves no physical trace might even conceivably, according to Hynek's taxonomy, motivate the shift from a CE-I to a CE-II, equating photographs with other forms of physical, indexical ufological evidence as burns, landing marks, residues, and radioactivity. It is in this regard that the concept

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[109] Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report*, p. 30.

of trace indexicality finds alternative ufological expression in such phenomena as "crop circles," and the physical maladies such as burns exhibited by witnesses in a number of prominent historic UFO reports (most famously in the May 1967 Falcon Lake, Manitoba incident, and the "Cash-Landrum" sighting north of Houston, Texas, in December 1980) (see *fig. 7.4 & fig. 7.5*).[110] Recontextualising the earthly landscape and even the human body as surfaces for the inscription of ufological evidence, these alternative indices function according to an equivalent semiotic logic as the trace interpretation of photographic indexicality. Bringing photographs into semiotic alignment with other such tangible, even corporeal forms, it is clear that perhaps the chief attraction among advocates of the trace interpretation of photographic indexicality is that it elevates the stakes of photographic evidentiality. In the trace interpretation of photographic indexicality, the photographic image is more than just an image, it is a physical impression, no less stark than the physical indentation of the crop circle, or the seared flesh of a UFO witness.

That said, as David Green and Joanna Lowry note, "the concept of the photograph as a trace of a past event does not exhaust our understanding of its indexical properties."[111] Addressing this common theoretical foreshortening, Green and Lowry suggest an alternative conception of the photographic index that goes a significant way towards compensating for some of the more vexing ambiguities in Peirce's initial formulation. They write:

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[110] "Crop circles" are patterns of various size, ranging from simple shapes to complex geometric patterns, rendered in indentations to cereal crop in agricultural land. Often posited as codes or puzzles left by extraterrestrial beings, or indentations left by UFO landings, crop circles are also notable here for the additional forms of evidence ufologists have introduced over the years to bolster their indexical yield, ranging from purported endothermic reactions in the depressed crops (indicating the presence of intense heat), to readings of increased background radiation at the circle site. The 1967 Falcon Lake UFO sighting, and the 1980 Cash-Landrum UFO sighting are both notable historic UFO reports privileged for the fact that witnesses experienced burns, and later ill health, ostensibly as a result of encounters with UFOs.

[111] Green & Lowry, 'From Presence to Performative,' pp. 47-8.

> Photographs […] are not just indexical because light happened to be recorded in an instant on a piece of photosensitive film, but because, first and foremost, they were taken. The very act of photography, as a kind of performative gesture which points to an event in the world, as a form of designation that draws reality into the image field, is thus itself a form of indexicality.[112]

This performative interpretation of the index—often referred to as deictic signification as per the linguistic deixis, signifying via a contextually dependent gesture—represents a further division of the index as a category of sign, distinct from, though not necessarily exclusive of the index as trace.[113] As far as Peirce's original examples of indexical signs go, the weathervane, thunder, the word "this," and the pointing finger, are all at least partly accounted for by a deictic interpretation of the index, as in each case their success as signs is predicated upon activation of the causal impetus of that which they are understood to signify (the blowing of the wind, and the objects of verbal and gestural indication).

Given that trace indexicality is rife with instability, then, it is conceivable that ufology might turn to the deictic index to substantiate the evidentiality of UFO photographs. Indeed, the deictic interpretation of indexicality is a commonly invoked semiotic register in ufological discussions. Though arguably the lesser of the indexicalities implied by Jung's "authenticity" (as if deictic indexicality were sufficient for Jung, the simple fact of the existence of so many UFO photographs ought to have rendered his joke null and void), these performative, deictic aspects of indexical signification might account for some, if not necessarily all of the lingering ambiguities surrounding photo-

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[112] ibid, p. 48.

[113] ibid. p. 57.

graphic indexicality as a viable evidential possibility.[114] The logic of the deictic index asserts, quite straightforwardly, that UFO photographs would simply not exist were it not for the existence of UFOs. Why would anyone produce and exhibit these bizarre, visually-indeterminate images, if not motivated by the appearance of some actual anomalous aerial activity they wish to evidence? Such a reading posits the iconic likeness of a UFO as working in tandem with photographic indexicality, making a case that the appearance of a UFO can be read as concomitant with the deictic gesture of taking a photograph, attesting to the existence of an actual UFO as the photographic referent. As in the cases of iconic paucity outlined in relation to the ecstatic indexicality of the trace, the deictic index is also frequently tasked with picking up where more obvious forms of signification, like iconicity, fall short. The very fact that a photograph was taken might be assumed capable of testifying just as persuasively to the integrity of the photographer's claims as any degree of iconic fidelity. Such an argument inverts the epistemological topology of the more familiar logic of a retroactive iconic likeness denoting the actuality of that represented, positing instead that the existence of an actual UFO serves as reliable motivation for the production of what would be an otherwise meaningless picture.

This, which might be termed the inherent *contingency* of photographic deixis—that its strength of testimony rests not so much on the photograph's contents, but upon the photograph as a certificate of authentication for the anecdotal evidence surrounding its production—is provided a useful point of reference in Green and Lowry's discussion of American conceptual artist Robert Barry's photography project *Inert Gas Series* (see *fig. 7.6*). Barry's photographs appear accompanied by descriptions of the artist "return[ing]

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[114] That the deictic is the lesser of Jung's implied indexicalities is logically deducible from the premise that if Jung's original formulation of "authentic" UFO photograph is invertible, and "inauthentic" UFO photographs can also be said to exist, then Jung must consider the *deictic* index to be incapable of authenticating them by simply having been taken.

*fig. 7.6:* "Inert Gas Series (Helium)." *Photograph by Robert Barry (USA, 1969).*

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to the atmosphere" a variety of noble gases in a series of locations around California. Owing to the invisibility of noble gases, which do not visibly react with other elements, Barry's photographs are largely incapable of visually representing the events they ostensibly document. Barry's employment of the word "*inert*," as opposed to the more common "*noble*," in the title of this work takes on an additional significance here, as his images are representationally inert; they are "carefully designed," as Green and Lowry write, to present "the limit point of photography's documentary capacity."[115] As such, Green and Lowry suggest that Barry's *Inert Gas* photographs exemplify the condition of photographic deixis (specifically as an alternative to trace indexicality) because they demonstrate how the photographic act itself is capable of assuming a significance that "undermine[s] conventional notions of meaning and," crucially, "*reference*."[116] In this respect, deictic interpretations of photography do not posit the photograph as documenting the referent, so much as the photograph is itself a document. Here, the photograph is not a token tracing back to an original event, or even a visual representation of that event; it is the event. The deictic photograph is a suspension of referent and representa-

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[115] ibid., p. 50.

[116] ibid., p. 59. [Emphasis added.]

tion, mutually constituted in the act of photography.

But in spite of the extent to which the deictic index might seem to favourably account for much of the photographic UFO evidence less easily substantiated with reference to trace indexicality, it is not without its own complications. For one, like trace indexicality, it is an ambivalent form of signification that can work just as much against the photographer's ufological claims as for them. For instance, in his sceptical treatment of the UFO phenomenon, *UFOs Explained*, Philip Klass implicates the deictic index in his discussion of what is, at times, the dubious timelines of UFO photography. He writes:

> If, after photographing the UFO, the person later says he [sic] let the valuable pictures sit in his camera for many days or weeks because he didn't want to waste a few cents' worth of unexposed film to obtain the valuable photos of the UFO […] this is "inconsistent" behavior and cause for grave suspicion of a hoax. […] It should be clear to every person intelligent enough to operate a camera that an authentic picture of a spaceship from other worlds would be vastly more important, and more valuable than a picture of an airplane crash or a meteor. Otherwise, *why exert so much effort to get the camera and photograph the object?*[117]

Further complications of photographic deixis also emerge from its combination with projected iconicity and trace indexicality, where deictic indexicality is revealed as abundantly capable of producing UFO evidence where there are no UFOs. This occurs most strikingly when visual motifs unintentionally produced in the act of photographic inscription are falsely attributed with a profilmic presence, via the conjectured intentionality of the deictic gesture. Such interpretations — common in the production and reception UFO photographs, but equally in the course of more everyday photographies — are furthermore notable for the extent to which they reveal why UFO photographs are so

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[117] Klass, *UFOs Explained*, p. 170. [Emphasis added.]

often subject to a forceful, even destructive self-reflexivity. Here it is worth returning once again to George Adamski's "Mother Ship Releasing Scouts #1," which will serve as a control in a discussion of two very different kinds of non-ufological photographs that collectively provide perspective upon the indexical peculiarities of the photographic UFO.

Of particular interest is the previously addressed manner in which the UFO in Adamski's image seems to oscillate indeterminately between presence and absence. As noted, this poses a number of difficult ontological questions. Notably, it casts the UFO somewhere in between the categorical absolutes of absence/presence. Whether one is seeing a representation of a physical structure, or an aspect of the representation (which itself might be construed as either an absence, a hole, a gap, or an excess, an obstruction, or *scotoma*), becomes undecidable.[118] Does it really depict something in the sky, or something that exists on the same visual plane as the silhouetted vignette of Adamski's telescope lens? More immediate than any postulations regarding the nature of object itself, however (at least in terms of the experience of viewing the image), is the manner in which the indeterminate ontology of Adamski's "Mother Ship" forcefully compels the observer's attention to the material properties of the medium. The figural destabilisation of the central shape, interchangeably an excess and a lack in starkly contrasting monochrome, dramatically defaults the observer's gaze to the level of the photograph itself, as the image's only remaining unified field. This reflexive friction is produced in the iconoclastic collision of the iconic/representational/referential with the indexical/ nonrepresentational/abstract. Irrespective of whether one has any interest in questions of what these images might ultimately attest to, then, the absolute blackness of what is reputedly a spacecraft, fluttering between interpretation as a solid object or a hole in the

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[118] "Scotoma" here refers to the ophthalmological condition of scotoma, in which an obstruction to the field of vision exists local to the eye (as opposed to between the eye and its subject, or the camera and its referent).

negative, forces the viewer into interrogating the image itself, scrutinising its surface. It is in this way that the UFO photograph is a "media-event," as Branden Joseph writes, citing Joseph Vogl's discussion of Galileo's telescope.[119] The visual properties of the UFO image corner photography into an epistemological pinch point, where the medium begins speaking for itself, addressing aspects of its unique representational character and representational capacity. That UFO photographs prompt close scrutiny in this way is not totally unique, at least in as far as claims about photographic images are commonly seen to make such demands on the viewer, one's attention compelled to the surface of the image as a verifying reflex (as when bringing a photograph physically closer, and squinting, when one cannot make out what it is supposed to depict). But that such a compulsion can be figurally triggered, as in the manner by which the semiological composition of the photographic UFO frustrates one's perception and troubles one's interpretative faculties, is revealing of the UFO image's unique effect upon photographic representation.

That this visual phenomenon should be closely associated with photographic UFO images is reinforced by the fact that many artists have turned to the UFO, and UFO-like images, in order to explore questions relating to photographic mediation and aesthetics. Which cues the first of two sets of images that will inform the forthcoming examination of how the concept of deictic indexicality significantly complicates the process of reading UFO photographs; the images of American artist Oliver Leach. Leach creates images that draw from the aesthetics of UFO photographs via a process of quite literally "cutting holes in [photographic] negatives" (see *fig. 7.7* & *fig. 7.8*).[120] By slicing out

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[119] Joseph Vogl 'Becoming-media: Galileo's Telescope,' trans. Brian Hanrahan, *Grey Room*, vol. 29 (Winter 2008), p. 16, quoted in Branden W. Joseph, 'Nose-to-Nose with a Mutant: UFO Photography,' in Tony Oursler, *Imponderable: The Archives of Tony Oursler* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2015), p. 499.

[120] Paddy Johnson, 'Why Everyone is Suddenly Making Art about Spaceships,' *Garage*, 22nd March, 2018 <https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/qvx8jw/for-these-artists-space-is-the-place> (Accessed 7th January, 2021).

*fig. 7.7 (left):* "1-8" ("UFO Series"). *Photograph by Oliver Leach (USA, 2015).*

*fig. 7.8 (right):* "L32" ("L Series"). *Photograph by Oliver Leach (USA, 2018).*

ovoid shapes from photographic slides and rephotographing the projections—a process

of making visual absences that remain legible in the frayed edges of the reversal film,

and the non-representational whiteness of the projector flooding in through the hole—

Leach actively induces a ufological photographic figuration where "authentic" UFO

photographs do so passively.[121] The hole, which literalises the puncturing of the photo-

graph's representational uniformity observed metaphorically in images like Adamski's,

assumes not only a precedence over the representational content of the photographic

landscape, but an ontologically indeterminate presence, like that of a UFO. (It is possi-

ble, of course, that Adamski himself may have used an equivalent technique in the mak-

ing of his "Mother Ship" photograph. The likeness is striking, though Adamski would

have had to cut the hole in his photograph at a different stage in its production process

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[121] Leach offers a helpful description of his process in a 2018 episode of Sean J. Patrick Carney's *Humor and the Abject* podcast, where he also specifies one of his chief artistic influences as *"manipulated photography made to bullshit people into thinking UFOs are real."* Sean J. Patrick Carney, 'PODCAST: Oliver Leach (@BAKKOOOONN),' *Humor and the Abject*, 10th September, 2018, <https://humorandtheabject.com/blog/2018/9/10/podcast-oliver-leach-bakkooonn> (Accessed 28th April, 2019).

to produce the darkness Leach elects to fill with light.) The ufological implications of Leach's images—clearly foregrounded in the title of his "UFO Series"—are visually clear, yet equally they seem to ask viewers of the extent to which they are willing to invest these figures with a ufological interpretation.

Keeping Leach's images in mind, a second set of images, this time wholly removed from a ufological context, serve to productively triangulate this comparison. The images in question are a subset of the photographs taken as part of the celebrated documentary photography programme of the United States' Department of Agriculture's Farm Security Administration, from 1937 to 1946. The most famous of these images—those taken by Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and Gordon Parks—will not be considered, however. Instead, a number of lesser known images, specifically those that were subjected to a particularly uncompromising form of censorship are of principal interest here. Tasked with documenting the plight of rural workers in the aftermath of the Great Depression and in the midst of the Dust Bowl without compromising the "desirable themes" insisted upon by officials in Washington D. C., FSA photographers would routinely have their images brutally censored (or "killed" as it was termed) by director of the photography program Roy Stryker, who punched holes in the original negatives of any images he considered unfit for purpose (see *fig. 7.9, 7.10, 7.11, & 7.12*).[122] Recently, many of the photographs Stryker "killed" have since been developed and reproduced in art books published to critical acclaim.[123]

Given the solemnity of their original purpose, to overstate the visual resemblance

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[122] Of course, the language of "killing" is interesting in close proximity to Focillon's vivifying notion of "the life of forms." It is significant that the photographs hole-punched by Roy Stryker are not just "censored" but "killed"; those that might have gone on to live what Stryker may have regarded as unpredictable and unruly lives were extinguished with a press of the hole-punch. Ironically, then, by ending the life of these images in the manner he did, Stryker also opened up the possibility that these images might take on new lives, as the artists who developed the negatives have since enabled, not least potentially ufological ones. See William E. Jones, *Killed: Rejected Images of the Farm Security Administration* (New York City, NY: PPP Editions, 2010).

[123] See ibid., and Bill McDowell, *Ground: A Reprise of Photographs from the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill, NC: Daylight Books, 2016).
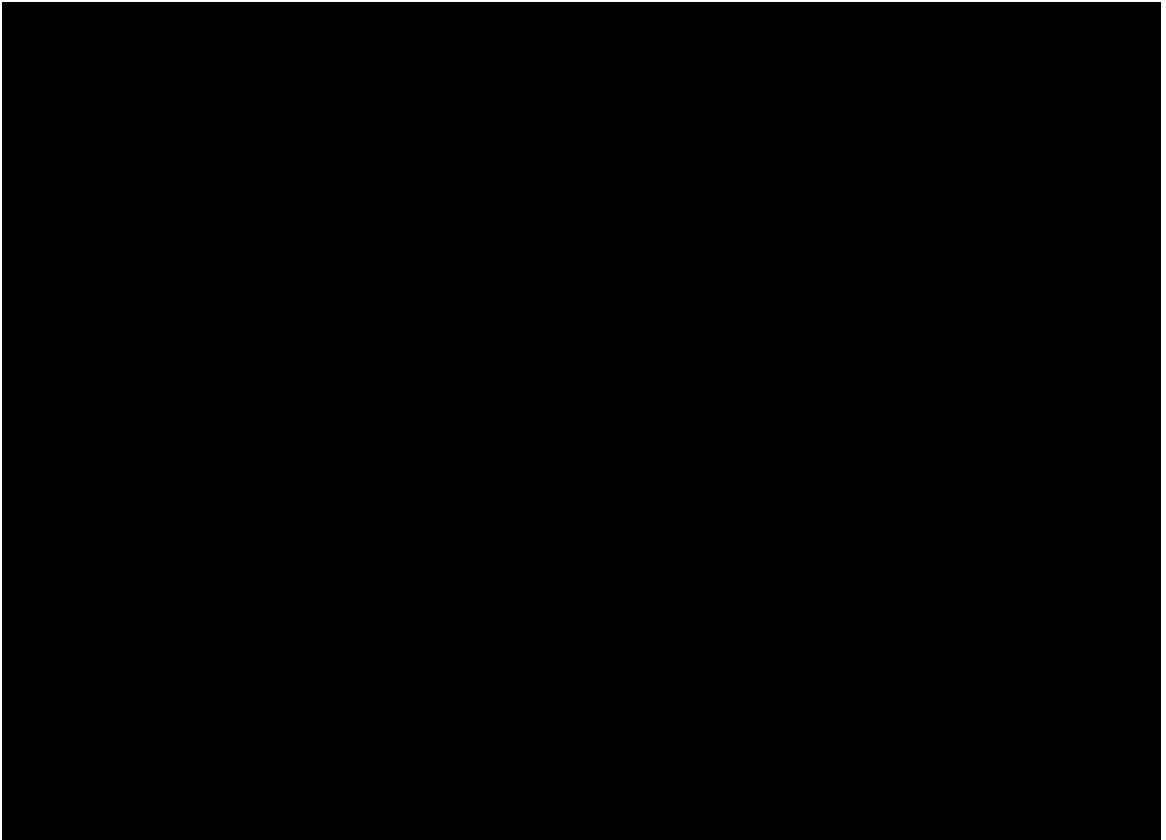
*fig. 7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.12: A selection of Farm Security Administration photographs, "killed" by programme director Roy Stryker (USA, 1937-1946).*

these censored FSA images share with UFO photographs would be gauche. Indeed, the photographs predate the emergence of the modern UFO phenomenon, some by over a decade, and any resemblance they do share with UFO photographs was ultimately brought about by the ersatz appropriation of their negatives in an entirely unrelated cultural context, over half a century later. There are, however, a number of inescapable commonalities between the "killed" FSA photographs and UFO images, not least the mutual pairing of the rural American landscape with an ontologically ambiguous, floating abstract figure. In the context of the present discussion though, the "killed" FSA photographs are significant not because the visual likeness they share with UFO photographs should be invested with any fallacious causal hypotheses (e.g. that Stryker was censoring UFOs in these images), but precisely because this likeness is purely fortuitous. If the "killed" FSA images look like UFO photographs, they do so from a context

distinct from that of ufology, and as such, they arrive helpfully positioned to reveal aspects of the UFO photograph's semiotic constitution from a neutral position of baseline credibility (which is to say, irrespective of the relative "truthfulness" of photography in a more general sense, the socio-political sincerity of the FSA's documentary project undoubtedly confers a culturally-sanctioned implicit trust upon their images, in a manner quite distinct from the hegemonic cultural opinion on UFO photographs).

The purpose of bringing Leach's art images, and the "killed" FSA photographs into the orbit of UFO photography is to ask the question: What semiological turns would allow these images to serve as ufological evidence? Subjecting these images to such an examination will identify how they might complement understandings of photographic UFO aesthetics, and further nuance the conceptualisation of photographic indexicality. So what, then, do these images appear to have in common? Visually speaking, they all support the possibility of being interpreted as UFO images. This is to say, irrespective of their original contexts, they each exhibit configurations of visual information that permit the inference of an iconically signified UFO. Furthermore, in each, the figure interpretable as a UFO occupies an ontologically ambiguous position pitched between the representational and non-representational, just as easily attributed with the denotative fixity of a presence at the scene of the referent as dismissed as a tendentious spin on a photographic aberration. Each, then, has at least two possible valences of interpretation; as an accurate signification of a UFO, or a faulty signifier open to the possibility of an erroneous ufological interpretation. In the former it is inferred that the photograph is an impression corresponding to a ufological original, a UFO, whether actual or imaginary (after all, both "authentic" UFO images and purposeful hoaxes refer equally to UFOs, even if one makes its claims truthfully where the other does so through deceit). In the case of the faulty signifier, accurate representation of the photographic referent is ob-

structed by an iconological inconsistency in the image itself. Crucially, however, at the level of visual reception, neither interpretation necessarily takes precedence over the other. While the contexts from which the photographs originate undoubtedly privilege certain interpretations over others, as images, their essential visual condition is one of being suspended between fulfilling the requirements of conventional photographic mimesis, and short-circuiting into a recursive self-reflexivity.

Crucially, however, where these similarities end, divergences in the indexical registers of the images' depart, and these divergences help further specify the peculiar semiotics of the UFO photograph. For one, these images reveal a number of flaws in the "guarantee" of photography's deictic index. For instance, while it may be possible to make claims for the conventional deictic indexicality of Leach and the FSA's images (which is to say, that they are denotative of the image's gesture to the referent), these claims would not stand up to significant scrutiny. The manner in which the holes in Leach and the FSA's images reproduce the representational instabilities of photographic UFOs with an acute self-reflexivity demonstrates how the deictic index—like the trace index before it—is similarly prone to defaulting to a non-referential photographic materiality. This is principally because the deictic gesture these images foreground is not, as in Barry's photographs, the initial photographic act, but rather the posterior subjection of the photograph to a process of excision. These are images where the ufological figure has very clearly been produced *after* the taking of the photograph, so if they deictically gesture anywhere, it is to the materiality of the image, the photograph as a manipulatable object. Furthermore, this is not what occurs in the majority of purportedly "authentic" UFO photographs. Leach and the FSA's images actively produce an effect that generally occurs passively in "authentic" UFO photographs, where the photographic process generates artefacts that function in a manner equivalent to these holes, and these

figures gesture most emphatically to the image, before reliably gesturing to the referent.

Clearly, then, intentionality—that most unreliable of exegetic pursuits—plays no small role in determining the course of deictic signification. Again, comparison of aspects among Leach and the FSA's image stands to helpfully reveal what remains more subtle in "authentic" UFO photographs. Consider, for instance, how the holes in Leach's photographs appear as searing white transparencies, and those in the FSA images appear as ominous black holes. As has already been established, the holes in both recall—in their puncturing of the image's representational uniformity, and diversion of attention away from the representation, towards the materiality of the image—the visual ambiguities of the UFO photograph. Considering these non-native representational figures as deictic gestures, however, Leach's cut-outs and Stryker's hole-punches function very differently, depending on how one interprets them. Having produced the images so that these holes are filled with light rather than darkness, it is arguable that Leach creates an eerie presence from these conspicuous absences, light cutting through the image like the dazzling brightness of a UFO. The glaring whiteness of the hole in *fig. 7.7*, for instance, assumes a distinct precedence over the dim surrounding scene, regardless of its relative lack of representational figuration compared with the image from which it is carved. It is in this sense that Leach betrays his interest in UFO iconography, and *iconology*. The rudeness of the gesture, slicing out a portion from a photograph, is entirely consistent with the distinctly ufological impulse of producing an alien presence from what is otherwise an absence.[124]

On the other hand, the darkness of the hole-punches in the FSA images signals a distinction from Leach's images. Stryker's censorial intervention, though iconically in-

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[124] Leach has also produced a number of images where the hole in the photograph is filled with darkness rather than light. The present study concentrates on his images that render the gaps in white light to ensure a helpful contrast with the darkness of the FSA photographs. Leach himself evokes the unique absence/presence of the holes in his images when he describes these figures as "yawning crevasses of nothing." Carney, 'PODCAST: Oliver Leach.'

terpretable as a ufological presence, is more prominently deictically aligned with the lack it was intended to produce (the lack that rendered the images unpublishable). The iconic richness of the photographs with which they were made ensures that while they appear shot through with these abyssal perforations, the original representation is not subordinated or displaced by the making of the hole.[125] The fact that the holes are smaller, and often less centralised also aids this impression. Unlike the holes in Leach's images, then—which are also readily interpretable as eye-shaped—both deictic indexicality and iconic inference posit Stryker's hole-punches as a kind of mute witness; whether that of a UFO hovering above the horizon, or a non-representational emblem of the image having been appraised and rejected. It is in the confluence of these latter interpretations that the most interesting implications of the "killed" FSA photographs upon the UFO photograph can be located. That these images resemble UFO photographs (and UFO photographs resemble these images) is telling from the perspective that the dark circles in the FSA photographs stand for, as much as anything else, a visual manifestation of official disapproval. Like the most famous examples of UFO photographs, these are documentations of the rural landscape blemished by figurally ambiguous interlopers, deemed by a government authority as unsuitable for public consumption, before later reemerging with a subversive iconoclasm. In this confluence of official disapproval with the aesthetics of representational disruption, the distinct agitational potential of the UFO photograph comes into view.

So what, in sum, do the Leach and FSA images reveal of the semiological peculiarities of the UFO photograph, particularly as they relate to indexicality? Most significantly, they speak of an uneasy relationship in the UFO photograph between a fluctuating ufological iconicity, and the various forms of indexical reference that might be

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[125] That said, many of the other images Stryker "killed" are considerably more jarring than the images discussed here; most notably images where a hole is punched through the body of a human subject.

brought in to bolster the photograph's evidential "authenticity." Besides the initial trace indexicality of the original photographic impression, the Leach and FSA images present, most notably, holes in the image that visually reproduce the ambiguous ontological condition of the photographic UFO. In the context of this study, the foremost effect of these holes is to allow for the iconic possibility of the production of a UFO image. In both Leach's and the FSA's images, the photograph appears as a border around a gap, which opens up so that the viewer can fill it in with projected iconic ufological inference. However, these UFO-supporting gaps also work to powerfully demonstrate the epistemological disruptiveness of the UFO, and how it dramatically undermines the trace indexicality of the original photographic inscription. Physicalising the UFO's disruption of the photographic gestalt by making holes that very literally puncture the photographic surface, these images forcefully recreate the ontological unplaceability of the photographic UFO, and slide into a unique representational slippage between trace indexicality, and deictic indexicality. The glaring legibility of the traces of physical intervention that produced these ufologically-iconic holes, crudely parodies conventional notions of the indexical trace-ness of photographic images while masquerading as a deictic prompt. In other words, the holes in these images, though clearly holes in the photograph, nevertheless appear sufficiently integrated with the intended referent as to refuse categorical dismissal of their ufological "authenticity," and continue, in spite of their stubborn undecidability, to entertain the possibility that the image attests, deictically, to a ufological actuality. These two sets of images make explicit, then, in the violence of Leach and Stryker's incisions, what remains more elusive in the UFO photograph. Photographic UFOs loiter, suspiciously, in an ambiguous semiotic umbra where though sufficiently visible as to support the iconic projection of a UFO, the indexical register of the image nevertheless remains neither safely attributable to trace-ness, nor deixis. The

photograph's feted "indexical guarantee"—and the legitimacy of its claim to ufological evidence—is caught in an irresolvable suspension.

The comparison of Leach and the FSA's "killed" images starkly reveals the manner in which both of the most prominent conceptions of photographic indexicality—trace indexicality and deictic indexicality—are incapable of documenting the appearance of a UFO in the ways they are often implicitly understood to. This is because the photographic UFO proves time and again to be acutely self-reflexive, and UFO photographs stand, therefore, as significant examples of photography indexing itself in such a fashion as to reveal the essential ambiguity that governs the relationship between the photographic process and what is conventionally understood to be its subject. As Branden Joseph writes, the photographic UFO "throw[s] into crisis the indexical specificity of photography as an artistic medium, [and …] foreground[s] photography's status as media."[126] It draws the observer's attention to the surface of the image, only to endlessly oscillate—visually and ontologically—between the scene depicted and its representation, frustrating all attempts to determine where it truly originates in this disorientating tailspin. In this respect, UFO photographs are notable from a photographic perspective for the manner in which, as Green and Lowry argue of Barry's *Inert Gas Series*, their most prominent locus of indexical reference is that of the medium itself, and the affordances and limitations of photographic inscription and epistemology. If the UFO photograph is to be considered a reliable index of anything, it is less that which is conventionally considered as belonging to the realm of the photographic referent (chiefly the profilmic event, and the possibility of an "authentic" UFO), but the conditions of the photograph itself—its materiality, its visual characteristics, figures, and textures—replete, as they are, with ambiguity and the potential for misrepresentation. Unmoored

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[126] Joseph, 'Nose-to-Nose with a Mutant,' p. 499.

from hegemonic empiricism and floating free in the fantastical world of ufology, the UFO photograph reveals that photography is no more reliable than any other form of visual representation, even if it does trace its imagery from the visible world.

In this respect, UFOs are not only agents of scientific and anthropological disruption, they are, first and foremost, disruptors of representation itself. Achieving, across a flush photographic surface, the semiotic ambiguity Leach's and the FSA's images only approximate via harsh physical intervention, UFO photographs literalise what Slavoj Žižek describes as the "stain which denaturalis[es the] landscape" (writing of the planes that crashed into the Twin Towers in the terror attacks of 2001); the figure whose ideological inadmissibility is directly expressed through a juxtapositional irresolvability of representation.[127] Like the *memento mori* of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*—a human skull painted at a forced anamorphosis at odds with the portrait at large, on its own distinct plane, optically irreconcilable with the rest of the image—the indeterminate ontological status of the UFO, and the indeterminate epistemological status of the photograph, short-circuit conventional notions of pictorial representation in the UFO photograph, puncturing figurative holes in both the image itself, and any sense of photography's unfettered access to actuality. Recalling the dent from Snyder's hammer, the photographic UFO not only supports a convenient untruth (evidence of an actual UFO), but entertains, while tantalisingly withholding, the promise of its indexical corroboration. Furthermore, resisting straightforward placement among the representation of the referent, hovering indeterminately between the representation and as an aberrational artefact at the level of the photographic itself—whether a lacunulose cavity, or a scotomic obstruction—the UFO refuses to neatly settle into any conventional category of indexicality (trace or deixis). It is in this way that UFO photographs dramatically cleave away

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[127] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 15.

from questions of "authenticity," however much ufologists might hope to use them to such an end, instead directing attention to the specificities of the medium, and questioning the very possibility of an "authentic" photographic representation.

While Leach and the artists who developed Stryker's "killed" photographs, through their conscious intervention in the photographic process and appropriation of found images, actively invite such attention, the majority of UFO photographs are not produced in the same way, or are at least made to look as though they were not produced via active interference. At this stage then, there is one final process associated with the photographic inscription that also contributes to the unique aesthetic character of the photographic UFO image, and it is arguably the most significant consideration when it comes to the photograph's ability to substantiate claims for the empirical reality of paranormal phenomena (in addition to producing images that pass for representations of real paranormal phenomena). It relates to certain technological and ideological specificities of the photographic process, and specifically, all that occurs during the exposure that takes place when a photographer activates the camera mechanism. This is the concept of photographic *automation*; the processes in the production of photographs that occur automatically, at a remove from active participation. Because the precise mechanics of photographic automation are temporally-specific, however—the technical specificities of Niépce's heliographs, for instance, varying enormously from those of the image sensors installed in contemporary digital cameras—it is necessary to preface this discussion with a brief consideration of the historical poetics of UFO photography.

## 8. Historical poetics of photographic UFOs

Many who believe in UFOs are quick to offer very specific ufological explanations for the distortions, and representational instabilities frequently present in UFO photographs. Ufology hosts a veritable smorgasbord of pseudoscientific optics purporting to account for such effects. Most commonly, these explanations take the form of what might be described as a miscalibration of technologies—the incompatibility of the UFO and the photographic imaging process—and such arguments are generally posited via one of two ultimately homologous, though differently emphasised explanations: first, the laxity of photographic technology; and second, the elusiveness of the UFO. Visually, this distinction is a moot point—both ultimately describe the camera's unresponsiveness to a UFO—but, culturally, and particularly in relation to questions of the epistemological legitimacy of photographic positivism, this distinction is worth noting, for it expresses the relative degree of confidence (or lack thereof) viewers have historically held in photographic imaging.

An example readily encapsulating the notion of the UFO photograph's representational difficulties as a consequence of the camera's sluggishness is one Jane Marsching provides a useful account of in an article on UFO photographs, and is considered perhaps the very first photographic UFO encounter.[128] On the morning of the 12th of August, 1883, astronomer José Bonilla of the Zacatecas Observatory, Mexico, telescopically observed hundreds of unidentifiable objects moving in front of the sun. Bonilla took several photographs of the objects, but because the technological limitations of the day impeded the photographic process, his UFO images appear as scarcely more than dark blotches on circular fields of white and grey blotches (see *fig. 8.1*). Bonilla, a scientist, offered no unsupported postulations regarding the nature of these

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[128] Marsching, 'Orbs, Blobs, and Glows,' p. 59.

*fig. 8.1:* Untitled. *Photograph by José Bonilla (Mexico, 1883).*

objects, though subsequent explanations have ranged from a flock of birds, to fragments

of a comet, since estimated to have passed in close proximity to earth on that date, and

likely broken up into pieces as its passed through earth's atmosphere.[129] Regardless of

whether the objects Bonilla observed were in fact, birds, comet fragments, or actual

UFOs—objects that have been visually documented in countless other images (if not

necessarily authenticated in the case of the latter)—that Bonilla's photographs remain

ufologically tantalising, yet ultimately unyielding, exemplifies the visual ambiguities in

UFO photographs routinely attributed to deficiencies of the photographic method, rather

than properties of the objects in question. If Bonilla's images do, in fact, represent actu-

al UFOs as some believe, then one might expect them to have appeared similarly in

1888 as they did upon their wider emergence in 1947, and therefore it is typically Bonil-

la's camera that is posited as having failed to capture the UFOs in better detail, as later

cameras proved (marginally) more capable of. The fact that Bonilla's images were taken

fifty-four years prior to the emergence of the modern UFO phenomenon also serves to

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[129] Bob Yirka, 'Mexican astronomers suggest Bonilla sighting might have been a very close comet break-ing up,' *phys.org*, 19th October, 2011 <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-mexican-astronomers-bonilla-sight-ing-comet.html> (Accessed 20th July, 2018).

illuminate that such distinctions are a matter of perspective, specifically a temporally,

and anthropocentrically determined perspective. The indistinctness of Bonilla's images

is commonly attributed to the photographic apparatus, and not the UFOs themselves,

because ufologists know that clearer, more detailed UFO photographs would later be

taken in the twentieth century. Perhaps this might partly explain why the modern UFO

phenomenon is generally considered as having began when it did, despite the existence

of many images, like Bonilla's, that significantly predate the late 1940s. Perhaps, by

1947, instruments for producing images of the visible world (of which photography is

just one of many, including radar, telescopy, microscopy, and radiometry) reached a

point of sufficient reliability, and reproducibility, that representations containing these

aberrant figures could be reproduced and disseminated at such an accelerated pace that

the images sped out of phase with their original representational context.

Alternatively, a figure who offered a number of widely publicised pseudoscientific

reasonings for an opposing explanation of the manner in which UFOs inhibit clear pho-

tographic representation was George Adamski. In his account of a UFO photoshoot in

his 1955 book *Inside The Spaceships*, Adamski offers the following description, identi-

fying the many difficulties one can expect to experience in attempting to produce ade-

quate photographic documentation of UFOs:

> As the photographs show, they [the aliens] were experimenting with the
> amount of light necessary to show the mother ship and at the same time
> penetrate though the portholes to catch Orthon and myself behind them.
>    While this was going on, radiation from both the mother ship and the
> Scout [spacecraft] had been cut to a minimum. I learned later that the
> men had been obliged to put some sort of filter over the camera and lens
> in order to protect the film from the magnetic influences of the craft.
>    [… these] attempts failed, due to the greater magnetic power in the
> carrier [spacecraft] in comparison to that in the Scout.[130]

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[130] George Adamski, *Inside the Spaceships* (New York City, NY: Abelard-Schuman, 1955), p. 248.

Here, Adamski explicitly suggests that the saucers piloted by his extraterrestrial contact, Orthon, exude a combination of visible light, magnetic fields, and unspecified radiations that, even under such agreeable circumstances (Orthon's visit on this occasion was specifically to allow Adamski to photograph his spacecraft), inhibit the photographic process. Such claims are common, particularly among the initial wave of contactees in the 1950s.[131] Branden Joseph notes how contactee Howard Menger, a contemporary of Adamski's, similarly alleged that the "electro-magnetic flux" of the saucers he rode in was responsible for his indistinct photographs.[132] These arguments express a very different view of photography than the dismissive ufological interpretation of Bonilla's images, investing a great deal of trust in photographic technology, even as it fails to elicit any useful results. Of course, it is unlikely Adamski and Menger would adopt such attitudes were it not for the fact that they aid their ufological claims. If photography is in fact the precise representational process their comments imply, then the suggestion that UFOs are capable of eluding it makes them all the more extraordinary, intriguing, and, presumably, technologically superior.

Such attributions are also prefigured in nineteenth century spirit photography. Krauss notes how the two or more overlaid image planes produced in the double-exposures used to make spirit photographs directly contributed to the belief that the ghosts depicted in spirit photographs "did not obey the same [optical] laws to which tangible objects were subject."[133] From a photographic perspective, claims like these are particularly interesting as, contrary to ufology's dismissal of Bonilla's images from the nineteenth

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[131] In fact, entire theories of the paranormal have been conceptualised in terms of the electromagnetic spectrum. John Keel's book *The Eighth Tower*, for instance, outlines a unified theory of the paranormal based on the visibilities and invisibilities of the so-called "superspectrum." See John Keel, *The Eighth Tower: On Ultraterrestrials and the Superspectrum* (New York City, NY: Saturday Review Press, 1975).

[132] Howard Menger, *From Outer Space to You* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1959), p. 78, quoted in Joseph, 'Nose-to-Nose with a Mutant,' p. 499.

[133] M. Decrespe in C. J. H. Hamilton, "Le manque d'effet stéréoscopique dans quelques photographies psychiques," in *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, 1913, p. 359, translated/quoted in Krauss, *Beyond Light and Shadow,* pp. 146-7.

century, they show how paranormal proselytisers are often willing to accommodate, even assimilate, representational specificities of the medium into the alleged properties of the phenomenon they seek to legitimise. By attributing visual characteristics of the UFO—in this case, blur, and the diffuseness of its appearance in photographs—not to the medium, but to the phenomenon itself, figures like Adamski and Menger bend the formulation of their paranormal mythos to the representational order of their chosen medium in just one of many examples of *non causa pro causa* fallacy in ufology. The failure to register photographically is attractively repositioned as evidencing the UFO's circumvention of known optical principals.

The status of Adamski and Menger's images as non-professional, or "amateur," is also significant here, as the contactees' rhetorical negotiation of the photographic ambiguities of their images (especially compared to Bonilla's silence on his scientifically accredited images) is consistent with what Frances Guerin considers a historical shift in the epistemological status of amateur photography, roughly coinciding (like UFOs) with the end of the Second World War. "There was a time when the amateur image […] was identified as a site of truth and authenticity because it emerged in the blindspots of ideological and political structures," Guerin writes.[134] "Today, however, these structures are so tightly controlled that they oversee all image production."[135] Where, previously, "the power of amateur photography lay in the fact that it typically did not consciously set out to expose the invisible," amateur photographers are now increasingly "obsequious to the political and ideological mainstream manipulation of images" imbricated, structurally and psychologically, with the insidious apparatuses of moneyed political and ideological agendas.[136] In their considered, deliberate embrace of photography's inherent ambiva-

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[134] Frances Guerin, 'The Ambiguity of Amateur Photography in Modern Warfare,' *New Literary History*, vol. 48, no. 1 (Winter 2017), 54.

[135] ibid.

[136] ibid., p. 54, 56.

lence (harnessed in support of preexisting ufological agendas, and circulated via the un-regulated, fictively-undifferentiated means of mass-market paperback publishing), Adamski and Menger's images anticipate the compromising consciousness amateur photographers now typically express of image presentation and context. Furthermore, by asserting the visual ambiguity of their images as originating with extraterrestrial ra-diations (in an audacious, opportunistic exploitation of the perceived credibility of in-dexical trace-ness), Adamski and Menger boorishly literalise amateur photography's historical propensity for "exposing the invisible," an elucidatory potential that, in Guerin's view, previously lay in precisely the opposite of the photographer's guiding voice (in the radical polysemy of the amateur image's politically unmotivated produc-tion and circulation).[137]

That Adamski and Menger should specifically implicate radiation in their paranormal justifications has further photographic resonances.[138] In these radioactive emissions of indeterminate nature, Adamski and Menger provide literal expression of the metaphori-cal "emanation[s] of the referent," and "radiations," "like the delayed rays of a star" in Barthes' description of photographic inscription in *Camera Lucida*.[139] Semiotically speaking, Adamski and Menger's fanciful explanations mythopoetically transpose the beguiling ambiguity of indexical inscription into mysterious forces visually detectible in the impediment of iconicity. In doing so, Adamski and Menger might even be seen (to refer to the most neglected of Peirce's semiotic categories in the present study) as mak-ing symbols of UFOs in this respect, even as their representations are offered in the first instance as evidence for the existence of actual paranormal phenomenon. In their re-

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[137] ibid., p. 70.

[138] For more sustained considerations of the interrelation of photographic imaging and radiation, see: Aki-ra Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), and the chapter "Nuclear Conditioning" in Jennifer Fay, *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 59-96.

[139] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 80, 81.

portedly ufologically-induced indistinctness, Adamski and Menger's photographic UFOs are symbolic of the limitations, failures, misrepresentations of the photographic process; the unruliness of its semiotic multitudinousness, and its treacherous ambivalences.[140]

Irrespective of how much Adamski and Menger's explanations for the representational malfunction of their images contribute to the cultural myth of the UFO, they do not, however, contribute in any significant capacity to an understanding of photography (at least not in any direct sense). If the view of UFO photography as legitimate evidence assumes, as previously asserted, that UFO photography is simply ordinary photography, then the malfunction of the image in UFO photography is not a *paranormal* malfunction, it is an ordinary *photographic* malfunction. If Adamski and Menger's mythologising of photographic malfunction reveals anything about photography, then, it is not that these images should be understood as evidence of paranormal UFOs, but that they are evidence that photographic representation can itself function *para-"normal"-ly*. This is not to say that photography is "paranormal" in the typical sense of the term, but to acknowledge, strictly literally, that photographic evidence often functions outside (*para-*) what is typically expected of it (*-normal*). UFO photographs show how photographs do not always adhere to the accurate, reliable, and predictable reflection of actuality typically expected of them. The UFO is the snag that unravels such conventional notions of photographic verisimilitude. UFOs photographs might even be considered "uncanny" in this way. UFOs—and UFO photographs—first emerged at a time when affordable, do-

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[140] It is in this symbolic sense that UFOs are often implicated in vernacular refutations of the officially sanctioned authority of science and technology, from which the general public are typically alienated, both practically and politically. As the less conspiratorial predecessor to the more prevalent "saucer in a hangar" school of ufological conspiracy (in which government, scientific, and military skulduggery is posited as keeping evidence of alien activity on earth hidden from the wider public), contactees like Adamski and Menger, and their amateur image making, assert the access ordinary people have to the frontiers of human knowledge. Moving the goalposts out of the realm of scientific rigour, and into that of the speculative, mystical world of the paranormal, the UFO becomes a symbol for the legitimacy of the extraordinary subjective experiences many people encounter from time to time, and consider science incapable of adequately explaining.

mesticated, amateur photography had fostered a cozy familiarity with the medium, bely-
ing its potential, as a technologically assisted extension of human vision, to diverge
from the visual hegemony. The appearance of UFOs in photographs from cameras typi-
cally used for such "amateur" pursuits as family portraits and holiday snaps is quite
straightforwardly *unheimlich*, in the original Freudian sense.[141] Their unsettling of nor-
malcy is incurred not by outright otherness, but by the medium's ambivalence. It may
show an alien intruder, or it may show an innocuous byproduct of the photographic
technology in which trust is implicitly invested, but either way one's confidence in the
reliability of photographic representation is destabilised.

At the point familiarity and convention enter the equation, it is clear that there is a
significant historical dimension to these aesthetics that has only been touched upon so
far, but is a significant motivating factor in both the explanations previously outlined for
why UFOs never appear satisfactorily legible in photographs. Moving to a more tempo-
rally sensitive approach, then, it will be possible to acquire a better understanding of the
precise historical contours of the automations and alienations that helped constitute the
photographic UFO phenomenon. There are three distinct possibilities for how photo-
graphic UFO aesthetics alter in significance over time, each of which can be mapped
onto the three basic literary tenses. First, there is, as noted, the ideologically-buoyed
familiarity with contemporary photographic aesthetics, capable of confounding the
viewer in encounters with the unexpected. Second, there is the present-day observer's
alienation from photographic media of the past, capable of eliciting ufological interpre-
tations. Third, there is the manner in which the present day observer's unfamiliarity with
emerging photographic developments is capable of eliciting ufological interpretations.
As the aesthetic character of the first is temporally unspecific, and has essentially been

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[141] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny,' in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London:
Penguin, 2003), p. 124.

outlined over the course of this discussion, turning attention to the second and third possibilities is necessary to nuance appreciation of how photographic UFO aesthetics shift through time.

Historically, there was a time when the processes and aesthetics of "old" (still, analogue) photography were capable of eliciting new and mysterious images that satisfied particular popular conceptions of the paranormal. Again, the most significant point of reference here is the mid to late nineteenth century, the widespread commercialisation of photography and the associated rise of spirit photography. That the original double-exposure that led William H. Mumler to patent spirit photography was achieved accidentally in a botched self-portrait is testament to the fact that, for both photographers and their subjects, photography was capable of eliciting surprises in its original historical moment. The imaging of "spirits" in the nineteenth century was not a product of methodically refining technology and technique, but of opportunistically latching onto an error, made at a time when photography, at its most technologically foundational, could still mystify from behind a shroud of technological novelty.

In an unexpected turn, however (given the technique's well-documented debunking at Mumler's 1869 New York fraud trial) spirit photography seems to have recovered much of its persuasiveness in the present-day. Circulating online, detached from any precise historical context, spirit photographs appear as capable of confounding as ever, though where they brought comfort to death-obsessed Victorians, they tend to inspire fear in present day viewers.[142] It seems, that in their ever-receding fall from contemporary relevance, and the proportional defamiliarisation of the scientific and technical

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[142] Refer, for instance, to the following quotation from a general interest article selected from the first page of a Google search for the term "spirit photography," which presents a number of spirit photographs (including Mumler's famous spirit photograph of Mary Lincoln) accompanied by the following erroneous description: "[Mumler] earned both acclaim and scorn from the spiritualist community. Though many accused him of fraud, no one was able to debunk his methods." [Reference withheld as this quotation is included to provide an example of this widespread tendency, not to censure any individual author.]

principles of analogue photography, many old photographs have acquired a *retroactive novelty* no less profound than the "future shock" of cutting-edge innovations in photographic representation.[143] Both, in their respective technological obsolescence and imminence, represent technological processes that occult the production of the image from the present-day viewer. If, as James Elkins asserts, developments in the technology of photography are generally theorised along trajectories of ever more detailed and precise image making, it follows that both long-obsolete methods of analogue imaging and digital images at the cutting edge of photographic representation each acquire distinct fetishistic surplus values in the perception of the contemporary viewer.[144] This seems to account for the seemingly paradoxical conspicuity of analogue media aesthetics in online media streaming services (Netflix, in particular, standing out as perhaps the most significant proponent of this in their productions and acquisitions). Though these services lure in viewers with a new, digitally facilitated means of accessing moving image media, their films and programmes abound in "obsolete" visual aesthetics because, for the average twenty-five to thirty-four year-old Netflix subscriber, the imprecisions of the analogue impart a charge of specificity and uniqueness (citations of the Benjaminian *aura*) that appear as distinct from any spectacular innovations at the frontier of digital representation so as to appear new and exciting.[145] It is in this way that the resurgence of popular and academic interest in analogue photography, and other varieties of old media fetishisation more broadly, likely originate in contemporary alienation from the

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[143] See Alvin Toffler & Adelaide Farrell, *Future Shock* (London: Bantam, 1984).

[144] James Elkins, *Six Stories From the End of Representation: Images in Painting, Photography, Astronomy, Microscopy, Particle Physics, and Quantum Mechanics, 1980-2000* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. 57.

[145] Netflix's previously mentioned docuseries *Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, and its exhibition of the photography-themed horror film *Polaroid* (Lars Klevberg, Dimension Films, USA, 2019), represent two, among many examples of films and television series among Netflix's current output that luxuriate in the technological and aesthetic specificities of analogue media. See Mansoor Iqbal, 'Netflix Revenue and Usage Statistics (2020)' *Business of Apps*, 23rd June, 2020 <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/netflix-statistics/> (Accessed 7th November, 2020).

technological conditions of media, old and new. This is what Joseph means when he writes that "the complex, ambivalent self-reflexive perception prompted by the UFO […in UFO photographs…] rekindles something of the fascination felt by photography's first viewers."[146] When one looks at images like Adamski's, or even the "killed" FSA photographs, their sheer *analogue*-ness, the traces of their physical specificity, sustains intrigue in spite of their seeming obsolescence because, for many, the analogue photographic process that determines their visual character is almost as mysterious as the UFO itself.

A similar condition accounts for the many digital innovations in representation that also produce "evidence" of paranormal phenomena. Perhaps the most common sites for encountering apparently paranormal media in the era of widespread online image and video streaming are websites hosting photographic footage from an unprecedentedly wide range of global contexts. Take for instance the ATFLIR video footage discussed in the preface to this thesis, or the many online videos compiling footage of apparently paranormal phenomena captured by cameras tethered to aerial drones.[147] The technologies involved in producing these images represent an emergent horizon of photographic imaging possibilities, and only when they comport to existing standards of photographic realism, are they embraced by the hegemonic representational order. In other words, these images are popularly assimilated and even championed when the images they produce appear strikingly new, but not so new that they defy comprehension. When these images significantly diverge from expected photographic form, however, as in the anomalies of the ATFLIR and drone videos, their cutting-edge sophistication is experienced as an obfuscation, and the perception of such visual anomalies is readily hijacked by paranormal interpretation.

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[146] Joseph, 'Nose-to-Nose with a Mutant,' p. 501.

[147] Thank you to my supervisor, Michael Pigott, for bringing the latter of these to my attention.

Such digital anomalies—typically subsumed into the category of the "glitch"—manifest with all the unpredictable, seemingly vital aesthetic energy characteristic of the analogue anomalies whose Focillonian emergence is elsewhere invested with a nonanthropocentric quasi-sentience. In fact, digital anomalies are perhaps even more open to interpretation in this way than analogue images. As Sean Cubitt writes, "[t]he glitch indicates another subject in the medium, a ghost in the machine, an inhuman in our communications […] a glitch is evidence that control is never complete." He continues: "Glitches come as a tactical revolt of the material against its organisation."[148] It is in this way that digital UFO photographs might be understood as automating—here, quite literally *making automatic*—the iconoclastic effect achieved by the artists who developed Stryker's "killed" FSA photographs. In a gesture to the inexhaustibility of the interpretative possibilities of a photographic image, such glitches puncture the representational unity of the image, but they do so automatically, unconsciously. Unlike the visual traces left by Stryker's purposeful punch-holes, that reemerge upon their retroactive development perpendicular to Stryker's intention, glitches emerge independently of intent, readymade for assimilation by a paranormal interpretation.

Discussing conspiracy theory videos uploaded to YouTube, Francis Gooding writes of something akin to this phenomenon, identifying a common conflation (or perhaps confusion) of the anteriority and posteriority of photographic reference exemplary of such interpretational possibilities. He observes that many of these videos "depend to a large degree on the reading of […] digital artifacts within these images" that are simply byproducts of the recording, transmission, and/or reception of the images, as opposed to

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[148] Sean Cubitt, 'Temporalities of the Glitch: *Déjà Vu,*' in Martine Beugnet, Allan Cameron & Arild Fetveit (ed.), *Indefinite Visions: Cinema and the Attractions of Uncertainty* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 299.

figurations of the photographic referent.[149] He writes: "artifacts or pixilation are interpreted as features of a hidden reality beyond the image. They are not seen as errors or by-products of digital processing, but as revealed properties of the object pictured, and thus as concrete signs of a completely different and concealed order of reality, existing beneath the one we are familiar with."[150] But, such a phenomenon, which may initially appear as a distinctly new, internet-led crisis of interpretation, really represents little more than all that has been previously discussed (only in relation to UFO images) adapting to the visual particularities of new media. It is in this respect that although photography theorists have consistently attempted to distinguish digital media, ontologically and epistemologically, from analogue images—an argument commonly figured around claims concerning the digital's perceived lack of trace indexicality—UFO photographs reveal that analogue and digital photography have a lot more in common than it might initially seem.

If analogue photographs, as previously argued, struggle to hold down any unequivocal indexical guarantee (other than to the image itself), and digital photographs, as commonly argued, are inherently non-indexical (in the sense of the physical indexical trace), then the claims of ufologists and Gooding's conspiracy theorists dramatically demonstrate the extent to which the meaning of a photograph is determined not in its relative correspondence with the referent, but rather its correspondence with the interpretational biases of the viewer. It is in this respect that although photographic indexicality may not stand up to scrutiny when it comes to substantiating photographic truth claims, the logic of indexical reference is so firmly entrenched within prevailing photo-

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[149] Francis Gooding, 'Artifact Readers: Pixelated Revelations, Glitch Augury and Low-Res Millenarianism in the Age of Conspiracy Theory,' *Unthinking Photography*, February 2017 <https://unthinking.photography/articles/artifact-reader> (Accessed 20th March, 2018).

[150] ibid.

graphic ideologies that it confers such claims with an ill-acquired legitimacy.[151] Here, the digital, so often figured as a fundamental semiological break with the analogue, suddenly appears considerably less distinct from earlier methods of representation. Digital photography might have rendered analogue photography obsolete in a commercial sense, but UFO photographs reveal that "obsolete" media is never truly obsolete. "Old" media may be obsolete in their original function, but they are capable of both supporting new interpretations as they acquire new uses, and, crucially, influencing approaches to the making and reception of new media representations. (This is, of course, exactly what Derrida described in his conceptualisation of "*hauntology*"; that which continues to influence the centre from the spatial or temporal wayside.)[152] This is how a medium of unparalleled realism in the mid twentieth century—occupying a broadly equivalent cultural status in its time to the familiar aesthetics of the mobile-phone selfie—became a medium of ambiguity and intrigue in the early twenty-first-century. Such is the fate of all representational media. As Focillon suggests, media come and go, only forms are perennial.

It is in this way that either side of a brief temporal window in which contemporary photographic imaging is ideologically invested with an intuitive realist guarantee, photography functions most prominently as a transformative medium, a method of imaging that transfigures the real through the variously crude and exacting processes of its material production. The "obsolete" aesthetics of a forgotten photographic past, and the startling, disorientating aesthetics of digital photographic novelty each in their own way

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[151] Peter Geimer affirms this suggestion in an article on trace indexicality in the *differences* special collection on the concept of the index. Although the conditions of indexicality are commonly perceived as no longer applying to digital photography, Geimer observes that a certain ideological persistence of the logic of indexicality ensure that the reception of certain kinds of images continues to be informed by the indexical. This, he argues, is most visible in certain forms of stigmatised or taboo imagery, giving the example of the photograph of a dead human body. This study proposes the appendage of the UFO photograph to such a suggestion. See Geimer, 'Image As Trace,' pp. 7-28.

[152] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 10.

represent technologies that appear to the present-day observer with an indeterminate relationship to their referent. Courtesy of this detachment from the technological conditions of the representation at hand, the medium specific ways in which these indeterminacies are visually expressed, acquire an aura of mysteriousness. In both obsolete and cutting-edge photography the spatiotemporal coordinates of the stages in the photographic process (of the referent, the photograph, and the viewer) are disassociated in such a fashion as to produce profound distortions, both visual and interpretational.[153] As a cultural phenomenon, then, paranormal photographies like UFO photographs serve as reminders that the history of representation cannot necessarily be understood as one of advancing progress towards more comprehensive means of depicting knowledge and experience, even if images appear clearer and more detailed. The technological past lurks behind the viewer entranced by the spectacle of technological advancement, refracting and distorting in the lens of the present, constantly renewing its capacity to surprise and confound as it retreats ever further into historical obscurity. It is in the untenability of this juggling act of demystifying the twin frontiers of paranormal representation, that paranormal phenomena slip into photographic representation, and the realm of perceived credibility. In this regard, UFO photographs (among the most significant of these photographic myths) will never be truly demystified. For as long as there are photographs there will always be photographs of unidentified flying objects.

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[153] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception,* trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), p. 15.

## 9. Automation, occultation, imagination

By now it should be clear that the unique aesthetic characteristics of the UFO photograph are constituted in the intersection of three distinct, yet interrelated factors: the figural properties of the UFO, the representational affordances conventionally conferred upon aspects of photographic representation, and viewers' relative familiarity with the technological profile of photographic processes and practices relative to the historical photographic continuum. The manner in which these factors coalesce in the UFO photograph can be forced, as is typically considered to have been the case in Adamski's images, for instance.[154] However, UFO photographs are usually more convincing when these constitutive factors come together, as in Bonilla's for instance, fortuitously (at least in the context of the ufological claims they are generally put to the task of evidencing). Free of the convenient ostentatiousness typical of the UFOs that appear in actively produced UFO photographs, the unforced UFO photograph sees each of the aforementioned factors fuse under a conventional, naturalised photographic verisimilitude that lends the UFO a further consignment of apparent plausibility. But if this is the case, how should one address this confluence of interdependent factors that elicit such an effect? There is a concept in photography theory that accounts for this, "automation," and an examination of the mechanical processes involved in analogue photography will lead to an understanding of its vital role in the UFO photograph.

In a conventional photograph, the moment of inscription, occurring after the photographer's selection of a subject, is initiated via an almost instantaneous, automatic,

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[154] The exact process by which Adamski made his images is not known, and there are many ways in which he could have achieved the results he did. Of principal importance here is that his images frustrate, rather than aid, processes of their authentication, allowing the true provenance of his images to linger in doubt even as Adamski himself has been discredited *ad hominem*. Take, the visual presence of his home-made telescope in many of his photographs, for instance. Even if his images were "authentic," it is very difficult to analyse a photograph with reference to established optical principals when such a non-standard photographic aid is in use. Its vignetting of the image visually foregrounds the stubborn obfuscation it seems calculated to enact.

mechanised process, in a device (the camera) that functions as an intermediary in the relationship between subject and sign, referent, and image.[155] This quality of photographic image production is commonly referred to as *automation*, referring to the camera's automatic inscribing of the image. Notably, the camera's mechanical automation represents a stage in a photograph's production where highly significant variations in the rendering of the photograph can occur, which can have a profound influence upon the image's semiotic valences. Shutter speed (or exposure time; the length of time in which the photograph is exposed) is perhaps the most notable variable here, potentially clarifying or frustrating the conciseness of signification so commonly taken for granted in photographic imaging. A short shutter speed halts the appearance of objects too fast to comprehend, plucking them from the flow of time, stilling them, and offering them up for closer inspection. Short-exposure images represent deep inscriptions in this way, fine tracings whose visual detail exceeds that of empirical experience. Long-exposure produces shallow impressions, thinly spread across a wider spatiotemporal field. It diffuses and smears, producing spectacular images that—recalling Epstein's *photogénie*—draw upon a medium specific photographic visuality that bears little obvious likeness to optical vision. This is to say that the analogue camera mechanism allows for a wide range of variation in the physical and temporal parameters of its photochemical inscription, and that, crucially, this can have a significant bearing on the image's semiotic character.[156] The example of exposure time also reveals how such variations affect the im-

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[155] Of course, CCTV cameras and other forms of remote, automatic photographic imaging initially seem to complicate the suggestion that inscription occurs following the photographer's selection of a subject. However, the decision to install a camera anywhere, for any purpose, always represents the intentional selection of a possible range of subjects, even if certain camera placements may be more likely to capture certain unforeseen subjects than others. Take a security camera fitted to face a shop door, for instance. It is precisely placed, and framed to monitor the shop's entrance, but the subject is not the shop doors, per se. Rather, its preemptive subject is who or whatever happens to enter the frame that might be of interest to the shopkeeper. As such, there is in fact a preemptive, retroactive deixis at work in such cases.

[156] The visual result of differences in exposure time can also vary according to a number of additional variables, including, most notably, the size of the lens aperture, and the speed of the film stock (though these are arguably less important in the context of the present discussion than the gross visual characteristics associated with variations in the length of photographic exposure more generally).

age's relative iconic fidelity and strength of indexical impression across a consistent interdependent coefficiency; the temporal specifications of the analogue photograph's photochemical inscription modulating both the image's iconic qualities and indexical registers in tandem. Crucially, then, these automated visual impressions—however the camera is calibrated—typically ensure that the viewer is presented with images visually distinct from human ocular vision. As such, whether more concise or more diffuse, a significant task in the reading of photographs is establishing a credible explanation for why and how these representations diverge from what might be expected of first-hand appearance, reconstituting an imagined impression of the photograph's referent (and perhaps even its motion over time).

But how, theoretically speaking, does the automation of photographic exposure render the photographic image distinct from other forms of indexical impression? Although it is possible to pinpoint a moment of physical interaction in the analogue photographic inscription—the trace produced by light reflected off the subject and upon the camera's photosensitive film—this process is initiated not by sheer incidence (as when Bigfoot leaves a footprint in the mud) but by the photographer's admittance of the impression via the gesture of activating the camera mechanism. From the perspective of those with an investment in the evidential legitimacy of the photographic image, then, photographic automation's mechanised inscription is considered capable of bestowing a certification of authenticity upon the photograph and its representational contiguity with the referent. Perceived as taking over where human decision-making leaves off, this is a sentiment that finds expression in the original advertising slogan for Eastman-Kodak film—"*You press the button, we do the rest*"—supporting such claims as the common

photographic dictum: "the camera never lies."[157] From this perspective, automation represents a reassuring buffer of human interference from the production of the photographic sign. This is why photographs are considered, by some, more authentic than drawings or paintings, because they appear detached from the influence of the mind and hand of the artist. It is also why Leach and the "killed" FSA photographs could never truly pass for UFO photographs. The artists' interventions upon the image remain too legible to pass for having been automated.

These ideas compliment Jung's notions of "authentic" UFO photographs and "photogenic" UFOs. An "authentic" UFO photograph, in Jung's estimation, attests to actual material phenomena, rather than the photographer's internal psychology, because the automation of the photographic process is perceived as divorcing subjective perception from the production of an objective image. For such apparent objectivity to be possible, the UFO depicted in the image must have been "photogenic," which is to say capable of being visually represented—iconically and/or indexically—and therefore generative of adequately referential photographs. The photogenic subject participates in a sympathetic relationship with the photographic apparatus in this respect. It offers itself to the photograph with an iconic fidelity and/or indexical guarantee proportionate to that which the viewer requires in order to invest their faith in the image as a reliable intermediary between the subject and themselves. As such, this common sense view of automation figures the photograph as directly causal, as innately legible as a set of animal tracks, or gazing through a window. It does not, however, require much further consideration to appreciate that the reality is significantly more complex than this.

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[157] Of course, Eastman-Kodak's slogan referred predominantly to the photographic development process rather than the initial photographic exposure, though the expression holds true in the context of automation. Eastman-Kodak were instrumental in establishing the consumer photography industry, manufacturing simple, easily used cameras, and providing the time, money, resource, and skill-intensive task of developing film as an additional service. See Tony Oursler, 'Optical Timeline,' *Tony Oursler*, 2008 <https://tonyoursler.com/optical-timeline> (Accessed 26th March, 2018).

In the context of photographic truth claims relating to UFOs, automation is equally responsible for facilitating a disorderly discrepancy between the photograph's iconic, trace, and deictic registers, as it is capable of supporting any fantasy of unfettered photograph denotation. It could even be argued that automation not only accounts for the extent to which the divergence of these semiotic registers is possible in the production of a photograph, but ensures that such divergences are a *precondition* to the very act of producing a photograph, unhelpfully withholding them from view via the hidden workings of the camera mechanism. For instance, by electing to photograph a particular scene, the photographer gestures, as Robert Barry did in his *Inert Gas* images, to an intentionally selected subject. But that the automation of the camera mechanism buffers the photographer's gestural intention from the trace-making of the photographic inscription, does not, as commonly assumed, ensure unequivocal representation of objective actuality. Instead, it opens up opportunities for its semiotic registers to diverge, and such divergences do not always remain visually legible in the resulting image. Such semiotic conflict is, of course, possible in any representation, and accounts for many unintentional misidentifications and deliberate hoaxes. For instance, one can assume, reasonably safely, that Bigfoot footprints are typically hoaxed using impressions made with models of oversized pentadactyl feet. The choice of medium in this case, mud, strengthens the impression via both its aptness, and perceived naturalness (that this is where one would expect a Bigfoot to be), and its rudimentary iconic incomprehensivity (that mud does not typically provide a flawless impression of objects imprinted in it). As such, theoretically speaking, the iconic and indexical register of the fake foot, while essentially only as believable as the model itself, are ferried into the realm of credibility courtesy of a "realism" that gestures to the possibility of Bigfoot's existence as it obscures reference to the hoax. (For if the plot is rumbled, the footprint will no longer gesture to Bigfoot,

*fig. 9.1 (left):* Untitled. *Photograph by Ed Walters (USA, 1987).*

*fig. 9.2 (right): Photograph of the model recovered from Ed Walters' home.
Photograph by* Pensacola News Journal (USA, c. 1990).

only a sorry sculpture.)

In a ufological equivalent of this common Bigfoot hoax, such a substitution is believed to have occurred in a particularly famous series of UFO photographs: contractor Ed Walters' UFO photographs taken in Gulf Breeze, Florida, in 1987. Throughout 1987, Walters produced a number of Polaroid photographs purporting to document a series of dramatic encounters with UFOs (see *fig. 9.1*). His images were later discredited, however, after a model of a flying saucer closely resembling the craft in his images was found in the attic of the house he lived in at the time the photographs were taken (see *fig. 9.2*). Significant here is the manner in which it was possible for Walters' images to iconically figure and deictically gesture to a UFO, while the trace value of his images—and their ultimate deixis—is worth no more than the styrofoam plates it was constructed from. Mike Kelley and Chris Wilder highlight similarities between UFO photography and historically concurrent developments in conceptual art in this regard.[158] They go as far as suggesting that UFO photographs often resemble conceptual art (like

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[158] Mike Kelley quoted in Mike Kelley & Chris Wilder, 'Weaned on Conspiracy: A Dialogue between Chris Wilder and Mike Kelley,' in John C. Welchman (ed.), *Mike Kelley: Minor Histories - Statements, Conversations, Proposals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 388.

that of Robert Barry's, for instance) to the eye of the late twentieth century observer, because conceptual art likewise appropriated the "snapshot" aesthetic exhibited in UFO photographs (both exploiting its visual unremarkability, matter-of-fact-ness, and implicit honesty), and the manner in which UFO photographs, like photographic documentation of conceptual art, assume a totality of representation that, from an aesthetic standpoint, wholly displaces the event it ostensibly documents. Attesting to the strength of the deictic index in the UFO photograph, Wilder even refers to photographs like Walters' as a form "analogous to a sculptural presentation," albeit one where the sculpture is not present.[159]

Like the dent in Snyder's wall, then, which might credibly gesture to a bullet fired from a gun, but actually (though unrecoverably) represents the trace of a hammer strike, photographs like Walters' are significant for persuasively gesturing, iconically and deictically, to an alien spacecraft while, as a trace, they attest to nothing more than a flimsy model (or else a photographic artefact, an usual cloud formation or any number of alternatives). Like the years that pass between Snyder hitting the wall and the occasion the dent is encountered—in which Snyder moves home and the hammer is misplaced—photographic automation serves as an occultation of the image making process, one more readily capable of mystifying than elucidating. Less a guarantee of like-for-like denotation, or window-like transparency, the photograph's buffering from the human hand serves to both induce the divergence of the image's semiotic registers, and conceal this

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[159] Another relevant confluence of the ufological and modern art in photography unobserved by Kelley and Wilder, though readily appreciable in the Walters' example, is that of the model Walters' is believed to have used in the production of his photographs considered in relation to the concept of the "readymade." By selecting an assemblage of ordinary household items and presenting them in a new context via his photographs, Walters enacts precisely the kind of representational transfiguration associated with the readymade in the vernacular context of the UFO photograph. Via the perceived "transparency" of his Polaroid camera, Walters elevates this styrofoam assemblage to nothing less than the mystical heights of credible paranormal evidence (just as Marcel Duchamp used the esteem of the gallery to agitationally induct the quotidian objects of *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), and *Fountain* (1917) into the realm of high art). Chris Wilder quoted in Kelley & Wilder, 'Weaned on Conspiracy,' p. 390. For more on the sculptural possibilities of the photograph, see David Green & Joanna Lowry, 'Time, Object, and Photography in the Work of Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein,' in Geraldine A. Johnson (ed.), *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 148-165.

process from view, introducing the reasonable doubt required to nudge the image, however fantastical, into the realm of apparent plausibility. In the case of Walters' images, it seems clear that without this buffer one would likely be entirely sure that the object they depict is nothing out of the ordinary. Automation is specifically responsible for facilitating the divergence of the iconic, deictic, and trace registers into and out of the photograph in this way. It is the intermediary stage in which the photograph disassembles the referent's semiological profile, and channels its different aspects among variously referential and differently emphasised aspects of the photographic image.

In sum, automation opens up two distinct interpretative pitfalls related to the misapprehension and exploitation of photographic indexicality. First, as is the case for the Gulf Breeze photographs, the apparent intentionality of the deictic gesture of Walters' use of the camera may be permitted to compensate for an insufficiency, in precision or presence, of the photograph's iconic likeness or trace indexicality. This is the role of automation in relation to what was previously described as the transformative faculties of photographic imaging. Walters' images take an assemblage of objects among the most mundane imaginable (including the styrofoam plates everyone has eaten from at parties), and in the process of concealing them behind a spectacular photographic presentation, the resulting images wind up far exceeding the relative significance of the referent. In other words, via a process prefiguring the development of photographic prints in a darkroom—in which negatives are rendered positive and representations are enlarged—the automation of the camera mechanism takes an impression of the scene into the occulted, or obscured space of the camera, and miraculously transforms it into something much more impressive. Second, photographic artefacts, such as blur, lens flair, and photochemical aberrations, might similarly be attributed with the intentionality of the deictic gesture. Here, photographs that unintentionally produce some ambiguous

figuration on the plane of the image, hovering ambiguously between representation and non-representation (like the holes in Leach and the FSA's images, or the compression artefacts in Gooding's YouTube videos), are more than capable of generating potential UFO evidence without actual UFOs.

It is clear, in this respect, that the very concept of automation is conceived of to account for the fact that the photographic process is commonly just as obscure as the referent of a paranormal photograph. This is not to say that photography itself is a mystery. It is always possible to take apart a camera and determine how exactly it produces its images. It is to say, however, that in the photograph's prodigious ability to transport visual impressions from elsewhere to here, automation, from the moment of the photographic inscription to the moment it reaches one's gaze, provides no reliable guarantee of representational "authenticity." As an imperfect theoretical construct devised to demarcate a decisive border between culture and nature in the production of a photograph (to pinpoint the fundamentally inaccessible, but endlessly debated point where the referent ends and the action of the photographer begins), the vagaries of photographic automation permit all manner of assumptions regarding the epistemological legitimacy of a photographic image, ranging from ufology's broad acceptance of seemingly "inauthentic" images, to the sceptic's out of hand rejection of legitimately intriguing images. (In a sense, this is a fundamental strength of the UFO image as disruptive of evidential representation. The UFO, in its interchangeable cultural mythologisation and evidential naturalisation, brings the artificiality of the distinction between culture and nature to the fore. Its refusal to comfortably adhere to the desired representational order of those who elect to produce artificial representations of it, and its apparent unwillingness to adhere to accepted criteria of evidential self-evidence in "authentic" images, is as salient a representation as any of how nature and culture are inextricably entwined in photographic

imaging.) Which begs the question—given the misplaced notion of the reliability of the photographic sign as buffer—what exactly are the "automatic" processes implicated in photography, and what (if anything) can they guarantee in regard to the semiotics of photographic representation?

To answer this question it is necessary to reconsider the present definition of the word "automation." On the one hand, "automation" is often posited as describing solely mechanical aspects of the photochemical inscription, the workings of the camera mechanism. In this view, it is easy to see how the photographic image can be understood as a technological iteration in the lineage of the Orthodox Christian *acheiropoieton* (or, the *icon made without hands*).[160] Indeed, what is photography if not a process from which the hand seems ever-increasingly alienated, especially since the rise of the digital, and the shift from photochemical photography to digital imaging processes, technological developments that often function to further screen the viewer off from the precise means of an image's production. This is also among the reasons that serve as the foundation for a theorist like Kracauer's championing of photography's ability to probe beyond the limits of human sensory experience; that, visually, its mode of representation, initiated by human activity but ultimately taking place outside anthropocentric perception, exceeds the blinkered limitations of ocular visuality.

On the other hand, as Stanley Cavell and others have argued, "automation" accounts for much more than solely the camera, and incorporates the full range of conventionalised behaviours implicated in the production and circulation of media, including those that determine the course of an image's interpretation. In his canonical work of film theory *The World Viewed*, Cavell operates from a definition of photographic automation as an entwining of the technological affordances of the medium with the traditions, con-

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[160] Of course, "icon" here appears in the Christian sense of the word, related to, but terminologically distinct from, Peirce's definition.

ventions, and ideologies of art-marking, equally as constitutive of the medium as any of its particular physical characteristics.[161] In the case of the UFO photograph, this includes such frequently overlooked aspects of the photographic process as consideration of the kinds of situations in which one might have a camera to hand; how many photographs one decides to take, and why; exactly when (as Klass observed) the film is developed; where the developed photographs are kept; who sees them; how are they exhibited; what interpretative strategies are used to make sense of them? Stressing the manner in which automation is inextricable from how photographs are both made and received, Cavell's emphasis on the behavioural habits, and cultural rhythms that govern one's engagement with media—both those inherent to media themselves, and those imposed upon them—inverts the exegetic schema associated with the strictly mechanical view of automation. Here, simply by placing emphasis on different aspects of the use of representational media, photography is reenvisioned as inextricably anthropocentric, as a representation of human interaction with human technology (the myth of photography's nonanthropocentric automation revealed as just that, a myth). Tellingly, the very same photographic properties privileged by Kracauer for their nonanthropocentric access would be characterised by Marshall McLuhan, just a decade later, as "extension[s] of ourselves," and—as writers like Sekula, and John Tagg are quick to assert—since it is people who use photography, it is people who ultimately determine its functions and meanings.[162] In this view, regardless of the extent to which its visual articulations diverge from human ocular vision (insofar as all representational media are ultimately routed back to the human senses), photography is always anthropocentric.

As the nonanthropocentric subject *par excellence*, the UFO serves as an ideal gauge

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[161] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (New York: Viking Compass, 1971), pp. 72-74.

[162] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 7. See also Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive,' and Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*.

for questions of the epistemological legitimacy viewers are willing to grant photographic representation. Looking at these images, one is confronted with the decision of whether to allow the rhetorics of the technological and cultural processes that converge under the name of "automation," to authenticate the "authentic," "photogenic" photographic UFO. From all that has been discussed so far, it is clear that many have been, and are perhaps still willing to allow automation to serve as a guarantee of representational legitimacy. Irrespective of where one falls on this spectrum, however, there remains an unshakeable sense in which the UFO photograph exhibits an elusive surplus to such evidential requirements. Though it should be clear by now how photographs produce UFO images even where there are no UFOs, and how technological and cultural processes help instil these images with a credible evidentiality, what remains less clear is why photographic UFOs remain *compelling* even when they are not *convincing*. Again, automation is implicated here. In addition to all that has been previously outlined of automation's role in rhetorics of photographic evidence, automation's evidentiary associations are significant, on an aesthetic level, for how they seemingly transform the cool, rational, technological photographic gaze into hot, miraculous manifestations, substantially raising the stakes of the representation. How is it that if the uneasy charge of the UFO photograph is largely an imposition, an opportunistic pounce upon incidental representational imperfections native to the photographic medium, that UFO photographs remain so abundantly capable of holding the viewer's attention, and asserting their apparent authenticity?

To answer to these questions it is necessary to return again to the critic that most comprehensively accounts for the manner in which aesthetic peculiarities in paranormal representation lend themselves to the formation of belief, Henri Focillon, whose radical theorisation of figural transference in his conceptualisation of form, alongside another

passage from *The Life of Forms in Art,* provides helpful insight here. As previously established, Focillon's form persuasively accounts for the manner in which the representational anomalies constitutive of photographic UFOs acquire their air of illusory agency. As forms, their activity is comparable to life, they reproduce, evolve, and, belonging to the realm of representation, they require no external impetus, no reference in actuality, to proliferate and endure. But the UFO is no different to any other form in this respect. All representations are manifestations of form, and there are plenty of representations it is much easier to resist making such bold claims about. Why, then, do UFO photographs so insistently compel such responses? The critical factor, it seems, is less the UFO itself, than the medium in which the form of the UFO manifests; in this study, photography.

When Focillon describes the mediation of form as an "introduc[tion] into some *indefinite* realm," he foreshadows the possibility that certain formal manifestations will incur unforeseen connotations.[163] Indeed, given the wide range of media in which the ufological form might take root (including the many possibilities for unmediated first-hand UFO sightings), these unanticipated consequences can be wide-ranging. Forms are metamedial, they might display a preference for certain kinds of mediation, but they are never strictly limited to any particular combination, including what one might consider the conventional parameters of artistic media. In the context of the UFO, then, its "realm" of mediation could just as easily be a peculiarly shaped cloud, a stealth jet prototype, an alien spacecraft, as much as a photographic image, or a painting. The appearance of a UFO in the sky shares a common source with a UFO in a photograph in this respect, only different media are employed in each respective expression. Considered in relation to Focillon's form, then, photography is revealed as just one of many possible ways in which the form of a UFO might be seen to chance upon a particular materiality,

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[163] Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art,* p. 35. [Emphasis added.]

acquiring a physical figuration. Photography has just as much in common, in this view, with a misty night, a mirage-inducing desert, or anywhere else one might expect to encounter UFOs first-hand, as it does with the visual arts. Photography, like those places, is a site for obscured vision, for one's eyes to play tricks. Focillon's form serves as a reminder, then, that photographic UFOs are just one particular kind of many possible UFO representations. But if this is the case, in what respects *are* the visual characteristics of the photographic UFO unique?

It is significant here, that—contrary to the interests of the present study—Focillon cautions against placing too great an emphasis on the medium specific attributes of a representation, and particularly against confusing them with the properties of the form in question. But Focillon's essay is motivated by the task of producing a morphology of artistic expression through a conceptualisation of form, so it should not be surprising that he is chiefly interested in delineating the properties inherent to form, at the exclusion of the extrinsic quantities that might distract from such a task. Notably, the English translation of *The Life of Forms in Art* articulates Focillon's warning with a phrase aptly resonant with the interests of the present study. Regarding the conditions that facilitate artistic expression, the relationship of the tools and materials that enable the manifestation of forms, Focillon is translated as:

> [T]hat these new values and new systems should retain their *alien quality* ["*qualité étrangère*"] is a fact to which we submit with a very poor grace. We are always tempted to read into form a meaning other than its own, to confuse the notion of form with that of image and sign. But whereas an image implies the representation of an object, and a sign signifies an object, form signifies only itself.[164]

The serendipitous double-entendre of the phrase "*alien* quality"—absent in the original,

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[164] ibid., p. 34. [Emphasis added.]

but present here as a byproduct, or artefact, of the translation ("*qualité étrangère*" does not have the same otherworldly resonance in Focillon's native French)—gestures to arguably the key point of the first half of this study. It is *precisely* the "alien qualities" conventionally appended to photography that are of principal interest here.

By insisting that the materials that usher forms into the world are "alien" to the images they support, Focillon directs attention to a consideration of all that is alien about the medium of photography. In fact, if UFO photographs have eluded nuanced appreciation over the years, perhaps it is because viewers have approached them with a misplaced perspective of what is truly "alien" about them. While there is little to suggest that the UFOs in these photographs are truly, "authentically" *alien* (which is to say *extraterrestrial*), even if this is how a considerable portion of the population chooses to view them, then surely there must be something *alien* (which is to say *not an essential characteristic of)* viewers append to the medium of photography?

What, then, are these "alien qualities" appended to the photographic medium, and what does the form of the photographic UFO help reveal of them? In short, they are the many deeply entrenched myths and superstitions, some no less farfetched than ufological belief, that have accumulated around the making and viewing of photographic images. Focillon's "alien qualities" serve as a reminder that while one's interpretation of a photograph might change, the images themselves remain the same, and as such, the contradictions and insufficiencies in the discourse surrounding UFO photographs are not the fault of some conflict in photography itself, but arise instead from a disjuncture between the medium and the expectations that have accrued around it. The implicit faith placed in photographic automation for detaching conscious intervention from the production of evidentially viable representational images asserts the photograph's evidential legitimacy only by distracting from its own arbitrarily-drawn semiotic motivation.

In an exegetic sleight-of-hand, naturalised discourses of photography, both ufological and popular, point not to aspects within a particular photographic image for proof of its "authenticity," but to photographic automation; its technological means of production, its habitual utilisation, and conventional strategies of interpretation. As such, behind the sweeping assumptions of projected iconicity and the lofty abstractions of ecstatic index-icality—all reinforced by notions of an automated, seemingly unadulterated process of photographic production—lies a medium much less understood than commonly assumed. Such preconceptions underwrite the popular appreciation of photographic images so pervasively that, historically, ufologists have quite comfortably presented UFO photographs as substantiating the existence of UFOs, even as, it would seem, the images themselves do very little to persuasively assert their evidential legitimacy. If UFO photographs fail to prove the existence of actual UFOs, then, this is a not failure of the images themselves, which make no essential claim toward evidence, but of an "alien" (imposed, and overdetermined) photographic discourse. As ufologist James W. Moseley said: "The camera can see what the eye can see, it doesn't make it any more real."[165]

The key significance of the photographic UFO as a disruptive force in theories of photography, then, lies in its status as a striking example of precisely where the innate visual tropisms of the photographic image diverge from the "alien" values popularly imposed upon photography as a medium and its functions. The deep-seated taboo screening the UFO off from polite society is also of significance here. Culturally, UFOs are *refuse*, both in terms of that which has passively fallen out of favour, and that which is *refused,* ideologically, socially, scientifically. As is abundantly visible in the cheap ufological paperbacks that lucklessly litter second-hand book shops, and the low-budget

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[165] Moseley was a unique figure in the world of ufology, as despite believing in the reality of UFOs, the overwhelming majority of his publications—including, the widely circulated *Saucer News* and *Saucer Smear* newsletters—consisted of devastating critiques and withering satire of ufological methods. See Gregory Bishop, 'Interview with James Moseley,' *The Excluded Middle*, 31st January, 2009, <http://www.excludedmiddle.com/J.%20Moseley.html> (Accessed 6th December, 2017).

UFO documentaries that bulk out the lower listings of online streaming services, in the most immediate, literal sense, UFOs are generally considered to require no serious consideration, and can therefore be culturally deescalated, and discarded. Likewise, the world of UFOs and ufology is a subculture relegated to the margins, and kept there by such self-enforcing cultural sensibilities as taboo, so that a hegemonic worldview may continue to occupy the centre.[166] But as Kracauer observed, the photographic image exhibits a distinct affinity for refuse. "[W]hat we ordinarily prefer to ignore proves attractive to [the photographic image]" as it is impervious, in his view, to "such inhibitions" as taboo, prejudice, and emotion.[167]

Herein lies the UFO's inherent challenge to evidential interpretations of the photographic image. Kracauer's description of photography's gravitation towards refuse—the excess that eludes the grasp of clear-cut denotation—partially accounts for the UFO's unceasing manifestation in photographic images, past and present, in an immediate, material, and representational sense. As has been demonstrated, cameras are prolific in their generation of UFO images, seemingly out of thin air, through an incalculably wide array of mechanical, optical, chemical, and/or technological variables the photographic is subject to during its production. In the arguments that circulate around these images, culturally-naturalised notions of photographic realism and their attendant support of an "authentic" photographic evidentiality supplement the inherent ambiguities of the UFO photograph, facilitating ufology's discourses of legitimisation. In other words, that such anomalies allow for a ufological interpretation is strictly incidental, photographically speaking. As Kracauer reminds viewers, the photographic image is a semiological mess, one that ufological arguments about photographs seek to tidy up, produc-

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[166] Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall write perceptively on the sociological function of UFO taboo. See Wendt & Duvall, 'Sovereignty and the UFO.'

[167] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 54.

ing "authentic" UFO evidence.

More significantly, however, Kracauer's description of photography's relationship to mess also strikes at the heart of the epistemological contradiction inherent to the evidential interpretation of the UFO photograph. This is that photography's irrepressible generation of visually credible, yet otherwise non-existent photographic UFOs, ceaselessly tugging at the fringe of photographic "authenticity," reveals that the photographic UFO is less accountable to any quotient of empirical veracity, than it is to precisely the fantastical divergences conventional accounts of photographic semiology commonly seek to downplay. Of course, these are also the principals on which ufological claims to evidence often rest, and it is in this respect that photographic UFOs are antithetical to the very possibility of ufological evidence. As the history of UFO photographs attests, cameras are capable of producing UFO images in great abundance, yet by their nature—their chaotic disruption of photography's most familiar interpretative principals—these images resist cooption into ufology's veridictional ambitions. The semiotic instabilities that attract the camera to the UFO—the instabilities that enable photographic UFOs to generate, and sustain ufological interpretations—are the very same properties that resist neat integration with the presentation of photographs as evidence. In other words, UFOs are obviously refuse, and are popularly refused, but viewers may be surprised to learn that UFOs also refuse them, and specifically their attempts to make sense of them.

What this reveals of the UFO photograph is an image far more complex than an epistemologically-depleted token of insubstantial evidence. Considered not for the manner in which it lends itself, usually unsuccessfully, to evidencing actual UFOs, but rather for how it actively resists such attempts, the photographic UFO is an image that in its recursive, self-reflexive, figural ambiguity, is arguably most valuable for its powerful demonstration of the extent to which all semiotic recourse in arguments for pho-

tography's evidential legitimacy only go so far before reaching dead-ends, or looping back on themselves. Revealing the elasticity of Peirce's original semiological formulations to an almost parodic extent, the UFO is a perfect foil for conventional interpretations of photographic reference based in iconicity and indexicality. The UFO is photographically *ekphrastic* in this respect; whatever the ontological status of actual UFOs, photographic UFOs consistently offer overt, yet precise demonstrations of the full range of representational affordances and limitations associated with photographic imaging. In this view, the bafflement so frequently elicited by UFO photographs is the product of photography's chance meeting with a subject whose essential ambiguity mirrors that of the medium itself, consequently alienating the viewer from the conventional strategies of interpretation forcefully imposed upon the medium, and revealing their true "alienness." Photographic UFOs are what Mitchell calls "metapictures" in this respect; images that narrate themselves, their semiological (dis)functions, and embody metatheoretical interventions they stage upon other images (in this case, photographic images more generally).[168]

At the point photographic evidentiality is thrown out, photographic "authenticity" takes on a very different character, and it is here that the radical aesthetic potential of the photographic UFO comes into view. Taking a final pass of Jung's dismissive joke, it is clear now that "authenticity" as it relates to photography's consistent correspondence with unmediated empirical vision, cannot, and should not, serve as the UFO photograph's exegetic terminus. It may be the case that actual UFOs are not "photogenic," but it is undoubtedly true that photographs are *ufogenic*; they insistently produce UFO images where there were no UFOs. Furthermore, if the unique disruptive properties of these images ensure that they cannot be falsified any sooner than a photograph of an ac-

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[168] See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 35-80.

tual UFO can be authenticated, then surely there is nothing inherently "inauthentic" about the UFO photograph that does not readily lend itself to the substantiation of ufological truth claims? In fact, one could even argue, given the photograph's propensity towards generating unreliable UFO images—not to mention the many uncertainties upon which the concept of the "UFO" is based—that it is precisely the most "inauthentic" UFO images by conventional, evidential standards, that represent the *most* "authentic" photographic UFOs. Here, "authentic" refers not to Jung's photograph that exhibits a faithful correspondence with a visual event (after all, there are so few images that fit such a description, as Jung himself noted), but rather to the image's faithful correspondence with the nature of the photographic medium. It might not be advisable to trust photography to produce images that reliably authenticate actual UFOs, but it can certainly be trusted to produce images that complicate the claims one might wish to make with photographs. Again, however evidentially "authentic" or "inauthentic" a photograph may appear, photographs do not *deceive*. They are images; no more, no less. It is only the arguments with which they are presented that are capable of deceit, and of which the viewer of UFO photographs ought to be wary. It is in this respect that outright hoaxes like Adamski, Meier, and Walters' photographs might not be true to ufology, but they are true to photography. Such a stance reclaims the images ufology rejects with a view to harnessing the critical potential of their aesthetic peculiarities.

So what does all this ultimately reveal about photography? Primarily, it reveals—perhaps surprisingly—that all approaches to photographic interpretation, even those based in rationalising notions of photographic empiricism, rely as much on fantasy, speculation, and, crucially, imagination (all processes readily associated with attempts to debunk the claims of ufology), as ufology's arguments concerning the existence and nature of UFOs. "The imagination is absent from current discourse on images and im-

agery," cultural theorists Bernd Huppauf and Christoph Wulf write, yet to what do the interpretative acrobatics of the evidential approach to UFO photographs attest if not leaps of imagination no less fantastical than that of the extraterrestrial hypothesis?[169] Broaching the often cavernous epistemological gap between the photographic image itself, and the viewer's interpretation of it, the imagination is responsible for the naturalised appreciation of photography's window-like, "transparent" correspondence with actuality, upon which most truth claims channeled via photographic images are based.[170] What else but the imagination could account for the experience of looking at a photograph—a distorted, fragmentary impression, flattened out and reproduced on a sheet of paper or screen—and perceiving people, objects, places. Transparency is an imaginative fiction, one that deftly bypasses the perceptual vertigo of the "dawning of an aspect," that which might otherwise alert the viewer to such epistemological stretches, in its naturalisation via the myth of a photographic "authenticity" guaranteed by automation. Dramatically raising the stakes of this photographic myth, only to cast it into a disorientating ambivalence, UFO photographs confront viewers with the possibility that conventional understandings of photography may be no less "crackpot" than ufology. This is why the UFO photograph remains culturally marginalised, but it is also the source of its unique aesthetic potential.

Consistent less with ufology's alternative realism than its own distinct *irrealism*, the UFO photograph is a fantastic image that, in Tzvetan Todorov's sense of the word, resists neat categorisation by eliciting an epistemological "hesitation," denaturing photog-

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[169] Bernd Huppauf & Christoph Wulf, 'Introduction: The Indispensibility of the Imagination,' in Bernd Huppauf & Christoph Wulf, *Dynamics and Performativity of Imagination: The Image Between the Visible and the Invisible* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 1.

[170] Walton, who conceptualised the notion of "transparency," also describes transparency as a "fiction," writing: "Even when one looks at photographs which are not straightforward works of fiction, it can be fictional that one sees. On seeing a photograph of a long forgotten family reunion, I might remark that Aunt Mabel is grimacing. She is not grimacing now of course […] it is fictional that I see her grimacing. In addition, I actually see, through the photograph, the grimace that she effected on the long past occasion of the reunion. […] it is fictional that I see Aunt Mabel directly, without photographic assistance." Walton, 'Transparent Pictures,' p. 254.

raphy's conventionalised realism and its associated evidential affordances.[171] The relative aesthetic value of the UFO photograph lies not in its failure to meet the criteria of attesting to actuality, but in that of a dialectical truth bursting forth from the UFO's disruptive intersection with the photographic image and its interpretational conventions. What, then, might be the use of a photographic image whose primary relation to actuality is that it unsettles one's sense of it? Similarly, if conventional photographic theory no longer adequately accounts for the effects of the UFO's unique visual characteristics, then what, if anything, can be installed in its place? The sheer staying-power of the UFO photograph—circulating widely many decades later, even in the absence of meaningful ufological "proof"—indicates that it must possess some cultural value exceeding the limitations of its associated truth claims, even if it is not immediately clear what this might be.

This alternative appreciation of the UFO photograph operates with two significant effects. It figures the appearance of UFOs in photographs as forcefully prompting recognition that photographic images are no more "real" than any other type of image. As Cohen writes of the etymological root of the word "monster," "the *monstrum* is […] "that which reveals," "that which warns.""[172] Accordingly, the UFO—ostensibly a monstrous vehicle—demonstrates the unstable semiotics of the photographic image, and warns against placing trust in it. But this is only the inverse impression of the established popular and ufological orders of photographic evidentiality. The photographic UFO not only *reveals* the photographs' existing evidential instabilities, it *revels* in them (after all, it might never have ever existed without them). Sure enough, this alternative view of UFO photographs also affirms that photography's inability to credibly substantiate UFO evidence does not exhaust the photographic UFO's meaningful possibilities.

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[171] Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 31.

[172] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses),' p. 4.

The second effect of this recalibrated approach to UFO photographs, then, is an asser-
tion of the productive possibilities of the photographic UFO's unsettling of conventional
approaches to photography. Here, the photographic image's naturalised correspondence
with ocular vision is figured not as providing support for the case for credible photo-
graphic evidence, so much as setting a stage for the UFO's visual subversion of such
claims, and articulation of new representational possibilities. Quite how this is the case
is the object of consideration in what remains of this thesis. Focusing less on the short-
comings of photographic evidentiality, and more on what the UFO demonstrates of pho-
tography's more speculative, alternative capacities, the textual horizon now widens,
branching out from the ostensibly factual photographic UFOs of ufology to the purely
fictional UFOs of popular culture, UFO images that were never intended to pass for evi-
dence. In these fictional texts, the representational inconsistencies that inevitably frus-
trate or even dissolve evidential credibility in the purportedly authentic still, are capable
of moving beyond this semiological impasse, assuming a particularly expressive signifi-
cance in the moving image. Arguably the foremost site of such images is the narrative
fiction film, and these, accordingly, serve as the primary source material for what fol-
lows. Here, the peculiarities of the photograph's "basic properties," schematised in the
first half of the thesis, will be observed serving a syntactical role as the material and aes-
thetic foundation of the UFO's activities in the moving image.

## 10. Photographic UFOs beyond evidence

In *Saucer Movies,* a survey of UFOs in film and television, historian Paul Meehan offers the bold assertion that "UFOs are inherently cinematic."[173] Meehan himself offers little qualification for this assertion, but it is a compelling suggestion. The world of film and television is perhaps the foremost site where photographic UFO images circulate unmoored from questions of evidence. The UFO is an iconographical staple of science fiction, and it also frequently appears in many less obvious circumstances, but it generally functions very differently in the context of moving image fiction. The burden of the filmmaker interested in depicting UFOs is orchestrating the conditions in which a UFO can be visualised without imperilling both the ambiguity and realism necessary to the UFO image. There are a number of strategies filmmakers have devised for managing this challenge, including visual citation of the aesthetics of "authentic" UFO photographs. For now, however, it is sufficient to note that the UFO's representational instabilities serve less here as obstacles to evidential legitimacy, than as catalysing unique possibilities for visual expression, and these possibilities are the subject of the remainder of this study. Beginning, then, by identifying some of the visual continuities these images share with what has previously been determined of "factual" UFO photographs, this section will consider how these images differ in function in the realm of narrative fiction, before going on to address how the UFO of the moving image differs from that of the still.

For the sake of meaningful comparison, this study focuses predominantly upon film and television contemporaneous with the "golden age" of ufology in the latter half of the twentieth century. If, as is commonly alleged, the cultures of "factual" and "fictional" UFO images frequently cross-fertilise — in a manner typically presented by ufolo-

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[173] Paul Meehan, *Saucer Movies: A UFOlogical History of the Cinema* (Folkestone: Scarecrow Press, 1998), p. 1.

gists as compromising UFO evidence while supplementing UFO fictions with an air of "authenticity"—then it is crucial that the selection of source material enables these interconnections to present. Notably, entertainment media of the mid to late twentieth century consisted largely of analogue media and its attendant apparatuses, and for this reason the majority of moving image texts considered in what follows were produced using analogue film and video processes, intended for cinematic and televisual exhibition. While the heavily theorised ontological differences between analogue and digital media play a determining role in the forms screen UFOs take, as noted, the UFO often reveals surprising aesthetic continuities between these technological bases, and their associated theories of interpretation. For this reason, what follows does not solely focus upon analogue UFOs, but will consider digital UFOs where the representations in question provide further insight into the visual characteristics of the screen UFO. But for now, at least, focus remains on the analogue UFO in the moving image.

There is no shortage of ways in which cinematography, like amateur photography, supports opportunities for the iconic projection of UFOs. This is most visible in the optical synonymity of a range of common cinematographic artefacts—including, blur, lens flair, and *bokeh*—with the UFO image. Jacques Aumont writes of the historical poetics of such artefacts in the cinema, coining an umbrella term for optical artefacts produced when the camera lens visibly intensifies, amplifies, or refracts light: "veils."[174] Aumont considers the curious manner in which these veils, or "luminous accident[s]," are capable of assuming a variety of representational valences, ranging from familiar forms of cinematic symbolism (e.g. the messianic halo), to the connotational free-association of the "pure visual event."[175] He considers the veil a cinematic malfunctioning of light,

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[174] See Jacques Aumont, 'The Veiled Image: The Luminous Formless,' in Beugnet, Cameron & Fetveit (ed.), *Indefinite Visions*, pp. 17-37.

[175] ibid., p. 21.

both literally, in terms of the refractions in the camera lens that are the optical origin of artefacts like lens flare, but also figuratively, in terms of the perceptual consequences of such effects (that lens flare is a light that conceals rather than reveals).[176] Aumont's veils support the projected iconicity of UFOs via two mutually complementary possibilities; they obscure other aspects of the image so as to render them as unidentifiable flying objects, or veils themselves appear as UFOs.

Arguably the most famous cinematic embrace of Aumont's veils for the purposes of UFO representation can be seen in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, Columbia, USA, 1977), where director Steven Spielberg and cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond repeatedly induce lens flair to function in both of the previously outlined capacities. When, for instance, the UFO mothership arrives at the Devil's Mountain landing site during the film's finale, it appears as a nocturnal sunburst, whose diffraction spikes are exaggerated by the bright gaps between the shadows cast by awed onlookers (see *fig. 10.1*). Consistent with Aumont's assessment of the veil as a light which conceals rather than reveals, the sunburst denotes the presence of a UFO while ambiguously screening its physical appearance from view. The lens flare it produces in the bottom half of the image also invites ufological association via its resemblance of the luminescent, globular appearance of the smaller UFOs witnessed earlier in the film (see *fig. 10.2*). Spielberg and Zsigmond cite the aesthetics of "authentic" UFO photographs, then—where lens flair functions as both an iconic support for a UFO, and indexical signification of the realism of its representation—while making clear attempts to safely deposit the ufological lens flair's inherent self-reflexivity within the conventionally-sanctioned parameters of cinematic spectacle. Carefully considered framing, continuity editing, and the establishment of clear eyeline matching with witnesses (or even the

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[176] ibid., p. 22.

*fig. 10.1 (above)*: *Still from* Close Encounters… *The UFO lands at Devils Tower*.
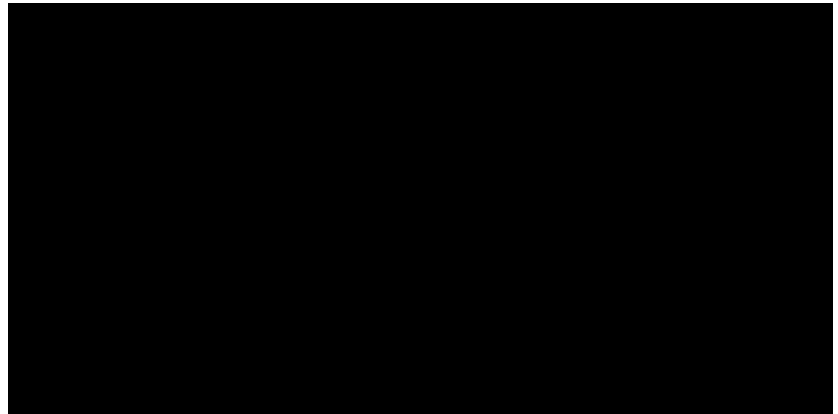
*fig. 10.2 (below)*: *Still from* Close Encounters… *A small UFO passes, pursued by police cars*.

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presence of witnesses in the shot), go a significant way toward dispelling the potentially ruinous visual ambiguity of the UFO's visual character, which is neatly packaged up for entertainment rather than evidence. The lens flair in *Close Encounters…* works to both conceal the craft—the obstructed representation of the fantastical helping maintain a certain realism—and invite viewers into the fictional spectacle by reaching out and touching where they are, behind the lens. The UFO's visual disruption here reflexively reveals the apparatus, as it did in the evidential still, but this reflexivity is harnessed and diverted from total undecidability towards a conventional, aestheticised, pleasurable performance of ambiguity.

Irrespective of the degree to which the filmmakers might have forced the hand of chance here, eliciting veils where they might not otherwise have occurred (a cinemato-

graphic trend Spielberg and Zsigmond played central roles in popularising), Aumont stresses that veils always represent the filmmaker partially ceding control to photographic automation. Cinematographers know how to induce lens flare—just as they knew how to avoid it during the decades it was considered a symptom of cinematographic ineptitude—but as a visual signature of refractive feedback occurring within the camera lens, its exact manifestation can never be fully predetermined.[177] It is in this controlled surrender of the image to the innate optical tropisms of the medium that lens flare illustrates both a consistency of the screen UFO with evidential UFOs, and the broader ufological affinities of the cinema. Aumont's insistence that veils demonstrate the limits of the filmmaker's authorial control (as Cubitt similarly suggested of the digital glitch), affirms that veils, like the automatisms previously outlined in the still photograph, are expressive of the innate ufological tropism of photographic media and the vital, autonomous unruliness of the photographic UFO.[178] Aumont even makes this connotation himself, albeit somewhat tentatively, likening the concealing, effacing effect of the veil to the "swip[ing] out" matte animation used to depict the effects of the Martian death-rays first depicted in *The War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskins, Paramount, USA, 1953).[179] Not UFOs per se, and artificially-imposed visual effects rather than spontaneously occurring artefacts, the ray-gun disintegrations seen in *The War of the Worlds* are distinct from "in-camera" optical phenomena like lens flare and the photographic artefacts discussed in Chapter One. As ufologically-aligned visual effects exhibiting an

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[177] This is the case when lens flare occurs "in-camera," of course, when it is a genuine optical effect in the camera lens. The same cannot be said for when lens flare effects are superimposed over the image, as is increasingly common in digital filmmaking, but it is also the case that these do not represent "lens flare" in the true sense of the term (the camera lens is no longer implicated at this stage in the production). These superimposed flares are better understood as "visual effects," which will be considered shortly.

[178] Aumont writes: "What the veil reminds us, is that such perfection, in its automatism is prone to mistake and lapse—a mistake that is not human, and is thereby even more fascinating. The veil […] is what allows, in the otherwise 'seamless' fabric of the ideal film, a fault, a tear." ibid., p. 35. See also Cubitt, 'Temporalities of the Glitch.'

[179] Aumont, 'The Veiled Image,' p. 33.

influence upon the profilmic referent, however, the Martian death-rays recall the manner, previously observed, in which these optical manifestations seem to reach out to the viewer, like rays (as Barthes wrote of the images in photographs in *Camera Lucida*), serving as a fictional facsimile of the evidential, indexical gesture and trace.[180] As a visual register of optical contact, veils—like the retinal afterimages Jonathan Crary notes fascinated figures like Goethe for what they reveal of the corporeality of sight—are indexical signifiers that implicate the viewer, as not merely a passive bystander, but as a witness, a participant in the sighting whose perspective is directly constitutive of the UFO's appearance.[181] This will later prove central to the development of this thesis' speculative theory of the aesthetics of the moving image UFO, but for now the Martian death ray gestures to another significant aspect of the ufological still observed enduring in the moving image.

Consistent with the stills previously examined, screen UFOs typically exhibit a distinct semiotic disjunction—perhaps even a bifurcation, like that produced by Aumont's veils and Martian death rays—with the apparently stable iconic denotation of the setting in which they appear. This most commonly takes the form of a contrast between the illegible airborne UFO, and the recognisable terrestrial landscape. Here, as in the still, the UFO's stark visual contrast with familiar earthly iconography establishes its abnormality, as the UFO simultaneously draws from the naturalised familiarity of the landscape to acquire a parasitic verisimilitude. This is broadly consistent with film phenomenologist Vivian Sobchack's description of the "visual tension unique to science fiction" that hinges upon the visual collision of the "the alien and the familiar."[182] Draw-

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[180] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 80.

[181] See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision And Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 137-150.

[182] Vivian Sobchack, *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film, 1950-75* (London: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1980), p. 89.

ing upon and expanding Sontag's essay on the aesthetics of science fiction cinema, "The Imagination of Disaster," Sobchack describes science fiction as a cinematic sensibility that makes use of the inherent juxtapositional character of cinema, both within and between images, "present[ing] us with a confrontation between and mixture of those images to which we respond as "alien" and those we know to be familiar."[183] The contrast between the UFO and the landscape serves as a prime example of this. There is at least one way, however, in which the UFO is significantly distinct from the alien images Sobchack describes in science fiction. Where Sobchack notes that science fiction cinema commonly presents its otherworldly images as grand spectacles, "fill[ing] the screen to awe us," screen UFOs, like UFOs in stills, only rarely do this.[184] In particular, many screen UFOs exhibit an ambivalent irreconcilability with the film frame, and—like the previously addressed optical obscurities—this combative visual relationship with the image's border often directly contributes to their ufological iconicity. An example of this can be seen in *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, Paramount, USA, 2016), where the alien craft repeatedly appears in the background of shots, often out-of-focus and cropped by the frame (see *fig. 10.3*). By deliberately refusing to show the craft in focus, and visually downplaying its full scale, the film both underlines the craft's anomalousness—that it is not compatible with conventional (anthropocentric) cinematographic framing—and bolsters its verisimilitudinal integration into more familiar surroundings (that its out-of-focus appearance, consistent with the focal-length of the image, situates both the computer-generated image of the UFO and the photographic image of the rural landscape within a convincing, perspectively unified visual field). It is a representation of the radically unfamiliar rendered perceptually-familiar; a credible depiction of the incredible. Tactically rejecting the declarative acuity afforded by fictional representation—where view-

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[183] ibid., p. 87.

[184] ibid., p. 103.

*fig. 10.3: Still from* Arrival. *The UFO appears integrated with the film world in its photographic consistency with the image's focal length, yet partially unintegrated in its incompatibility with the image frame.*

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ers are expected to willingly accept what is depicted as the actuality of the fiction, however incredible it may seem in relation to lived experience—*Arrival* undertakes a carefully choreographed performance of the photographic deficiencies familiar from "authentic" photographic UFO images, to achieve a verisimilitude all the more spectacular for its underwhelming presentation.[185]

Regarding the relationship between UFOs and their settings—the *mise-en-scène* of the ufological—what is the significance of the kinds of locations in which screen UFOs commonly appear? Generally, these settings are broadly divisible into two categories; specific, well-known landmarks (typically the preserve of fictional representations), and anonymous, liminal spaces (familiar from "authentic" UFO stills). The former emphatically underscore the abnormality of the UFO via an iconoclastic disruption, often both literally (that is physically, diegetically) and figuratively (conceptually, or metaphorically). This occurs in films including *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 20th

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[185] This formal strategy is employed most liberally in the "found footage" style of horror and science fiction filmmaking, where sophisticated visual effects are commonly compressed into consumer-grade cinematography in a similar (though arguably more extensive) act of visual diminution that functions to enhance the spectacle. *Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, Paramount, USA, 2008) is a notable example of this, and a film that will be addressed later in the thesis.

Century Fox, USA, 1951), *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 20th Century Fox, USA, 1996), and *Mars Attacks!* (Tim Burton, Warner Bros., USA, 1996), each of which juxtaposes their UFOs with highly recognisable architectural structures. This is, of course, a long-held convention of the "creature feature," and an established, even conventional, means of cinematically conveying anomalousness. How else, for instance, should one read the arrival of the gigantic alien craft in *Independence Day*, shown dwarfing the Empire State Building, if not as an awe-inspiring oneupmanship of the finale of *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack, Radio Pictures, USA, 1933) (see *fig. 10.4*)? In the craft's effortless eclipse of one of the world's tallest buildings, discrepancy in scale visually indicates the unearthliness of the extraterrestrial invaders as much as it does the magnitude of the alien threat. Released the same year, *Mars Attacks!* dabbles in this convention more playfully. Depicting a markedly smaller, more cartoonish saucer attempting to knock the Washington Monument onto a battalion of fleeing soldiers, *Mars Attacks!* stages a comically exaggerated vision of this alien iconoclasm at the symbolic centre of U. S. governance, striking with gleeful remorselessness at the ideological heart of Western order and certitude (see *fig. 10.5*). Such depictions—including, of course, the less destructive, though no less visually iconoclastic Washington, D. C. landing depicted in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*—similarly draw upon familiar sights of familiar sites to situate both the UFO within the terrestrial, and emphasise its abnormality.

Liminal, marginal spaces offer other opportunities for ufological representation. Historically, UFOs have often been associated with sites of uttermost wilderness, most notably the deserts of the Southwestern United States, but also to a lesser extent the frozen wastelands of the Northern hemisphere. Meehan suggests that these two locales are linked via the mutual association of the nascent nuclear threat of the mid to late
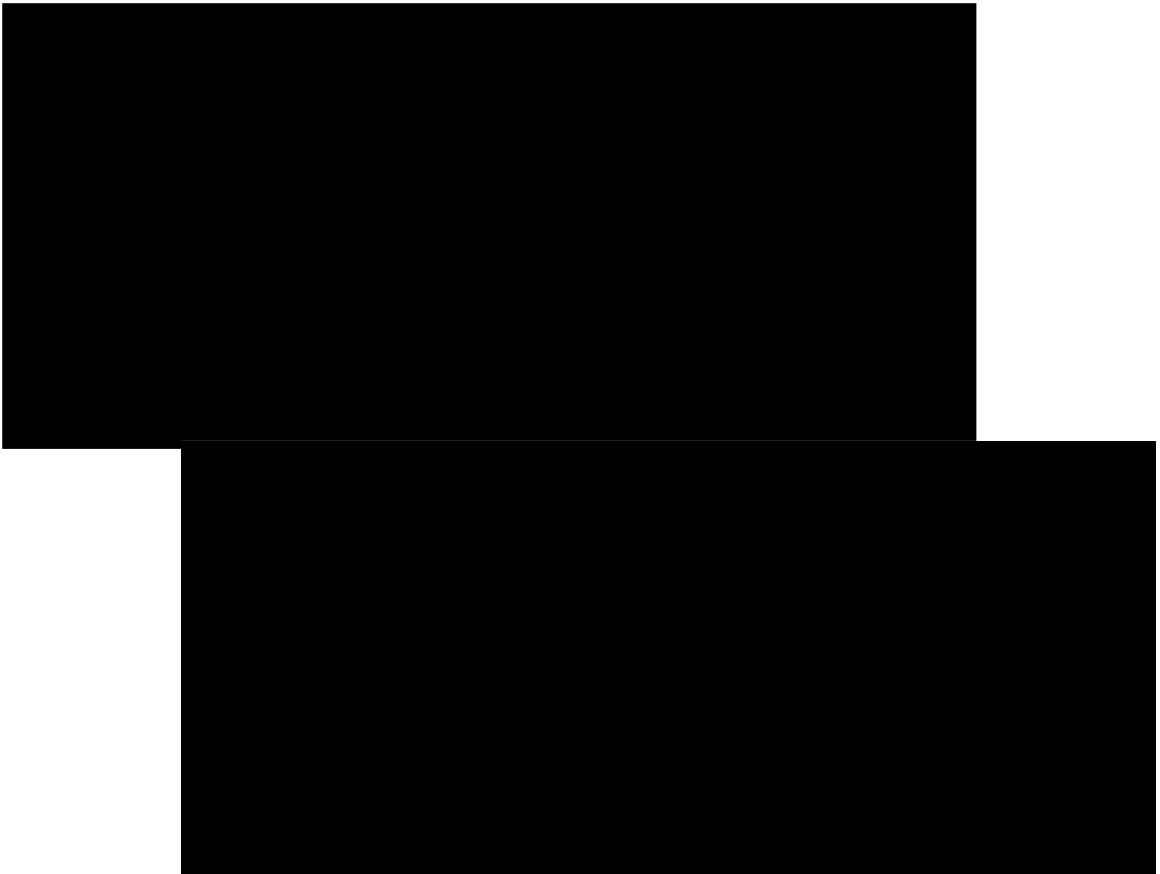
*fig. 10.4 (above): Still from* Independence Day. *A UFO dwarfs the New York City skyline.*

*fig. 10.5 (below): Still from* Mars Attacks!. *A UFO of much smaller size transforms the Washington Monument—an architectural icon of U. S. patriotism—into its deadly plaything.*

twentieth century, the desert a common site for U. S. atomic bomb testing, and the Alaskan/Siberian tundra representing the no-mans-land separating the Cold War's contending superpowers.[186] Such locations are prevalent in "authentic" UFO photographs for obvious reasons (in the absence of multiple corroborating eye-witness reports, a UFO photograph taken in an isolated location is more plausible than a UFO photograph taken in a crowded city street). Because of this visual association with "authentic" UFO photography, these locations are also common in fictionalised moving image representations. Arguably the most famous screen depictions of such locations are *The Thing from Another World* (Christian Nyby, RKO, USA, 1951), and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*

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[186] Meehan, *Saucer Movies*, p. 52.

(Fred F. Sears, Columbia, USA, 1956), the former set in Alaska and the North Pole, and the latter prominently featuring the landscape of California's Sonoran Desert.

A similar liminality, albeit perhaps less stark, is encapsulated in the "Nothing Ever Happens On Mars" sequence in the Direct Cinema parody *Waiting for Guffman* (Christopher Guest, Castle Rock, USA, 1996), a musical number in the film's diegetic stage production based on the history of the fictional midwestern town of Blaine, Missouri. Here, am-dram performer Dr. Allan Pearl (Eugene Levy), wears a green, triocular Martian costume, singing of how their saucer came to Blaine because—ironically, given the film's unflattering portrayal of Blaine—life on Mars is "boring, boring, boring, boring." As culturally neglected, and often socioeconomically deprived locations, the rural town is commonly presented as a site of ufological intrigue, often because these places are depicted as having something to gain from the promise of paranormal contact. A perceptive parody of the original B-movie saucer cycle, *Mars Attacks!* similarly invokes the liminal space as a site of ufological activity with its use of a caption indicating that the Martian landing will not take place in any nameable location, but rather "four miles outside" the nearest town. In fact, even within these liminal locations the particular settings in which UFO encounters are shown to occur are often themselves marginal, including roadsides, motels, trailer parks, diners, and woodland clearings. These are places associated interchangeably with both stagnation and transition. The roadside "Waffle Hut" where the initial UFO sighting takes place in the second series of *Fargo* (USA, FX, 2014-present), for instance, is not only between cities, and between the urban and rural, but its chief witness, petty gangster Rye Gerhardt (Kieran Culkin) is from out of state, passing through on criminal business (see *fig. 10.6 & 10.7*). Impervious to anthropocentric distinctions, it is only logical that the UFO should emerge from the spaces between such places. Where the iconoclastic interruptions of the UFOs in *Indepen-*
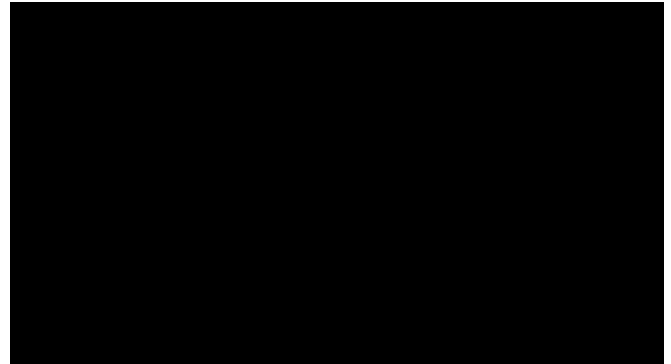
*fig. 10.6 (above): Still from* Fargo. *The "Waffle Hut" where Rye Gerhardt sees a UFO and ultimately gets abducted (though not by a UFO).*

*fig. 10.7 (below): Still from* Fargo. *Rye's UFO sighting (which also features prominent lens flare.)*

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*dence Day* and *Mars Attacks!* telegraph the "steady[,] inexorable," unrelenting intervention of the UFO upon ordinary terrestrial life that Sontag and Sobchack describe, in the wilderness they take on a more ambiguous character.[187] UFOs appear to the people occupying these locations during what are typically their own, terrestrial departures from the ordinary course of everyday life. They are usually free to return to their ordinary lives afterwards, but these films often pose the question of whether they will return, or otherwise remain in the ufological hinterland (a space as much psychological as it is physical).

Whether between the artefacts of the photographic imaging process and the profilmic referent, discrepancies of figural precision between elements in the image, or the iconoclastic stagings of screen UFO sightings, screen UFOs, like those of the evidential still,

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[187] Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster,' p. 45.

are rife with conceptual tension, visual disjunction, and variously successful attempts to resolve the inherent contrast between the fantastical UFO, and the naturalised verisimilitude of photographic imaging. As previously outlined, the semiotic disruptiveness of the UFO often exerts a distinct rupturing effect upon the still photograph, not only by refusing straightforward denotation, but by frustrating the very legibility of the image in its occupation of an undecidable space between the referent and the image, actuality and its representation. Here, however, it is significant that all that has been described so far occurs within functioning fictional diegeses, representations of UFO encounters built from photographic images that rely upon established representational codes as much as the UFO relies on their denaturing. Why, then, might it be the case that these UFO representations do not seem to collapse under the weight of their own semiotic disjuncture as previously witnessed in "authentic" stills?

To an extent, this is attributable to the inevitable devaluation of evidentiality in the consideration of fictional, screen UFOs. As it is not necessary for the images to pass as "authentic" photographic evidence of actual UFOs in the fiction film (at least no more than it is necessary for any other fiction film image to pass as an "authentic" representation of an actual occurrence), immediately, certain epistemological discontinuities can be overlooked in favour of more hypothetical possibilities. Accordingly, the abstractions and obstructions of the moving image work less here to frustrate or withhold access to the UFO as a potentially knowable, but epistemologically inaccessible object, than they do to puncture and destabilise aspects of the ordinary world upon which they incur, offering opportunities for philosophical reflection. But there is also something else in play here, something more "inherently cinematic." It concerns the dimension to which the still image has only an arrested access, and moving images are more capable of approximating. This refers, of course, to time, or more specifically, duration—flow, and its in-

terruption—and its influence on screen UFOs. To consider this in more detail, attention must now turn to a particular film—or really a particular set of films—that help demonstrate the many roles played by time in the representation of moving image UFOs. These films are *purportedly* "authentic" UFO evidence of actual UFOs, filmed by a UFO "contactee," necessitating a momentary return to questions of evidential legitimacy. Beyond these evidential considerations, however, these films reveal many of the unique representational possibilities the moving image affords the representation of UFOs in both fact and fiction.

## *11. Stillness and motion*

The foremost affordance of the moving image—that which distinguishes it from the still—is, of course, the illusion of motion, images through time. These are the "technical properties" of the moving image, in Kracauer's words, constituted in film's combinative presentation of many individual images in a continuous sequence determining the relationships between these images, both in material objecthood, and the structuration of its representational assemblage.[188] These technical properties exist across two distinct temporal levels in the moving image: in the sequential unfurling of individual images (frames) cumulatively producing the illusion of motion (the continuous sequences characteristic of "animation"), and the gross arrangement of animated units (shots) into patterns (sequences, or scenes), typically via editing. Between these two distinct temporal dimensions of the moving image, a range of additional representational possibilities open up for the UFO image. Notably, where the still UFO enacts its semiotic unruliness spatially (by collapsing, and obfuscating the spatial relations between the referent and the point of photographic exposure), the UFO of the moving image extends these representational instabilities through time. To examine some of the ways in which the moving image UFO enacts this temporal unruliness, however, it is first necessary to concentrate on the former category of film temporality, the relationship of images from frame to frame.

*Capturing the Light: The Dorothy Izatt Phenomenon* (Frank Longo, Outside The □ Productions, Canada, 2007), is a low-budget documentary profiling octogenarian "contactee" Dorothy Izatt from Vancouver, British Columbia, who spent decades from the mid 1970s amassing a large collection of original, purportedly authentic UFO footage, shot herself using eight millimetre home-movie cameras. Sympathetic to its subject's

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[188] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 29.
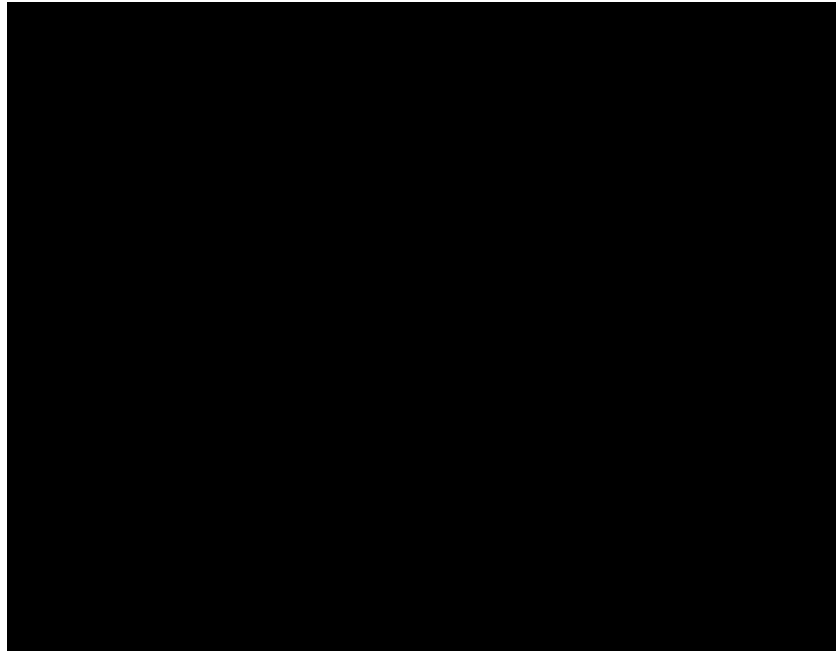
*fig. 11.1: Still from* Capturing the Light, *showing multiple cells in a strip of Izatt's 8mm film. A single incongruous frame can be seen between two frames that belong to an otherwise continuous sequence.*

sincere claims (Izatt, a devout Christian, believes that her films contain messages from divine extraterrestrial "light beings"), the documentary presents numerous extracts from her films, all of which mostly resemble any other ostensibly authentic UFO footage; bright, unidentifiable lights hovering eerily against the night sky, before suddenly vanishing. Izatt's films are unique, however, because in spite of her claim to have filmed the sightings in an ostensibly ordinary fashion—that is, pointing a camera at the lights, and turning it on, with no use of post-production effects such as optical printing—individual frames in her films contain strobe-like "blast[s] of light," chaotic, abstract patterns of intense overexposure, and motion blur, purportedly the product of extraterrestrial craft engaging in wild manoeuvres for less than one-eighteenth of a second (see *fig. 11.1*).[189] Izatt and her followers claim these anomalous frames represent displays of the amazing dexterity of the light beings' craft, able to move in complex patterns through the night sky for a fraction of a second, and that the resulting lightning-like streaks often contain

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[189] Super 8 cameras expose film at the more economical frame-rate of eighteen frames per second, as opposed to the industry-standard commercial film-camera frame-rate of twenty-four frames per second.

written messages, sometimes even pictorial representations.

While Izatt's films serve as the principal focus of what follows, aspects of how they are presented in *Capturing the Light* are also significant, mainly due to two outstanding considerations regarding the relationship between the texts. First, to discuss Izatt's films at all is impossible without considering their representation in *Capturing the Light*, as it remains the only widely accessible site where Izatt's films can be seen (and even then they are only shown in brief excerpts). Izatt is by no means an especially well-known figure in the world of ufology. The documentary repeatedly states that publicity—so often the undoing of contactees—was never a priority for Izatt, so beyond a single book, and handful of local news features, *Capturing the Light* is arguably the definitive document of Izatt's UFO films.[190] Second, as *Capturing the Light* is the only place one might realistically encounter Izatt's films, the significance of how the documentary chooses to mediate them, and the perceptual challenges they present cannot be overlooked. Towards the beginning of the documentary, for instance, footage is shown of a cinema screening of Izatt's films, seemingly a one-off showing to a ufological (rather than general) audience, staged for the purposes of the film. It is difficult to imagine Izatt's films exhibited in this way, given their unusual formal characteristics. If the films were shown in full, one would expect the audience to be mostly sitting in almost complete darkness, waiting for an almost imperceptibly brief, split-second flash, only to be plunged back into darkness again, repeating this every few minutes for each of the films exhibited. A description more befitting of an experimental film screening than a ufological conven-

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[190] Izatt and her films are, however, highly regarded among the relatively small number of ufologists familiar with them. For instance, Peter Guttilla's book on Izatt, prominently displays the following quotation from J. Allen Hynek on its back cover: "Mrs. Izatt's work is unique…," he writes, "a major contribution. I've made a study of the films and I'm convinced they are completely genuine…"). See Peter Guttilla, *Contact With Beings Of Light: The Amazing True Story of Dorothy Wilkinson-Izatt* (Santa Barbara, CA: Timeless Voyager Press, 2003).

tion, this seems an unlikely proposition.[191] In this respect, it should not pose a significant problem that *Capturing the Light* only offers brief glimpses of Izatt's films, as to consider Izatt's claims on her own terms is to assume that everything the documentary excises from her films is reasonably unremarkable. While one cannot afford not to question the influence of the documentary on the perceived legitimacy of Izatt's claims, many of the representational decisions the documentary makes helpfully illustrate the ufological position on Izatt's films, and will be invoked as such when required.

Most immediately striking about Izatt's films is their acute, yet somewhat perverse *cinematicity*. This cinematicity is perverse because while on the one hand, the ufological evidence these frames purport to provide is yoked, very precisely, to the material and technological specificities of the film medium, on the other, this medium specificity seems to come at the cost of film's ordinary function. The scientific anomalousness of the light beings and their craft is visually inscribed as an anomalousness of representation; filmic anomaly as much as scientific anomaly. Discontinuous with the flow of images that precede and follow them, these outlying frames dotted through Izatt's films are seen by ufologists not as faults, symptoms of a mechanical defect that perhaps jams and overexposes a single frame, but are instead assimilated into a ufological epistemology where they are read as representing a UFO's unprecedented manoeuvrability. For those who believe Izatt, then, the cinematicity of her incongruous frames bolsters the credibility of her claims through an appeal to the tangibility of eight millimetre film. It is the "hard, physical evidence," to quote an attendee at a screening of Izatt's films documented in *Capturing the Light*, so often lacking in ufological discussion, and presents itself

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[191] As Chris Kraus writes in her novel *Aliens and Anorexia*, however, "[t]he time frame of [… ] Alien encounters is diffuse and messy, like an experimental film," so perhaps such a screening would be an entirely appropriate presentation of Izatt's evidence. Chris Kraus, *Aliens & Anorexia*, (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2000), p. 16.

as such through its conspicuous medium specificity.[192] Alternatively, from a media-centric perspective, it is difficult to see Izatt's films as incontrovertible UFO evidence when her incongruous frames so closely resemble the product of some in-camera long-exposure trick. Interviewees in *Capturing the Light* (professional cinematographers among them) insistently stress the immense difficulty of doing anything with Super 8 cameras except conventional, linear film exposure, vouching for the improbability that Izatt could have developed, and kept secret, some previously unknown, traceless, atypical application of the camera in the course of producing her films. Yet surely this is the more credible interpretation of these instantaneous, convulsive film expressions? That Izatt has somehow developed an in-camera technique that allows her to temporarily stop the film and make a long-exposure image on a single film cell, erratically swinging the camera over a light source to achieve the luminous streaks seen in her anomalous frames is surely more plausible than the ufological alternative (that the wild manoeuvres of some unknown craft perfectly synchronise with the inner workings of Izatt's camera mechanism so that they remain contained to an individual film cell)? Izatt's films raise the stakes of the "compet[ition]" between "objective" and "subjective" motion Kracauer identifies in the moving image (where "objective" refers the motion of the profilmic subject, and "subjective" refers to the motion of the camera) into an irresolvable conflict in this way.[193] Do these images represent the "objective" motion Izatt insists upon (that the camera is still and the UFO's are moving), or are "subjective" movements of the camera, abstracted against the night sky and condensed into a single frame, producing an illusory trace of objective motion?

Consistent with the manner in which the flow of the moving image is repeatedly

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[192] *Capturing the Light*'s tagline, "30,000 feet of proof," offering a "measure" of "evidence" in length, draws similarly upon the notion of film as the physicalisation, or concretising of evidence. (Thirty-thousand feet of eight millimetre film footage, played back at eighteen frames per second, makes for approximately forty and a half hours of film footage.)

[193] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 34.

posited in ufology as antithetical to the investigative impulse, and how the ufological

circulation of Izatt's evidence outside of *Capturing the Light* comprises mostly of stills

isolated from the films, it is clear, watching *Capturing the Light*, that ufology, insistently

reducing its evidence to stills, is highly suspicious of motion.[194] There is very little dis-

cussion of Izatt's films *as films* in *Capturing the Light*, and even less presentation of

them in motion. In fact, her footage arguably appears less as film than it does as a kinet-

ically-redundant, linearised repository of still photographs.[195] Though Izatt's films are of

course *films*, ostensibly produced via, and intended for, processes of animation, it is also

the case that if it was not possible to still Izatt's films one might never realise that there

is anything particularly remarkable about them. (Or, at least, what marks them as dis-

tinct from other UFO footage might never be appreciated.) It is irrefutable that it is very

difficult to see anything, other than a brief flash of light, when the films are presented in

motion. At odds with the flow of animation, the brevity and brightness of the anomalous

frames acutely contrasts with the comparative emptiness of the sequence they interrupt,

so there is inarguable motivation for stilling Izatt's films: to provide viewers with an op-

portunity they might never have otherwise had to see the anomalous frames in detail.[196]

Nevertheless, this common ufological tendency neglects to address the evidential

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[194] For a stark example of this in relation to Izatt's films (besides *Capturing the Light*), a video uploaded to YouTube compiles a four and a half minute selection of solely the anomalous stills from Izatt's films. The video's description reads: "[The] UFOs move about in 1 film frame only, then become white dots. These are my 1/24th. [sic] of a sec. frame grabs, from super 8 Dorathy [sic] Izatt gave me for a cable TV show." See Martyn Stubbs, 'Izatt Phenomena: UFO Fastwalkers,' *YouTube*, 29th August, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hs-jmsx-63k> (Accessed 6th August, 2019).

[195] This is, of course, an inherent paradox of film—that it produces motion from stills—but the formal composition of Izatt's films brings this to the fore. For more on the relationship between still images and motion in film, see Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[196] It should be noted, however, that, in ufological circles, *Capturing the Light* is generally considered less significant for its showcasing of Izatt's films than for what it later presents as a genuine UFO the film crew seem to catch on video while interviewing Izatt's daughter. This element of the documentary will not be discussed here, as it bears little aesthetic relation to Izatt's films, and the visual characteristics that make them useful in the context of this study. It is, however, a notable aspect of the film, and it may even be the case that in its self-reflexive handling of what the documentary presents as the UFO's diversion of the film's intended course, *Capturing the Light* is an example of what Stella Bruzzi calls "new documentary," referring to documentaries that situate themselves in a critical relationship to established documentary convention. See Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2011).

contributions of the moving image. After all, if Izatt's films weren't films, then the alleged difficulty of fabricating her evidence—as is typically, though reductively, posited as the chief ufological argument for its authenticity—is lost to the ease of producing long-exposure still photographs with even the most rudimentary photographic technology. Izatt and her followers are quick to exploit the conventionalised "authenticity" of photographic automation in this regard—its perception as buffering the human from the production of the image—yet by stilling her films themselves, they contradictorily reintroduce this influence into the representation. Even if one takes Izatt's claims on face value, then, the act of stopping them *post hoc*, is arguably no less of an evidentially-compromising, anthropogenic intervention as any alleged hoaxing. As *Capturing the Light*'s chief means of both negotiating the challenges posed by the atypical temporal structure of Izatt's films, and harnessing these characteristics for their evidential potential, stilling the films appears here as both a wholly necessary representational manoeuvre, and a deeply suspicious one.

Clearly, then, in addition to the competition between interpretations of "objective" and "subjective" motion, ufological distinctions between the ("basic") evidence provided by the still and the ("technical") evidence provided by the film in motion are caught in an epistemological deadlock here, one that *Capturing the Light,* in its struggle to attend to the unique evidential registers of these two distinct modes in Izatt's films, clearly illustrates. To arrive at an understanding of why this might be the case, it is necessary to return, with the benefit of all previously considered of the "basic" properties of the still UFO photograph, to the question of why ufologists more generally so often seek to arrest the representation of the UFO in motion. At a fundamental visual level, UFOs are so notoriously elusive and ephemeral that stills, and/or the stilling of film, might be understood as an expression of the understandable reflex to attempt to contain the phe-

nomenon, to artificially prolong its presence and delay its disappearance. Unrestricted in duration, the still bears a distinct hermeneutical affinity with the investigative impulse of ufology in this respect, a desire for prolonged appreciation it shares with the "moments of narrative halt" Laura Mulvey argues are integral to conventional modes of cinematic spectacle, bringing the ufological gaze into alignment with a cinephilic gaze.[197] Izatt's films seem not only to invite the process of stilling the film, they demand it. Explicitly establishing a temporal structure of tantalising brevity paired with a stark visual contrast, Izatt's films are both uniquely expressive of the UFO's elusivity, distilling its notorious ephemerality to a particularly acute visual paucity, and the inevitability of having to still the film in order to appreciate it. In its compliant acquiescence to this perceived necessity, a documentary like *Capturing the Light* presents the still in a manner exemplary of the conventional ufological outlook, as reclaiming all that is "swept away and denied by the continuous series of images [in film]" (to recall Barthes).[198]

For ufologists and Barthes alike, the still—compared with the moving image—contains a nascent promise of the unreified, wresting open an ambiguous representational space (or, more accurately, a time) allowing for interpretative consideration unencumbered by perceptual limitations and conventionalised semiological preconditions.[199] But while it is true that the more time one is able to spend with an image the more visual information it may be capable of dispensing (and that available interpretational avenues seem to proliferate accordingly), by now it should be clear that this does not mean

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[197] From the canonical essay 'Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,' to her more recent book *Death 24x a Second*, Mulvey has insistently examined the integral role played by stillness and temporal detachment in the moving image, both its illusion in the films that reigned over the era of film's theatrical exhibition—moments of narrative hesitation typically coupled with fetishistic isolation—and the possibility of its literal attainment as facilitated by home viewing interfaces. See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,' *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (October 1975), pp. 6-18, and Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 7.

[198] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 78.

[199] See Roland Barthes, 'The Third Meaning' in Roland Barthes, *Music Image Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 52-68.

that any of the additional interpretative insight facilitated by the benefit of time will necessarily be any more "authentic" than that acquired on first impression. Indeed, arguably, the more time one spends with a still, the more potential there is to overreach in one's interpretative appraisal, to project iconicities, infer indices, and otherwise assemble precarious, tendentious, apophenic exegesis from the relentless fixity of its visual field. In this respect, although the semiotic mutability facilitated by the temporal unlatching of the still beneficially satisfies Barthes' desire for a less deterministic approach to representation, this comes with the inevitable risk of exploitation, chiefly in the form of evidential fabrication. Fraudulent ufologists could take advantage of the pareidolic possibilities of presenting non-ufological images in insinuatingly ufological contexts in this way.[200]

But the representational mutability of the still is not only exploitable during its interpretation. Carving out a temporal interval between the production and exhibition of the image allowing for the artificial imposition of an implied evidential signature, stilling film also aids in the production of fraudulent UFO images. As the evidential "guarantee" of photographic trace indexicality typically rests on notions of some unfiltered contact between the photograph and its referent (and therefore that one would typically expect a film, kept in its canister until it was professionally developed, to be considered more reliable, evidentially, than a film that may have at some stage been tampered with), then the ability to undetectably still the film in order to work further upon an image presents a range of opportunities for the fabrication of indexically compelling evidence. Indeed, there is a distinct possibility that Izatt's evidence might be a representative example of this. If, for instance, Izatt actively induced the anomalous frames in her films, using a long-exposure technique she developed and decided to keep secret, then

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[200] Famously, this occurred with the widely publicised "Face on Mars," an optical illusion first captured in a series of astronomical photographs taken in 1976 by NASA's Viking orbiters depicting a relief in the landscape of the Cydonia region of Mars that resembled a humanoid face.

her films serve as a prime example of how stillness serves in the production of photographic UFO evidence, irrespective of the images' relative facticity. In fact, like the deliberate obfuscation of spatial scale witnessed previously in the Adamski photograph that photographically inflates the scale of a pressure lamp cover using still photography to detach the object from any reliable frames of spatial reference, equivalent manipulations of scale can be witnessed in Izatt's films, only in this case, manipulations of *temporal* scale.

Long-exposure photographs expose a single frame for a longer period of time than ordinary, resulting in streaky, diffuse images, where the photograph has registered the movement of its referent over the exposure's extended duration. In the moving image, then—where exposure time from frame to frame is typically standardised to produce consistent images animated in proportion to "real time"—Izatt's anomalous frames gesture to two distinct possibilities: something is moving too fast to be clearly rendered in the course of the film's ordinary exposure time, or the exposure time of a single frame has been deliberately extended to artificially affect the impression of something moving too fast for the camera's ordinary exposures. That one can imagine Izatt's films being produced in this way illustrates how the decision to interrupt film's ordinary flow to hover over a still proves just as integral to the production of her films as it does to one's viewing of them. When one interprets the anomalous frames as artificially produced, the compulsion to stop the film is a direct response to the uneven, compressed, and perhaps even nonsequential distribution of time the anomalous frames exhibit in their visual contrast with the rest of the images in the sequence. If the "film time" of Izatt's footage in any way diverges from the "real time" of her purportedly "authentic" ufological referent, then it cannot truly be considered an "authentic" representation (though admittedly it is very difficult, by design, to determine whether or not this is the case). Crucially,

however, even if the anomalous frames are interpreted as "authentic," the compulsion to stop the film emerges not from any inherent desire for stasis, but simply to make the most of the opportunity presented by film's standardised, modularised sampling of motion in order to *dilate* the flow of time—that is, viewing (real) time, not filmic (reel) time—to examine the movements of the craft with closer attention. Whichever way one chooses to interpret Izatt's films, therefore, the compulsion to still them lies less in the attainment of stillness in and of itself, than the opportunities arresting motion provides for its examination.

But the visual anomalousness that marks Izatt's spectacular frames as evidentially distinct—their conspicuous lack of continuity with the encompassing animation—is only truly appreciable when considered in relation to the rest of the images in her sequences. Taken in isolation, the images appear no more remarkable than any other pictorialist abstraction. Considered in relation to their neighbouring frames, however, it becomes clear that whatever they represent—ufological or otherwise—is distinct from the familiar order of the filmic representation of actuality. The anomalous frames are disruptive of the expected relationship of film images from frame to adjacent frame, one that typically creates the illusion of continuous motion through visual continuity. In fact, even if the film is presented as a film strip rather than animated, as is often the case in *Capturing the Light*, this is an inherently temporal proposition. It is also a comparative process, one of identifying significant visual discrepancies over the course of a linear progression. However much it may initially seem, then, that Izatt's films are less significant in ufological terms as moving images than they are as stills, this is assuredly not the case. Just because the locus of evidence in Izatt's footage is not attributed to any continuity between images, as is typically the case in conventional cinematic realism, does not mean that the linear succession of images surrounding the anomalous frames

can be safely disregarded. Rather—at least as far as Izatt's films and *Capturing the Light* are concerned—discontinuity between images, the disruption hewn by the UFO in its unruly incursion upon the ordinary, is just as assimilable into the project of present-ing ufological evidence as any more conventional notion of realist continuity.

Of course, it remains possible—indeed probable—that many will interpret this discontinuity sceptically. To do so would take the form of the entirely rational sugges-tion that the discontinuity exhibited by Izatt's anomalous frames tallies unfavourably with the continuity established by every other frame in the sequence. But in a clear demonstration of the eternally evasive toggleability of the ufological episteme (an out-look capable of flipping even arguments against it to its own advantage), Izatt's films not only make the remarkable suggestion that they prove the existence of extraterrestrial life, but do so through a shrewd inversion of the established logic of film realism. Typi-cally, theoretical schemata of film realism are predicated on some variation on the theme, most famously expressed by André Bazin, of the "unity of image in space and time," and the "refusal to break up the action," an unbroken, unforced continuity epito-mised, in Bazin's view, by the long take, and its articulation of meaning through dura-tion and depth of focus.[201] "Accelerated montage play[s] tricks with time and space," Bazin writes.[202] He does not deny that editing—the interruption of the continuous shot —is an important resource in the filmmaker's expressive inventory, but insofar as it compresses, constructs, and otherwise tweaks the representation of actuality, it is less inherently realistic than the unbroken shot, and at odds with the cacophonous polysemy of the long take and its echoes of the rhythms of lived experience. In Bazin's view of film realism, realism is constituted in the agglutinous cohesion of objects developing in

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[201] André Bazin, 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,' in Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, vol. 1, p. 35, 34.

[202] ibid, p. 36.

space over time. As outliers in otherwise continuous, "unified" sequences, then, one might expect Izatt's anomalous frames to be "swept away" by the flow of everything else around them.[203] But considered through a ufological lens they demand the opposite. The discontinuities in Izatt's films, inscribed with an agitational acuteness in her outlying frames, are presented as so visually striking, so representationally compelling, that they displace realist continuity as an evidential register of the moving image altogether. Perhaps it should not be surprising that a radically heterodox worldview like ufology has little difficulty performing such an elaborate conceptual manoeuvre, figuring the anomalous frame, that might otherwise be dismissed as a glitch or a flaw of the medium, as a truer representation of actuality than everything else around it. Categorically asserting the centrality of the individual detail is, after all, an established means of argumentation not only in ufology, but also the world of conspiracies and many other paranormal and paranoiac subcultures.[204] As Frederic Jameson famously suggested, such methods of crude conceptual unification are "the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age."[205]

While not originally formulated in relation to the moving image, Sekula's archival realism also goes some way towards explaining how ufology accommodates and repurposes the seemingly aberrational, objectionable discrepancies of Izatt's stills towards evidential claims. In archival realism, the imposition of conventionalised systems of aesthetic valuation upon selected groups of heterogenous texts is capable of conferring a

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[203] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 78.

[204] In an exemplary ufological account of such an assertion, and specifically one that originates in the act of stilling moving images, contactee Whitley Strieber describes an unusual occurrence he claims to have experienced after pausing video-cassette footage of a 1995 UFO sighting in Colorado. "The frozen frame presented a radically different and unexpected picture," he writes, going on to describe an image of a purportedly unseen craft that manifested only when the image was paused. Whitley Strieber, *Confirmation* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 48. See also Gooding, 'Artifact Readers.'

[205] Frederic Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping,' in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (ed.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), p. 356. See also Frederic Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

more persuasive realism—and, therefore, more credible evidence—than any properties, visual or otherwise, inherent to images itself.[206] As in Sekula's anthropometrical examples of the Bertillon system (French police officer Alphonse Bertillon's method for recording the bodily proportions of criminals using photography), and the English eugenicist Francis Galton's physiognomical photographic composites used for the purposes of racial profiling, abstracted from the apparatus of exhibition and presented in its most basic form, film too can be viewed as a method of systematically linearising a series of photographs. What is a film, in the most direct, material sense, if not a collection of images, physically and conceptually bound together by visual continuity and the process of animation? What is seen in Izatt's films, then, and her supporters' arguments for their evidential legitimacy, is perhaps best understood as a category realignment, in which Izatt's anomalous frames are liberated from the photographic corpuses in which they originate—which is to say, the moving image film strip—and recontextualised via their aggregation with a wider corpus of UFO photography more generally. Of course, it is possible to deploy the principals of Sekula's archival realism to the anomalous frames in isolation. One could easily view Izatt's anomalous frames in the manner one might regard the motion studies of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, or the stroboscopic images of Harold Edgerton, whose long-exposure photographies rendered legible patterns and intervals of motion in a single image. Izatt's anomalous frames lend themselves to interpretation as equivalent aggregative representations of the movement of the light beings' craft—albeit perhaps more chaotic, and difficult to read—the streaks of light in the image plotting the craft's movement through the duration of the image's exposure (such a reading is frustrated, however, by Izatt's credulity-defying insistence that this temporal interval represents just one-eighteenth of a second). This does not, however, satisfactori-

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[206] See Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive,' pp. 3-64.

ly account for the images surrounding the anomalous frames in their native film sequences, those that so easily unseat the evidential legitimacy of the anomalous frames at the level of the most obvious register of archival realism, the enveloping continuity that threatens to overwhelm the anomaly. It is for this reason that it makes sense, ufologically speaking, to extract Izatt's anomalous frames from their immediate filmic context, and resituate them in the archival realm of the "UFO photograph" more broadly, where an alternative interpretational consensus is more forthcoming of a conferred credibility less apparent in their original, material situation. This again accounts for *Capturing the Light*'s continual abstraction of Izatt's anomalous frames from the flow of the films in which they appear, both to link her individual films through the commonality of their anomalous frames, and to subsequently proffer these frames to the ufological community for their perceived continuities with the kinds of photographic UFO images found elsewhere. The ufological realism of Izatt's films, then, is one that can only be derived from an act of recontextualisation ranging from rethinking how these images relate to established cinematic continuity—which is to interpret Izatt's anomalous frames as filmically non-anomalous, like the Gilbreths' motion studies or Edgerton's stroboscopes, as images that archive motion, and in Izatt's case, incredibly fast motion—or otherwise extracting images from one archival context (the original film strip), and affirming their legitimacy with another (the wider UFO photograph corpus).

Izatt's films, then, and their presentation in *Capturing the Light*, illustrate three significant facts: First, though what draws one's attention to Izatt's anomalous frames is inherently cinematic—their striking disjunction from one frame to the next—there is nothing essentially cinematic, or "technical," about their use in the name of ufological evidence. The incompatibility of elements in Izatt's films with conventional notions of continuity and the representational schema of filmic realism is taken up by ufologists

and repurposed, via processes of stilling and excerpting individual frames, as part of their forced introduction to a much broader, alien context (*alien* both extraterrestrially, and in Focillon's sense of the term as a non-native conceptual imposition). Izatt's films do not, after all, actually *show* the craft's incredible movements she and her supporters claim of them. As in the Bonilla case, it is the very *inability* of Izatt's camera—and specifically its sample rate of eighteen-frames per second—to record the breakneck manoeuvres of her alleged UFO that determines both the form of her evidence, and represents a signature of its authenticity.[207] In any other context these tangled clusters of lightning, visually arresting, but abstract and difficult to parse, would appear ambiguously. But like the captions Walter Benjamin feared would flatten out the unique epistemological relief of the photograph (and, with it, the Barthesian promise of the unreified), these images can be aesthetically foreshortened by ufology's ersatz hermeneutics, an interpretational preconditioning that decides upon what it seeks to uncover, and works backwards from its conclusions, rewriting the image's ufological significance as it goes (as in the logic of confirmation bias).[208] As such, the claims Izatt and her followers make about her films bear only a tangential relation to the films themselves. Their claims are not strictly photographic, they merely exploit an unconventional photographic form, via convenient, unifying, literary and curatorial explanations. They emerge not from the films, but discourses running parallel to the text.

Second, that this is the case demonstrates the extent to which obtuse, even representationally obstructive aesthetic characteristics do not significantly reduce the possibilities photographic evidence present for evidencing ufological claims. As Izatt's films

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[207] During the period Izatt produced her films, she never upgraded her camera equipment beyond the eight millimetre format, even as, by the 1980s, Super 8 had been largely superseded by consumer video cameras. That this is the case should not be surprising, given that the form her evidence takes is so precisely determined by the medium specific characteristics of the eight millimetre format.

[208] Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography,' trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1972), p. 25.

clearly demonstrate, even the most atypical, seemingly epistemologically-untenable representational characteristics can effectively support ufological claims when in/appropriately recontextualised. Furthermore, Izatt's films demonstrate how the very same aspects of a ufological representation are equally interpretable as signifiers of evidential "authenticity," and inauthentic misappropriation. They cast into stark relief the ease with which one can toggle between opposing interpretations when viewing UFO images, as one might between visible light and infrared with night-vision goggles.[209] It is in this way that the ufological interpretation of photography and film as an appealing indexical physicalisation of UFO evidence persists among converts, even as glaring structural flaws threaten to collapse the images at a theoretical, semiological level. Methods are always available to invert conventionalised evidential logics so that they might work in ufology's favour.

Finally, while it remains unclear exactly *how* Izatt's films were made, and to what, therefore, they actually attest, what is for certain is that how one arrives at an opinion on their evidential legitimacy (and that of UFO photographs more generally), again, depends less on one's view of the epistemology of photography, and knowledge of historical photographic technology and techniques, than on one's existing opinion about UFOs. On the one hand, Izatt's films show the extent to which the affordances and limitations of particular photographic media have served as a significant historical determinant upon UFO aesthetics. On the other, the ufological discourse ensconcing Izatt's films simultaneously demonstrates how photographic images are epistemologically pliable. Izatt's films emphatically gesture to the highly problematic nature of the interrelation of medium specificity and evidential legitimacy as typically expressed in ufological truth claims. From the anomalous visual surface of Izatt's films, a question, previously

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[209] This is, of course, the case for all UFO photographs, but Izatt's films seem to exist in the narrowest band of what in other cases is a much wider threshold.

only implicit, rises to the surface: What is more palatable? That these films evidence an extraordinary, as-yet-unknown, extraterrestrial technology, or that they demonstrate the extent to which the photographic image is exploitable, and ultimately unreliable? Both options are in their own way inconvenient, so at this stage in the discussion a tilt of the axis of enquiry towards more constructive horizons is required. Moving past ufology's fixation on the evidential still, and the "basic" ufological aesthetics of the photographic image, there are more interesting things at work in Izatt's films than *Capturing the Light*, in its unwavering support of Izatt's claims, can afford to address.

Hopefully, by now, a faint, inverse impression of this more constructive alternative is emerging. The formal anomalousness of Izatt's films forces the distinction between the UFO photograph as evidence, and as an aesthetic experience, to a point of productively destabilising ambivalence, and, as such, Izatt's films serve as a useful stepping stone between ufology's preoccupation with *evidential stillness* (both the desire to reduce moving images to stills, and its interpretational stagnancy) and appreciation of a more radical, speculative, moving image UFO aesthetic. Taking a moment to consider the unique formal characteristics of Izatt's films freed from the constraints of ufology's interest in evidence will catalyse the identification of new interpretative possibilities, and lay the foundations for what remains of this thesis. To do so, it is necessary to make a second approach to Izatt's films and their anomalous frames, this time not for how they function as stills, but for how they function as *moving* images.

The common association of motion with the life-like (mirroring equivalent associations of stillness with death) readily fuels interpretations of the moving image as potentially more truthful, more "authentic," than other means of representation. As such, one might reasonably expect the realistic representation of unrealistic motion to serve as a significant representational target for those wishing to persuade others of paranormal

actuality, and it is in this respect that the inevitability of the earlier return to questions of evidence is revealed to run deeper than the superficial fact that Izatt claims her films are non-fictional. Just as UFOs exploit terrestrial iconography to assert both their credibility and abnormality, in Izatt's films one can observe UFOs performing equivalent, seemingly contradictory semiotic acrobatics in relation to the *temporality* of filmic representation. Izatt's UFOs draw from the credibility associated with moving image motion (its iconic verisimilitude, and the redoubling of its indexical guarantee with every consecutive image exposed to the ostensibly consistent referent), yet simultaneously use it to assert their fantastical manoeuvrability (appearing to perform their elaborate movements in less than one-eighteenth of a second, Izatt's UFOs slip elusively below the threshold of moving image continuity, evading the vivisectional partitioning of the film strip), all of which amounts to an audacious exploitation of the moving image's naturalised, broadly anthropocentric representation of motion.

Izatt's UFOs exemplify what Tom Gunning calls "The Realistic Motion Of Fantasy."[210] Countering what he frames as an overemphasis upon the photographic and the indexical in film studies, Gunning hypothesises that animation has a more legitimate claim to cinematic medium specificity.[211] Drawing from Henri Bergson, and Christian Metz, he posits an alternative to the existential contact associated with trace indexicality in the form of the "participatory effect" engendered by moving image motion, a phenomenological interrelationship between the viewer and cinematic representation in which the physiology of perception—the eyes, ears, nervous system—synchronises with screen motion depicted in a kinaesthetic symbiosis.[212] If a film can be understood in this way, as "demand[ing] that we participate in the movement we perceive," then "the real-

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[210] Gunning, 'Moving Away From The Index,' p. 44.

[211] ibid., p. 38.

[212] ibid., p. 41.

istic motion of fantasy" describes the manner in which seemingly fantastical events set in motion by the moving image, appear more credible—even if only in a fictional sense —when the viewer is inducted into their flow.[213] Of course, this is a purely conventionalised realism, constituted in codes and conventions of film temporality that bear no relation to lived experience. Nevertheless, it describes an opportunity for the spectator to experience UFOs relieved of the burden of empirical judgement, as much as it accounts for the less exciting possibility (on account of its futility) of positing ufological truth claims using moving images.

One can imagine how the state of being set perceptually adrift in a current of film motion running parallel to lived actuality might serve as a radical, even revolutionary space for critical reflection, but this is not what one finds in Izatt's films (or, indeed, in classical film studies, where the cinema apparatus has insistently been treated as a reactionary space of which to be suspicious). Brightly coloured and starkly contrasting with the images surrounding them, when Izatt's films are set into motion their incongruous frames dazzle the viewer, eliciting an acute physiological reaction. In the first instance, this might affirm arguments for the authenticity of her evidence.[214] Given the overfamiliarity with photographic and moving image representation in the media-saturated twenty-first-century, it is easy to imagine how such a visceral reaction might readily associate with extraordinary, even paranormal experiences. Anything capable of eliciting such a response could represent something new or notable as it poses a challenge to the confident, intuitive ease with which viewers consider themselves in command of the media interfaces they engage with on a daily basis. Beyond this more general appraisal, however, it is significant that this jolt should arrive bound up in a curious combination

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[213] ibid., p. 43.

[214] Described here is the *affective* influence Izatt's films impart upon the viewer. There is no pressing need to formally introduce affect theory here, however, as, beyond this initial jolt (and perhaps Gunning's theorisation of the viewer's physiological response to film motion), it is less relevant to the present study than another theoretical approach that will be introduced shortly.

with what seems on first glance to be a profound paucity of image content. What may initially appear as a certain visual inefficacy in Izatt's films, however—a slightness of image-content at odds with the physiological force it exerts— reveals itself upon further consideration as something considerably more complex.

To a media-minded viewer, the strobe-like jolts of Izatt's incongruous frames associatively short-circuit to Structural/Materialism, particularly the work of filmmakers Peter Kubelka, Tony Conrad, and Paul Sharits, whose "flicker" films of the 1960s famously employed extended applications of similar strobe effects.[215] This is not to make the dubious implication that Izatt represents some kind of *cine-savant*—her films a naïve mis/application of Structural/Materialist aesthetics—but rather to acknowledge that when admitted to further comparison, this association reveals something more substantial than a mere passing resemblance.[216] Where the aims of the Structural/Materialists consisted largely (though not exclusively) in attempts towards the elucidation of the film apparatus as routinely mystified and obscured in commercial cinema, Izatt's films' rela-

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[215] Kubelka, Conrad, and Sharits were each responsible for producing the most notable of the "flicker" films of the 1960s, including, most famously, *Arnulf Rainer* (Peter Kubelka, Arnulf Rainer, USA, 1960), *The Flicker* (Tony Conrad, Jonas Mekas, USA, 1966), and *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* (Paul Sharits, Independent, USA, 1968). Izatt's films also recall Ken Jacobs' films and "Nervous Magic Lantern" shows for their strobe effects, and, in composition they resemble Stan Brakhage's experiments with film abstraction, and Jordan Belson's abstract light and colour effects (though the latter are not generally considered Structural/ Materialist filmmakers). The strobing in Izatt's films could also be said to recall the well-documented mid twentieth century anxieties concerning subliminal messaging in moving image representation. See Peter Gidal (ed.), *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI, 1976).

[216] On a side note, it is precisely the kind of prejudice that would have Izatt labelled as a film savant that accounts for why UFOs are a consistent iconographical staple in the controversial art-historical category known as "outsider art." The contactee-like personal investments many typically lesser-known artists express toward their own personal ufological cosmologies often serve critics with superficial justification for declaring the "outsider" status of such figures. By the same token, the means by which these artists express themselves—through art—often has the effect of alienating them from the ufological community, which routinely excludes the aesthetic surplus of such representations in its conspicuous mimicry of the cool rationalism of mainstream science. Among the most famous artists of this description are Ionel Talpazan, Paul Laffoley, William Scott, and more recently David Huggins, and Esther Pearl Watson. Contactee Betty Andersson is a rare example of a figure from ufology who has received sincere ufological acknowledgement for her many paintings and illustrations depicting her abduction experiences. There are also many non-"outsider" artists that have taken UFOs as their subject and faced considerably less ostracisation than their "outsider" peers, including Keith Haring, Tony Oursler, Jim Shaw, Michael Buhler, Oliver Wasow, and Raymond Pettibon.

tion to such interests is considerably more ambiguous.[217] Though the form Izatt's films

take undoubtedly draws attention to film's material base, it is difficult to argue that they

*elucidate* the conditions of the medium, as the intended ufological interpretation of her

images relies in no small part upon mystification of the precise means of their produc-

tion. Izatt claims simply to point the camera and record, yet the more one examines her

films, the less this appears likely to be true. What Izatt does have in common with the

Structural/Materialists, however, is that her films similarly posit a kind of mystical ac-

cess to properties hidden within the cinematic apparatus, that can be excavated with

startling implications. Where the Structural/Materialists sought to locate some vertex of

the cinematic essence in their film work, Izatt finds subliminal messages from divine

extraterrestrial beings.

The stark exegetic divergence exhibited here cannot be downplayed, but what the

two views share is of greater significance than how they differ. Most notably, Izatt's

films share a common filmic language with the demystification strategies of the Struc-

tural/Materialists, insofar as Structural/Materialist aesthetics provide a conceptual out-

line for the filmic structuration of Izatt's ufological absence. What is initially experi-

enced as a conspicuous lack in Izatt's film — a gap of which one is acutely aware (as it is

signposted with a bright flash), yet cannot immediately account for (as there is not

enough time to make out exactly what it is) — is revealed upon closer inspection as re-

plete with anomalous, apparently paranormal activity. Izatt's incongruous frames give

filmic form to the blinding lights and "missing time" of UFO reports in this way. Fur-

thermore, *Capturing the Light*'s stilling of Izatt's films allows their initial incomprehen-

sibility (a product of the dazzling effect concomitant with the brevity of their anomalous

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[217] The Structural/Materialists were also interested in film's relationship to language, abstraction, and, as
Juan A. Suárez has recently argued, concurrent developments in music, chiefly minimalism, and *musique
concrète*. See Juan A. Suárez, 'Structural Film: Noise,' in Karen Beckman & Jean Ma, *Still Moving: Be-
tween Cinema and Photography* (London: Duke, 2008), pp. 62-89.

attributes) to spectacularly unfurl as a visual abundance, not unlike the hypnotic regression techniques that allow abductees to conjure conscious recollections of alien encounters previously shrouded in amnesic haze. Just as Izatt's films provocatively recast the perceptual frustrations and temporal unmoorings associated with the Structural/Materialists as representational signatures of ufological anomaly, then, perhaps Izatt's UFOs might be considered as occupying the space of the contingent filmic truth the Structural/Materialists sought to derive from their cinematic experiments?

Not so much revealed as highlighted by the comparison with Structural/Materialism, among the additional representational opportunities afforded by the moving image is privileged access to the *temporal* complexities of ufological experience. Furthermore, the still frames ufology insistently returns to are recontextualised by this comparison insofar as although they might provoke an evidential interpretation, their role within the broader moving image continuum actually works to destabilise the conventional ufological approach to photographic evidence. The comparison with Structural/Materialist filmmaking reveals that in the context of film, the individual image is just one link in a long chain. Some images may be seen, as is the case of Izatt's anomalous frames, as compressing more information into a particular temporal interval than those surrounding it. (The blurry streaks in Izatt's anomalous frames represent motion after all, and so Izatt's films seem to assert the seemingly paradoxical scenario in which the film is stilled to observe the motion.) But for every anomalous frame in Izatt's films, there are thousands of considerably less spectacular frames, containing more commonplace ufological representations that do not compel examination outside the flow of their intended duration. However convenient it may seem to do so, then, one cannot responsibly ignore every image in a film except the most spectacular. The aesthetic significance of Izatt's anomalous frames derives as much from their discrepancy with the rest of the

images in the sequence, and their resulting inscrutability upon playback, as the surprising volume of detail they reveal upon stilling. As such, Izatt's films highlight the extent to which the film frame occupies a dual ontology; while it might be taken as an image in its own right, it must also be considered an interval in a sequence.[218] To quote Peter Wollen on the at times contradictory interrelations of photographic stillness and motion:

> [F]ilm is like fire, photography is like ice. Film is all light and shadow, incessant motion, transience, flicker, a source of Bachelardian reverie like the flames in the grate. Photography is motionless and frozen, it has the cryogenic power to preserve objects through time without decay. *Fire will melt ice, but then the melted ice will put out the fire…*[219]

If stillness and motion appear at an epistemological deadlock in the ufological quest for evidence, then, it is because stillness and motion are in an epistemological deadlock in photographic imaging more generally. By stilling the film, ufology attempts to put out the fire with ice, but fire will always melt the ice. After all, missing time might appear as an absence, but it is not an outright absence of time, it is really only elapsed time that cannot be accounted for. Moreover, this nascent movement is also apparent in the visual character of Izatt's anomalous frames. Resembling long-exposure images, the compressed motion of Izatt's anomalous frames figures the moving image still as no more and no less than a sampling of indivisible, continuous motion. One-eighteenth of a second may seem like an instant, but if Izatt's extraterrestrial visitors *are* capable of performing such elaborate gestures with their craft in that time, perhaps it feels much longer to them. Their anomalousness is determined by a disjunction between the an-

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[218] This "dual ontology" relates to Barthes' description of a "third meaning" in stills from *Ivan Grozny/ Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (Sergei Eisenstein, Mosfilm, Soviet Union, 1944) as considered in his famous essay of the same name. The third or "obtuse" meaning refers to an interpretative locus of the film image in which "the basic centre of gravity […] is transferred to inside the fragment, into the elements included in the image itself," as opposed to between shots. See Barthes, 'The Third Meaning,' p. 67.

[219] Peter Wollen, 'Fire and Ice,' *Photographies*, no. 4 (Paris, April 1984), p. 119. [Emphasis added.]

thropocentric temporal scale of film and an alien (and extraterrestrial) temporal scale. Equally, though less dramatically, if Izatt fabricates her anomalous frames, one-eighteenth of a second in film-time may actually equate to a much longer photographic exposure. The individual film cell might represent an event horizon for continuous motion—all that falls within its temporal interval will be compressed within it—but the resulting image is still an inscription of time's passage, and the colourful streaks in Izatt's images, however one wishes to interpret them, are representations of motion before they are representations of stasis (like the Gilbreths' and Edgerton's images).

Izatt's films reveal how the difference between stillness and motion in photographic UFO representation represents less of a clean division than an intersection of asymmetrical, variously overlapping and diverging sets of concerns. This serves as a foundation for all the consideration of moving image UFOs to follow. *Capturing the Light* serves as a fulcrum in this thesis' transition from stillness to motion, as its unique formal structure—straddling both the still, the moving image, and the still in the context of the moving image—condenses the key questions relating to stillness and motion in the ufological context into a single text. The film, and the discourse it represents, illustrates the manner in which the still is continually asserted as the ideal state of photographic evidence in ufology (even for moving image evidence), but simultaneously how such approaches exploit the ambiguities of the photographic still, and fail to engage with the registers—evidentiary and otherwise—of the "technical" properties of the moving image. The UFO's aesthetic capabilities extend far beyond the scope of ufological evidence, and close attention to its unique aesthetic character in the moving image will reveal the manner in which it is capable of functioning, like the films of the Structural/Materialists, as disruptively intervening upon conventionalised approaches to moving image representation. Questions of in/authenticity instinctively recede as the visually

untenable contradictions of the screen UFO give rise to new, more speculative aesthetic

possibilities, and these will be the focus of the rest of the thesis.

## 12. Acts of looking

One final aspect of Izatt's films, one not rooted in questions of stillness and motion but involving another comparison between her films and experimental filmmaking, reveals how a tweak to the definition of the "UFO" will better serve the forthcoming consideration of screen UFOs. As previously noted, Izatt explains in *Capturing the Light* how the luminous streaks in her anomalous frames, purportedly tracing the craft's spectacular motion, sometimes contain messages and representational imagery. Most often, these images are alleged to depict the light beings themselves. In one frame, for instance, Izatt alleges there is a light being, in the form of a humanoid alien, holding a clipboard (see *fig. 12.1*). While extraterrestrials are a familiar iconographical motif in ufology (and perhaps to be expected, therefore), altogether more surprising is the alleged text Izatt interprets in her anomalous frames. Perhaps the most significant of these text-based inscriptions appears in an anomalous frame Izatt claims contains her forename, "Dorothy," rendered in three streaks of red and green light spanning the right-hand side of the frame (see *fig. 12.2*).

Only a small stretch of the imagination is required to read "Dorothy" here. This ease of interpretation is facilitated, largely, by the prominent upper-case "D," and lower-case "y" figures of the bottom two lines (and a lower-case "t" in the middle figure), appropriately distributed through what are otherwise ambiguous scribbles. On the one hand, it is conceivable that reading these images as writing is enabled by the interpretational leeway enabled by the temporal dilation of stilling the film. Eschewing the allographic definitude of, say, a monkey reproducing the complete works of Shakespeare on a typewriter, the prodigious visual polysemy of the photographic inscription provides ample support for a wide range of interpretations that grows proportionally in relation to the
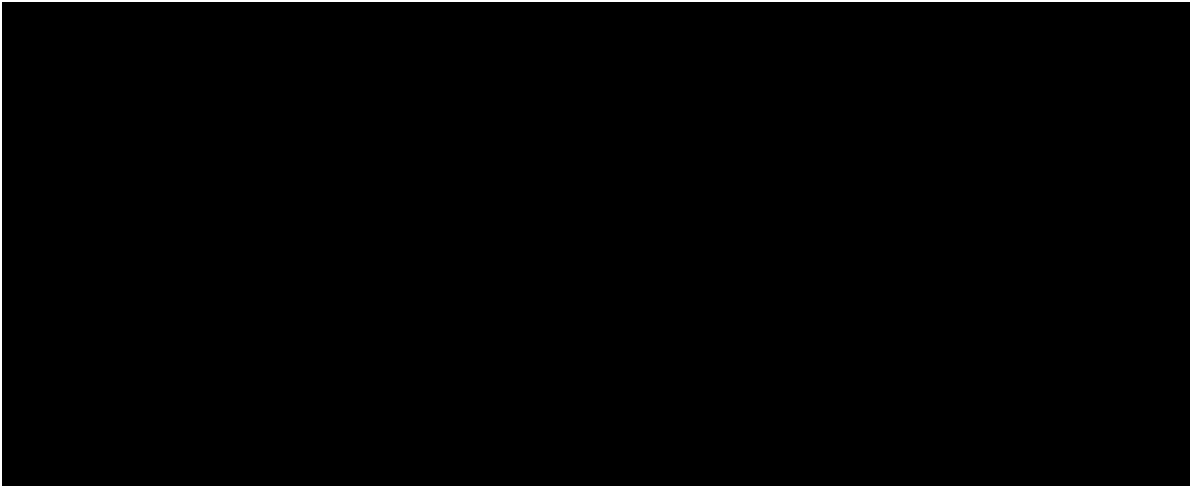
*fig. 12.1 (left):  Detail from one of Izatt's anomalous frames, allegedly depicting a light being holding a clipboard.*

*fig. 12.2 (right): Still from* Capturing the Light, *showing another of Izatt's anomalous frames, this one purportedly containing Izatt's forename, "Dorothy," written in the light from the alien craft.*

length time spent with the image.[220]

On the other hand, the text in Izatt's anomalous frames seems less revealing of the prejudices of the film viewer than the film's production. Notably, Izatt's "Dorothy" image bears a conspicuous resemblance to Stan Brakhage's famous "By Brakhage" film signatures, scratched into the emulsion of many of his films (see *fig. 12.3*). There are, of course, many ways Izatt's images are distinct from Brakhage's, not least that Izatt's exist only for a single frame, where Brakhage animated his signatures over multiple frames so that they etched themselves into the blankness over several seconds. Likewise, it is unlikely that Izatt produced her images using any method remotely comparable to Brakhage's. Brakhage's scratched emulsion looks significantly different to Izatt's name in the anomalous frame. More pressingly, however, Brakhage's method leaves behind a tangible engraving, unequivocally indicating the film's handling (surely among

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[220] "Allographic" here refers to Nelson Goodman's definition of the terms; "allographic" referring to reproducible, and visually reducible inscriptions (like musical notation for instance), as opposed to the "autographic," which refers to unique, visually irreducible inscriptions (like painting). Photography's position within this binary is a contentious topic, as it resists neat categorisation into either category. See Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (New York City, NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), p. 113.

*fig. 12.3: Still from* The Wonder Ring *(Stan Brakhage, Independent, USA, 1955), showing an example of Stan Brakhage's hand-scratched "By Brakhage" signature.*

the first possibilities examiners of Izatt's films would seek to rule out). What is of interest, however, is what the appearance of Izatt's name recalls of an artist's signature, and what this might indicate of the nature of the photographic UFO more broadly.

That Brakhage regularly signed his films in this way is unsurprising, not least because his technique often resembled that of a painter more than that of a traditional filmmaker, applying pigments directly onto the film, scratching, and physically manipulating the celluloid in an almost sculptural approach to filmmaking. That Izatt's name should appear similarly in one of her films is considerably more surprising, especially given that her *modus operandi* as filmmaker is the very opposite of Brakhage's. Where Brakhage's experimental films are revered for their representation of subjectivity and intimate entanglement with Brakhage's creative vision—a proximity inscribed in the indexical traces of Brakhage's manual intervention upon the film—the testimonial legitimacy of Izatt's films is predicated on claims she filmed them in an ordinary fashion, making no post hoc alterations to ensure the honesty required of "authentic" UFO evidence. To suggest that the appearance of Izatt's name in this anomalous frame recalls Brakhage's name at the end of his films is to bring Izatt's purportedly undoctored, photographically-automated UFO evidence into suspiciously close proximity with the in-

tensely worked, authored, and ultimately credited artwork of a filmmaker principally occupied with attempts to cinematically visualise human subjectivity. Accordingly, the connotations of the artists' signature brought out by the comparison with Brakhage, point to the most readily non-ufological interpretation of Izatt's "Dorothy" image; that no longer satisfied with abstract shapes, Izatt, like Brakhage, began experimenting with her established technique, scribbling her name in the movement of the camera during the making of her long-exposure frames, before working out a prescribed interpretation of the images that incorporates them into her existing ufological cosmology. This initially appears—on the surface at least—as yet another problem reducible to questions of evidential credibility. Substantially escalating the visual spectacle of her evidence, the precision displayed in the rendering of Izatt's forename poses a challenge to credulity even greater than that of her anomalous frames more generally. On further consideration, however, it is also neatly demonstrative of another lesser-appreciated aspect of ufological representation with only an ambivalent relationship to questions of evidence.

The appearance of Izatt's name in this anomalous frame and its resemblance of Brakhage's famous film signatures is perhaps the clearest indication so far of the constitutive role played by the observer in the UFO encounter. Resembling—intentionally or otherwise—the signature of an artist, the appearance of Izatt's name in the context of UFO evidence she is alleged to have simply chanced upon, serves as an unintended signification of the distinct authorial role played by the viewer in the making of UFO images, both "real" and "fake." Of course, many UFO photographs are consciously authored. The majority of images considered in the first half of this thesis are generally believed to have been deliberately crafted for the purposes of falsely substantiating ufological claims. But really, *all* photographic UFOs—including "authentic" photographic UFOs, depicting very real anomalous aerial activity—are the product of the observer's

authorial gaze. How exactly is this the case? The most efficient means of explanation is to return to the definition of the "UFO" asking whether what has been seen so far affirms or resists the suggestion that UFOs are necessarily "*unidentified flying objects.*" It is best to do so by readdressing each initial in "UFO," starting with "object," and working backwards.

Is a UFO always an object? If, for the sake of argument, the activity behind UFO sightings is a legitimately unknown phenomenon presently unaccounted for by science, then how is it certain that these as yet unexamined aerial appearances necessarily fit the physical, discrete properties that are typically considered to constitute "objects?"[221] Photographs provide little help in this regard, as it is often difficult to determine the precise nature of anything in photographs, let alone UFOs, which typically frustrate clear identification at every conceivable turn. Similarly, even if one imagines that all UFO sightings actually represent misrecognitions of more familiar aerial activity, it is equally impossible to say for certain whether a UFO is an object (a bird, a plane, etc.), something less physically distinct (certain rare weather activity, or mirages such as Fata Morgana), or even purely optical, solely of the domain of the eye or the camera lens. The essence of the problem this poses to photography is distilled in the laconic parody of deictic indexicality in Barry's *Inert Gas Series* (as theorised by Green and Lowry), and applies to all UFO photographs insofar as they achieve their inscrutability precisely by frustrating attempts to determine the true origin of the seemingly anomalous figures seen within them. Are they physical objects, atmospheric disturbances, or artefacts of the photograph itself? This is rarely clear. The same is also true of Izatt's films. Is it possible to reliably state, visually speaking, that the luminous streaks in her anomalous

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[221] Referring to the *Oxford English Dictionary* entry for 'object, *n.*' reveals the manner in which the general understanding of the term has evolved from an older, looser definition of "something placed before or presented to the eyes or other senses," to the distinctly more tangible "a material thing that can be seen and touched." Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'object, *n.,*' *Oxford English Dictionary* <https://0-www-oed-com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/Entry/129613> (Accessed 3rd April, 2019).

frames are more likely motion trails of the lightning-quick movements of a UFO than movements of Izatt's camera? Not with any certainty, and not without reference to existing conceptions of relative probability non-native to the image.

Similar difficulties affect the adjective "flying." Typically, "flying" connotes an agency, active aerial locomotion over the passivity of "floating," "falling," or "gliding." Birds and planes "fly," where rain and dust "fall." Inanimate objects like paper aeroplanes and drones might be said to "fly," but both represent intelligently-designed, and deliberately-operated projectiles. When these connotations of flight are combined with assumptions of objecthood it is easy to see how the "flying objects" of the "UFO" lead many to entertain extraterrestrial explanations of the UFO phenomenon. The U. S. Air Force's initial decision to forgo reference to the "flying saucer" in favour of the "UFO" was made for this very reason. It is difficult, if not impossible, to state unequivocally that any of the photographs discussed so far in the study truly depict "flight." The eerie stasis of the hovering UFOs in Adamski and Meier's photographs, and in the moments preceding the spasmodic movement of the anomalous frames of Izatt's films, does seem to mark the UFOs as paranormal through their seemingly antientropic defiance of gravity, yet equally, by compelling the viewer's attention to the surface of the photograph, they appear more likely accounted for by a flaw of the representation than a truly extraordinary referent.

"Unidentified," however, is arguably the most important term in the "UFO" initialism, particularly with regard to the present discussion. It is where visuality enters the equation, and ultimately leads to an alternative definition of the "UFO" this study will henceforth adopt. So what does "unidentified" really mean in the context of the "UFO?" The most efficient means of answering this question is to first ask what it means to be *not* unidentified, or—to invert the double negative—what is an *identified* flying object?

There are, of course, countless "IFOs," but there is rarely any reason to describe them as such, because the very act of identification—associating a particular specimen with a larger genealogy—is itself a precursor to naming. Whether a "bird," a "kestrel," or "Kes," a "plane," an "Airbus A318," or "Flight BA1," commonalities in visual expression associated with particular objects and phenomena allow for identification, and the formalisation and specialisation of those typologies and specimen with certain groups, and individual names.[222] These are luxuries not generally afforded to those who witness anomalous aerial phenomena (at least not beyond the loose, "catch-all" of "UFO"). Unlike other more stable iconographies—including, arguably, the "flying saucer," the "mystery airship," the "foo fighter," the "ghost rocket," and the "green fireball"—the apophatic "UFO," fundamentally *"unidentified,"* introduces a distinctly negative ontology to the categorisation of anomalous aerial activity. The truly *unidentified* flying object cannot be located in the visible presence of particular features, but rather in lack, the absence of identifiable features. Like the Derridean spectre—that which is neither fully here nor fully there—the UFO is ontologically unplaceable.[223] Present enough to appear, it nevertheless remains sufficiently absent as to elude identification. It represents a semiological superposition, a perceptual entanglement, the unidentified *thing* that could be a bird, a cloud, a plane, an alien spacecraft, or any number of other things, but crucially, not any one in particular. If "UFO" as a term identifies anything, then, it is the inability to decisively identify. It is a temporary name for the unnameable. However much the term "flying object" might misleadingly imply certain attributes—notably that the phenomenon in question is tangible and agential—"unidentified" is the caveat that not only introduces doubt, but withholds all certainty from the "UFO" as a categorical,

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[222] The taxonomical language here seeks to recall W. J. T. Michell's discussion of "the lives of images" in *What do Pictures Want?*. See Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?*.

[223] See Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*.

definitional designation.

But the unidentifiability of the "UFO" can be specified further, specifically in relation to the visual. For something to be defined by its unidentifiability, its fundamental visual characteristic must be that of indiscernibility, an inability to distinguish what the thing consists of, and perhaps even where it begins and ends.[224] Such a characteristic bears no relation to the essential characteristics of the thing in question. Instead, it describes a relative configuration in which visual access to the thing in question is partially or even totally withheld from the observer in such a manner as to preclude the possibility of identification. In this respect, the "unidentifiability" so central to the formulation of the "UFO" cannot rightly be attributed to any particular "flying object," as it is more precisely a property of the entire perceptual field better attributed to the UFO *sighting*, and the observer's inability to derive affirmative knowledge from the experience. In fact, the "UFO" of this definition is *inextricable* from the "UFO sighting." There can be no "UFOs" without UFO *sightings*, and *witnesses*.[225] Unidentifiable by definition, the "UFO" has no fixed iconography, and its appearance is constituted in the frustrated act of witnessing, the sum total of the visual distortions through which it assumes its evasive form. In this way, the UFO is never solely an object, but it is always at

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[224] Mike Kelly describes the abject alien body in a similar way in his essay 'The Aesthetics of Ufology.' Referring to the slimy bodies of the conventional blob-monster saucer-occupants of B-movie science fiction via Jean-Paul Sartre's comments on slime in *Being and Nothingness*, Kelley writes: "Slimy things are terrifying, primarily, because they provoke an ontological crisis due to the fact that they *cling*: they threaten one's sense of autonomy, and are thus imbued with an uncanny quality." The lack of distinct borders exhibited by the UFO here gestures to a property their speculative occupants might be seen to share. See Mike Kelley, 'The Aesthetics of Ufology,' in Welchman (ed.), *Mike Kelley*, pp. 403, 401.

[225] A number of ufologists have made similar claims to this, including Hynek who insists upon noting that the ""raw materials" for the study of the UFO phenomenon are not the UFOs themselves but the *reports* of UFOs." He also implores ufologists to use the term "UFO reporters" over "UFO observers," as UFOs can assuredly be reported, but they might not, in actuality, be observed. Similarly, the rise of the alien abduction phenomenon in the 1980s exhibited a further subjectivisation of ufology. Where Hynek principally focused upon what the phenomena and/or objects witnessed rather than the act of witnessing itself, many abductionists took a more subjective approach to evaluating the experience of purported alien abductees. Harvard psychologist John Mack, and abstract-expressionist painter-turned-ufologist Budd Hopkins are perhaps the most notable examples of this latter kind of ufologist. See Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report*, p. 8, J. Allen Hynek, *The UFO Experience: A Scientific Enquiry* (London, Corgi, 1972), p. 34, John E. Mack, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (New York City, NY: Ballantine Books, 1994), and Hopkins, *Missing Time*.

least a perceptual, perspectival configuration constituted in a particular visual relationship between object and subject, observed and observer, UFO and witness. This "UFO" is a UFO in the expanded field—the "UFO phenomenon" as a *visual* phenomenon—and when cameras are involved, this is an experience that can be represented photographically.[226]

If the impossibility of identification is a prerequisite to the "UFO" in this way, it follows that emphasis on the question of what the "UFO" in a UFO sighting *is* recedes before an awareness of the visual conditions that deny this knowledge, the processes of obfuscation that withhold identifiability. In other words, the UFO only really bears an ambivalent relation to the "flying objects" ufologists seek to identify, the ostensibly demystifiable activity taking place behind a veil of obfuscation. After all, at the moment of identification the UFO evaporates, leaving behind some other nameable, comprehensible, discrete *thing*. Instead, what this definition of the term gestures to more exactly is obfuscation itself, the interplay of visual conditions capable of inducing a UFO sighting; the visually irresolute, whether obscured by darkness, clouds, the photographic apparatus, or any number of other variables. This redefinition allows one to dismiss the typical ufological investment in a static objectivity in favour of its resituation within a dynamic interplay with the subjectivity constitutive of the UFO sighting. Ontological speculation is deemphasised in favour of epistemological consideration (how are the conditions of viewing producing this experience?), and aesthetic disruption (what are its wider visual

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[226] The phrase "expanded field" is used here in allusion to Rosalind Krauss's canonical 1979 essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field.' In fact, many of Krauss's essays from the late 1970s can be seen retroactively entertaining aspects of the UFO's unique aesthetic disposition. Her two-part essay 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America' offers a particularly resonant consideration of how contemporary American sculpture in the 1970s assumed the semiotic disposition of the photograph. She observes that the sculptural works of artists like Gordon Matta-Clark, Lucio Pozzi, and Michelle Stuart employ processes of "cropping, reduction, and self-evident flattening" analogous with the photographic process. As the thesis progresses it will be shown how UFOs can also be seen performing equivalently quasi-photographic functions. See Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' *October*, vol. 8 (Spring, 1979), pp. 30-44, Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2,' *October*, vol. 4 (Autumn 1977), p. 60, and Rosalind Krauss, 'Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 1,' *October*, vol. 3 (Spring 1977), pp. 68-81.

implications?). One might never truly know whether a UFO in a photographic image ever appeared as it appears on film. What can be known for sure is that vision (and its technological extensions) cannot provide unbridled access to the objects and activities they represent. As such, while the ontology of the UFO is both conceptually and practically unknowable, the epistemology of its unidentified-ness is often knowable to within a reasonable degree of accuracy (especially when the obfuscations that screen the UFO from view bear all the hallmarks of known obfuscations associated with particular photographic effects). Indeed, UFO photographs are inherently more plausible than sightings and photographs of other kinds of paranormal phenomena (like ghosts, Bigfoot, or the Loch Ness Monster) in this way. If UFOs are produced not through the accurate recognition of anomaly, and ufological anomalousness is constituted in the visual insufficiencies that frustrate identification and encourage misrecognition, then naturally the possibility of seeing a UFO via a failure of recognition is entirely more plausible than the possibility of positively identifying a very real paranormal being (as is ostensibly the case in the iconographically positivist phenomena of ghosts, Bigfoot, and the Loch Ness Monster).

Similarly, then, questions of "authenticity" lose significance as the viewer's involvement in the creation of the UFO is revealed. If all UFOs, sincere and fraudulent, are created in acts of looking, then questions of "authenticity" relate less to the aesthetic characteristics of any particular image itself, than to the physical and character evidence that determine the relationship of a UFO image to its associated ufological truth claims. To recall Izatt, then, and the anomalous frame containing her name, placing aside the "authenticity" of her evidence—as this *perspectival* definition of the UFO allows—that Izatt's name appears like an artist's signature in one of her films provides a neat expression of both the literal means by which UFOs are perspectivally generated, and the con-

ceptual ramifications of such a suggestion. However these frames were actually produced, the UFOs in them are generated not through the prescriptive attainment of any particular iconography (Izatt's films do not visually *resemble* "UFOs," per se), but rather through a particular relationship between Izatt's camera and the source of the light that produces the inscriptions. From here, two key possibilities stand out. First, as Izatt alleges, actual alien craft wrote her name by tracing it at breakneck speeds while her camera remains still ("objective" motion). Second, the light source remains still while Izatt writes her name with the movement of her camera ("subjective" motion). In other words, as the acute oppositional contrast between these two competing interpretations of Izatt's anomalous frames clearly illustrates, it is always the relationship between the perceiver and the referent that constitutes and consolidates the UFO encounter. The fact that one of the inscriptions takes the form of Izatt's name, seals the deal, conceptually, as its resemblance of an artists' signature (like Brakhage's) reflexively expresses a condition in which the perception and perspective of the spectator *authors* the UFO encounter, and its associated images. Whether or not Izatt's images depict actual alien craft, that her images appear signed attests to the fact that if Izatt did not film them in the way she had (whether by faithfully documenting, or fraudulently forcing the ufological impression) her images would likely not be considered to represent UFOs at all.

In this way, even if Izatt's UFOs do not serve as meaningful evidence of the existence of the divine light beings she proselytises, they are nevertheless "authentic" insofar as she has made UFO images with film. This is another respect in which Izatt's films have more in common with Brakhage's than those of the Structural/Materialists. Where the Structural/Materialists strived, among a range of objectives, towards the (perhaps impossible) task of objectively elucidating the precise means of film production and exhibition, Brakhage was concerned with the very opposite, employing a radi-

cal filmic subjectivity to produce representations of the human imagination. Considered in this way—and in light of the revised definition of the "UFO"—Izatt's films represent one particular permutation (chiefly involving motion, and darkness) of the necessary subjectivity involved in the making of a UFO sighting, and the production of UFO images. If Brakhage's films can be understood as representing opportunities to "[see] yourself thinking," as he described it, perhaps photographic UFOs, like those in Izatt's films, provide viewers with opportunities to *see themselves seeing*, to externalise the perceptual and perspectival dynamics that constitute the UFO sighting via the camera, allowing for clearheaded consideration of the UFO's unique visual constitution.[227] In its ability to capture and fix the perceptual and perspectival shifts that produce UFOs, the moving image is an ideal medium for an examination of the making and unmaking of UFO images. Ufological ambiguity unfurls in the moving image, stretching out into complex, continually evolving spatiotemporal dimensions, producing rich and dynamic representations of perspectives from which UFOs might be seen. The UFO is revealed in the moving image as one element in a visual process from which it is inextricable. It may eventually be identified, or it might remain unknown, but the moving image serves as a reminder that this is always a matter of perspective.

Moving away, then, from the conventional definition of the "UFO" to refocus on the nature of the visual situations in which UFOs are seen and photographed, it will be possible to identify many of the aesthetic issues at stake in ufological visuality, and appreciate how a sensitivity towards these concerns might inform an approach to a range of questions historically posed of the photographic image. Asking how and why UFOs evade clear identification—to recall art historian Elkins' discussion of the roles of elucidation and obfuscation in twentieth century image making—this alternative definition of

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[227] See Stan Brakhage interviewed in *Reflecting Thought: Stan Brakhage* (Jason Starr, Centre Productions, USA, 1985).

the "UFO" finally accounts for how the UFO image so frequently appears in step with the unstable semiologies and unreliable transparencies commonly observed in photographic and cinematic signification more broadly.[228] Furthermore, this also suggests that photographic images *are*, in a certain sense, the UFOs they represent. In addition to photography and the moving image's ability to represent the perspectival situations in which UFOs appear, the photographic image is often *itself* part of the veil of obfuscation, without which there might be no UFOs. The play of perspectives inherent to photographic imaging—and uniquely harnessable in the moving image—situates the medium as having privileged access to the visual dynamics of the UFO sighting, the camera acting as a proxy for the eye. Perhaps, this is what Meehan meant when he wrote that UFOs are "inherently cinematic"? If UFOs are made by looking—irrespective of whether there is actually anything truly anomalous to look at—then is this not, in a certain sense, analogous to the cinema; that more familiar space where ephemeral, immaterial visual impressions play out in light, in the space above viewers' heads, offering fleeting representations of what they might wish to believe?

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[228] In a discussion of the transparency of representation in twentieth century image making (scientific imaging and postmodern art, in particular), Elkins writes: "One of the most incisive questions it is possible to ask of a late twentieth century image is how and why it evades whatever clear meaning it might have achieved." Elkins, *Six Stories From the End of Representation*, p. 57.

## 13. Perspective and the moving image

Most impressive of all the ufological affordances of the moving image is its capacity for representing the relationship between objects in space and time, and the relationship between subjects and objects—both central to the newly perspectival "UFO"—as they change over time. The innately combinative function of moving-image representation—its assemblage of a series of images offering representations of motion and the passage of time—promises that the moving image should be capable of providing a comprehensive representation of the perspectival phenomena associated with UFOs as they contribute to its prodigious visual mutability. For instance, it is commonly claimed that UFOs are capable of moving vast distances in a very short space of time, exert profound perceptual influences upon those who witness them, and even change aspects of their physical structure and appearance. These dynamic, relational dimensions of the UFO sighting are less accessible to the still, whose UFOs are typically constituted via its gnomic fixity preserving static aspects of unidentifiability. Conversely, the comparative visual plenitude of the moving image steps up to the task of providing more comprehensive representation of these dynamic aspects of the UFO sighting.

This is not, however, to suggest that such affordances necessarily work in service of a ufological agenda. Perhaps the still, in its temporal and perspectival ambiguity, is a more reliable means of producing UFO images, because its spatiotemporal limitations more readily facilitate the inconclusive visuality essential to the UFO? Certainly, it is significant that far less purportedly "authentic" UFOs in the moving image have drawn anywhere near the level of attention attracted by hundreds of famous UFO stills.[229] As

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[229] Notable exceptions to this include, of course, the 2017 ATFLIR videos, and perhaps the 1995 "Alien Autopsy" film, a hoax perpetrated by film producers Ray Santilli and Gary Shoefield, broadcast to a wide audience on Fox in U. S., and Channel 4 in the U. K.. The Alien Autopsy film does not, however, contain UFOs, per se (except for a brief sequence near the end of the film where a scientist displays the fragmentary remains of metal consoles, ostensibly recovered from a crashed flying saucer).

sceptical ufologist Klass put it (in 1974):

> In contrast with the many hundreds of still photos that purport to show
> UFOs, there are only a handful of amateur ("home") movies that make
> the same claim. This might at first seem strange, since there are more
> than 8 million home-movie cameras in the United States. The explana-
> tion is that it is extremely difficult for an amateur to make a convincing
> hoax UFO movie without a well-equipped special-effects department
> that is available only to commercial motion-picture producers.[230]

In this scornful dismissal of moving image UFO evidence, Klass overlooks two
significant points with many subtle implications. He fails to address the potential evi-
dential affordances moving image evidence may be uniquely capable of providing, fix-
ating instead upon the statistical improbability that so many film cameras would fail to
produce any credible evidence.[231] Surely, being able to observe a UFO's movement in
extended duration is a useful affordance of the moving image categorically unavailable
to the still? It is, after all, arguably the principal factor that marks out the videos dis-
cussed in this thesis' preface as remarkable, the UFO's nimble evasion of the ATFLIR
tracking system serving as perhaps their most convincing representational aspect when
it comes to evidencing their anomalousness. Also, in his alignment of "commercial mo-
tion-picture" images with humbug, Klass implicitly rejects the representational possibil-
ities presented by fictionalised representation, and "special effects." This makes sense in
the context of his argument, which is principally motivated by the desire to debunk "au-
thentic" UFO evidence (as opposed to the present study's aesthetic appraisal of photo-
graphic UFO images), but its quotation in this context should reveal the short-sighted-

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[230] Klass, *UFOs Explained*, p. 180.

[231] Though who can say that the relative wealth of still UFO photographs is not, again, attributable to
specificities of the still photograph, as opposed to the detriment of the moving image? As Klass himself
writes elsewhere: "The reason there are so many hoax UFO [stills] is that they are so easy to make." ibid.,
p. 165.

ness of this approach. Who can say that fiction film images, because they do not repre-sent photographic evidence of actual UFOs, are not in command of any other, equally significant possibilities? Evidence is a ufological pursuit. Film studies is epistemologi-cally omnivorous.

UFO images serve as a unifying motif in many moving image representations, where they enact a variety of unique aesthetic manoeuvres irreducible to questions of evi-dence. In fact, prised from the burden of serving evidentially, the spatiotemporal range available to moving image representations of UFOs in the more hypothetical, or specu-lative territory of fiction, not only enriches UFO representations with the possibility of additional detail and comprehensive depiction, but also a wider range of representation-al possibilities into which the UFO can extend its disruptive influence. Consider, for in-stance, with regard to all that was previously discussed of the term "flying," how the moving image's ability to more comprehensively depict the spatiotemporal relationships between different elements in the image might dispel many of the ambiguities concern-ing whether or not a photographic UFO represents a truly *flying* object.

Whether via tracking, cutting between multiple shots, or even simply the motion of an object across a fixed frame, the moving image's sequence of images over time pro-vides an extra dimension of visual information from which a consistent, perspectival sense of motion in space can be reliably triangulated. Consider, for example, the Billy Meier photograph previously discussed for its forced perspective depiction of a UFO hovering over a van, against the flight of the saucer fleet in *The War of the Worlds* (see *fig. 13.1* & *fig. 13.2*). Though both representations emerge from different contexts, each with their own intended receptions, this comparison is neatly indicative of the extent to which the moving image is capable of enriching UFO representation with its more com-prehensive depiction of the spatiotemporal dynamics of flight. Where Meier's hoaxed
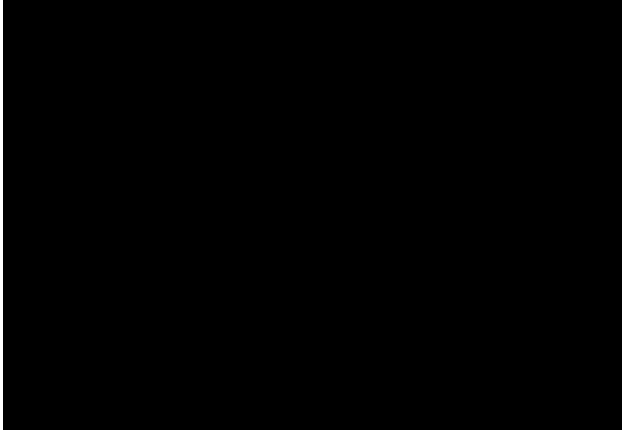
*fig. 13.1 (above):* "829." *Photograph by Billy Meier (Switzerland, 1981).*

*fig. 13.2 (below): Still from* The War of the Worlds. *The movement of the saucers is rendered with al-most didactic consistency, repeatedly depicted as unambiguously advancing from the background of screen-right to the foreground of screen-left.*

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image provides only a spurious, rudimentary illusion of flight, through its deliberate harnessing of the spatial flattening more readily achievable in still photography, the craft in *The War of the Worlds*, are famously rendered, throughout the film, both abundantly clear, and chillingly persistent via their consistent advancement from the background of screen-right to the foreground of screen-left.

Of course, this does not mean that stills are incapable of representing UFOs with spatial legibility, or that moving images are incapable of presenting spatial ambiguity, but rather that the possibilities available to Meier—attempting to produce credible rep-resentations of UFOs with stills—are more limited in range than those of *The War of the Worlds*' producers. The forced perspective technique exploited by Meier relies on pro-

ducing an illusion of flight through the constriction of perspective, a limitation of the viewer's visual access to the representation of the referent. Images like these force the viewer into reflexive scrutiny of the photograph itself, rather than acceptance of the image as a credible representation of a flying object (as described earlier in this thesis, where the out-of-focus-ness of Meier's UFO hurls the image into a tailspin of perspectival irresolvability). By contrast, shots like this from *The War of the Worlds*, make a deliberate spectacle of the unambiguous spatiotemporal progression of its UFOs, harnessed, in the context of science fiction horror, to elicit a thrill, rather than engage the investigatory impulse. Perhaps paradoxically, then, undistracted by assuring viewers that the representation ought to be understood as factual, UFOs in moving image fiction often have the capacity to provide more visually credible UFO images in this respect than those of stills. While Meier's UFO appears ambiguously suspended in the still as an inauthentic "authentic" UFO, the saucers from *The War of the Worlds* may be entirely fictional, but they are, with absolute certainty, UFOs, not photographic distortions, illusions, or misrepresentations. Depicted as occupying distinct spatial coordinates within a two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional continuous, object-permanent, diegetic space, such an image firmly situates its fictional UFOs as unknown objects actively navigating the represented setting.

Returning to the earlier question, then, of why fictional moving image UFOs do not collapse under the weight of the UFO image's semiotic disjuncture as commonly occurs in stills, this is arguably because of the access fictional moving images have to continuous spatiotemporal representation. Duration provides a richness of visual context, so even when it is not clear what a UFO is, its demonstrative occupation of space through movement—even when that movement itself defies belief, as when UFOs make impossibly fast hairpin turns—serves to affirm its diegetic actuality. This is why Meier's still

UFO "hovers," where the UFOs of *The War of the Worlds* "fly." This is less a question of the difference between objective and subjective motion, as it was considered in relation to Izatt's films, as both images are fixed of frame. But Meier's UFO has to hover, as any indication of movement (e.g. motion blur) would threaten to extend its existing perspectival discontinuities across a wider spatiotemporal range, producing more visual signatures of its fraudulence. The representational logic of the UFOs in *The War of the Worlds* is the exact opposite. In a bid to thrill the audience, the filmmakers ensure their UFOs' threatening advancement is made irrefutably clear, the static frame allowing the UFOs to make their presence unequivocally certain, even as their nature remains in doubt. It is in this way that the epistemological disruption of the UFO is unrestricted to images of "authentic" UFOs, and the perspectival definition of the UFO—as opposed to other more nebulous alternatives—helps account for this. Fiction simply asks its viewers of a different approach to such ambiguities. Since fiction consists of what it shows, representing aspects of events depicted that might remain inaccessible in actuality, declaring no consistent relation with the real (beyond, perhaps, verisimilitudinal resemblance, or thematic resonance), fiction film can depict a UFO, and viewers have no reason to second-guess this. In fiction, flaws in the image are generally subsumed by the totality of representation, as opposed to sharpening, and puncturing the representation, as generally occurs in evidential UFO stills.

Given this unparalleled access to spatiotemporal representation available in moving image fiction, exactly how fiction filmmakers have harnessed the possibility of staging the subtle shifts in perspective and perception constitutive of UFOs must now be considered. There are many representational strategies at work in the moving image representation of fictional UFOs, three of which stand out, and will now be examined in detail. Consideration of these three representational devices helps further illustrate the in-

tricacies of both the relative perspectival complexity available to fictional moving image representation, and the epistemological particularities of the UFO considered in perspectival terms.

The most notable of these representational devices appears in numerous fictional UFO narratives, and highlights the integral role perspective plays in the UFO sighting. This is the UFO "bait-and-switch." The bait-and-switch occurs when a film deliberately manipulates the viewer's perspective—typically through cinematographic slight-of-hand; precise framing, panning, and tracking—momentarily leading the viewer to believe that what they are seeing represents a UFO, before suddenly and spectacularly shifting perspective to reveal the true, typically non-ufological nature of the event depicted. A play against viewer expectations, the bait-and-switch is most commonly articulated through modulations of the viewer's access to on- and off- screen space. Something on-screen gestures to something off-screen, or something off-screen projects an impression of itself on-screen to imply the presence of a UFO, only for the camera to track back, or cut to another angle, revealing that it is in fact something entirely ordinary. An interesting example of this occurs in *Fire in the Sky* (Robert Lieberman, Paramount USA, 1993), during the scene depicting police lieutenant Frank Watters' (James Garner) arrival in the logging town of Snowflake, Arizona, where he is due to investigate the disappearance of logger Travis Walton (D. B. Sweeney), last seen by colleagues after apparently being struck and killed by a beam of light emanating from a mysterious object out in the woods.[232] After a shot introducing Watters, taken from the passenger seat of his car, a medium-close-up of Watters, looking through the windshield, shows the lieutenant pick up his radio to respond to a call, only to be interrupted by his pro-

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[232] *Fire in the Sky* is based on the story of Travis Walton, a logger who disappeared on the night of the 5th of November, 1975, and reappeared five days later, claiming to have been abducted by aliens. As is typical of the most famous UFO reports, Walton's story is considered a prized example of UFO abduction among ufologists, and a particularly egregious hoax among sceptics. See Travis Walton, *The Walton Experience* (New York City, NY: Berkley, 1978).
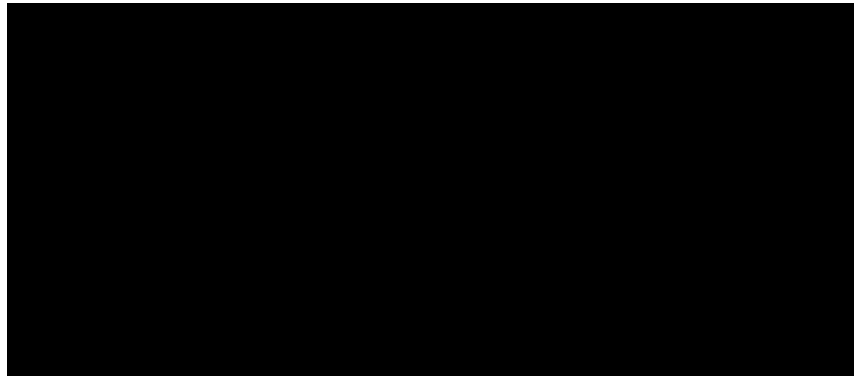
*fig. 13.3 (above): Still from* Fire in the Sky. *Four red lights can be seen reflected in lieutenant Frank Watters's windscreen, bathing the car in what appears initially as the glow of a UFO.*

*fig. 13.4 (below): Still from* Fire in the Sky. *The lights are revealed to be stop lights installed on the barriers of a railway level crossing.*

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gressive immersion in a sinister red glow. Watters stops the car and squints through the windscreen at something in front of him, that in the reflection of the windscreen descends as a crescent of four red lights, while an ominous whirr builds on the soundtrack (see *fig. 13.3*). The moment of emphasis placed on Watters observance of this off-screen object produces a strong impression that whatever he is witnessing is somehow extraordinary. Contrary to this implication, however, a startling cut, matched to a cacophony of industrial noise, reveals, in a shot from behind Watters' car, that the red glow is emitted not by a UFO, but nothing more elaborate than the illuminated barrier of a level-crossing, obstructing the railway as a freight train passes (see *fig. 13.4*).

This is just one example among many similar instances in moving image UFO fiction where ordinary objects are momentarily transfigured by the moving image's ma-

nipulation of viewer perspective.[233] More commonly the bait-and-switch occurs with vehicles. "Jose Chung's From Outer Space," for instance, a cult-favourite episode of *The X-Files*, opens with a shot that appears to present the undercarriage of a UFO against the night sky. As the camera tracks backwards, however, this is ultimately revealed as nothing more unusual than the cradle of a crane. Elsewhere, other vehicles are implicated in the bait-and-switch via compositional, or figural, manipulation. During a moment in the first episode of the second series of *Fargo* a cluster of ambiguous lights hovers over a desolate country road (see *fig. 13.5*). As they pass into clear definition, no longer obscured by a halo of diffraction, they are revealed as nothing more elaborate than car headlights, momentarily flattened-out, and abstracted by the camera's long-lens (see *fig. 13.6*). This effect is more subtle than *Fire in the Sky*. It seems *Fargo* does not want viewers to necessarily interpret these lights as a UFO, but it represents a moment's flirtation with the ufological, foreshadowing the much more direct representation of a UFO that occurs later. Sound, again, plays a crucial supporting role here. A whistle on the soundtrack, redolent of the early electronic science fiction soundtracks of the 1950s (e.g. Bebe and Louis Barron's soundtrack to *Forbidden Planet* (Fred M. Wilcox, MGM, USA, 1956)), contributes an uneasy, UFO-adjacent sonic texture to this otherwise mundane non-event. Elsewhere still, using similar, though passively-attained means of visual obfuscation (which is to say relying on clouds, rain, or simply darkness to achieve the initial visual indistinctness), helicopters are perhaps the most common subject of the bait-and-switch. Films and television programmes ranging from *Close Encounters…*, and *The X-Files*, to Area 51 comedy *Paul* (Greg Mottola, Universal, USA, 2011), repeatedly show brightly-illuminated helicopters descending from the sky, with all the ufological portent of an "authentic" UFO sighting, only to arrive within the camera's

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[233] Another particularly striking instance of the bait-and-switch appears in *Alien Abduction* (Matty Beckerman, IFC Midnight, USA, 2014), which employs a shift in focus (aided by some subtle, "invisible" CGI effects), to reveal what first appears as an indistinct UFO, as the plughole of a bathroom sink.

*fig. 13.5 (above): Still from* Fargo. *Momentarily ambiguous lights illuminate the horizon.*
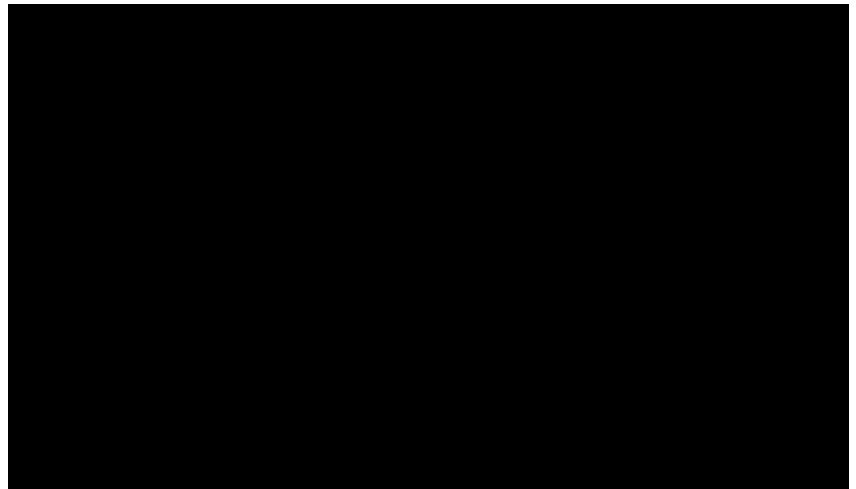
*fig. 13.6 (below): Still from* Fargo. *As cars drive into the shot, the lights are revealed as headlights.*

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field of comprehensible vision with all the visual attributes necessary for their true identification.

A second possibility for the bait-and-switch, albeit less common in ufological fiction than non-ufological fiction (where familiar cinematic forms of dramatic irony commonly afford viewers more comprehensive knowledge of events depicted than that available to the characters), is the exact reverse of the previous examples, and concerns instances where what initially appear as ordinary objects are revealed as UFOs. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurs in *Close Encounters…*, in the scene depicting Roy's (Richard Dreyfuss) initial UFO encounter on a deserted country road. Where *Fire in the Sky* mobilises the frame to the bait-and-switch effect, here the misdirection occurs in the
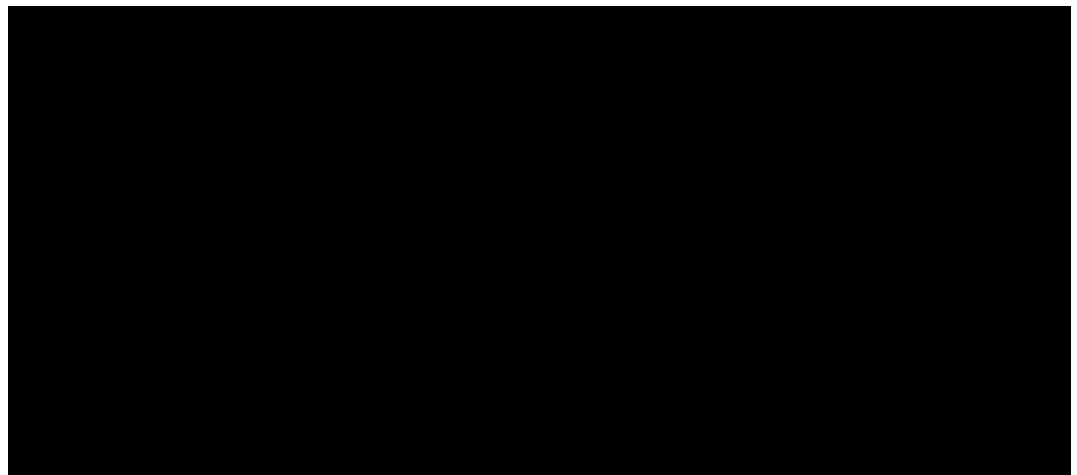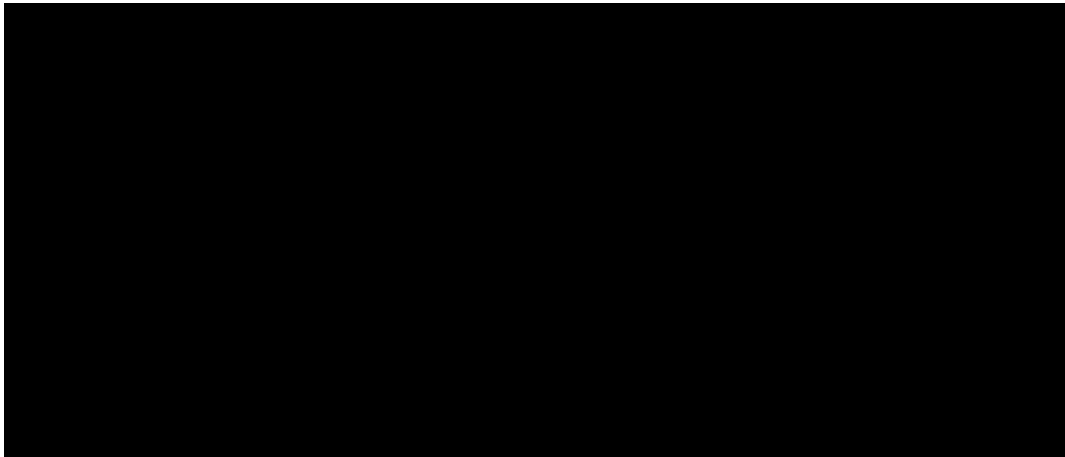
*fig. 13.7 (above): Still from* Close Encounters… *Four lights approach Roy's truck through the rear-windshield. Busy checking a map, Roy gestures them on without looking.*

*fig. 13.8 (below): Still from* Close Encounters… *In the same shot, the lights rise silently into the air (revealing more lights), visually refuting viewers' initial inference that they belong to a truck.*

film's use of lighting. Stopping in his truck to check a map, shown in a fixed shot framing Roy screen-right, and the darkness of the rear windscreen screen-left, Roy gestures on a driver approaching from behind, who appears simply as the headlights of an approaching lorry (see *fig. 13.7*). Recalling but subverting representational cues established in an earlier scene (where, like the cars in *Fargo*, unidentified lights in a sandstorm reveal themselves, as in the previous orientation of the bait-and-switch, as the headlights of several cars), the true source of the lights becomes apparent when, rather than overtaking, they rise up vertically into the sky and out of the shot (see *fig. 13.8*). Not very much is seen of the UFO, per se, but its motion, shrouded in darkness and

deathly silent, unequivocally indicates that it is not a lorry, posing the question of what it might actually be.

One thing these sequences from *Fire in the Sky* and *Close Encounters…* have in common is that both are staged solely for the appreciation of the film viewer, whose perspective is kept decidedly distinct from that of the characters. Lieutenant Watters is aware, of course, that what he is seeing is a level-crossing and not a UFO, but the view-er only learns this after the true origin of the lights is revealed. Equally, Roy does not see the effects of the nocturnal lights himself until after their unearthly origins have been revealed to the viewer. Both also present a stark thematic contrast between what is originally shown and what is ultimately known, namely by juxtaposing the fantastical otherworldliness of UFOs with objects and events of relentless mundanity. Everyone has stopped at a level-crossing, or had another car pull up behind while stationary. These are totally mundane, everyday situations that the films reveal can be radically al-tered with just a subtle change of perspective. Additionally neither of these moments present their UFOs strictly ambiguously (as is the UFO's default state in the semiotic uncertainty of the still). Rather, they each perform deliberate disambiguations of any lingering ufological uncertainties. A UFO turns into stoplights, headlights turn into a UFO, but either way this is a binary operation that occurs in a concerted shift across a range of representational cues, that cumulatively tip the balance from one interpretative possibility to another. Unlike the Wittgensteinian "dawning of an aspect"—where noth-ing of the representation changes but perception is radically altered—the bait-and-switch carefully guides the viewer through the process of the generating or dispelling of a UFO image.[234]

Revealing how subtle shifts in perspective can have tremendous implications for

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[234] Another curious but significant commonality between these three sequences is that they all take place around cars, and on roads, which will be considered in more detail shortly.

perception in the UFO sighting, the bait-and-switch—a ufological conjuring/vanishing act facilitated by the moving image's access to the dynamic spatiotemporal interplay between the observer and the referent—offers a keen demonstration of the fundamentally unfixed, perspectival nature of the UFO. A common motif of fictional UFO narratives, it presents a salient, vernacular demonstration, of almost pedagogical precision, of both the moving image's prodigious ability to document these dynamic perspectival shifts as they occur through space and over time, and how this ability displays an aptitude for UFO representation. Centralising the role of perspective in ufological representation in line with the earlier speculative redefinition of the "UFO," beyond the implications local to any individual instance, the bait-and-switch self-reflexively exposes the plasticity of cinematographic perspective, revealing the moving image as an ideal habitat for the UFO, an image that by its very nature can radically change from moment to moment. Whether via a strategic cut (*Fire in the Sky*), or simply by holding the camera still (*Close Encounters…*), the bait-and-switch inducts the viewer into the making and unmaking of a UFO. The viewer is escalated to the status of witness (it is often only the viewer that sees UFOs in these instances, after all). Providing both the thrill of the UFO sighting from a vicarious distance, and a demystifying explanation of how one may be led to make a ufological interpretation, the cinematographic stunt of the bait-and-switch—presenting such dramatic perspectival acrobatics as spectacle, without rupturing the careful hermeticism of mainstream moving image fiction—is the best evidence yet for the moving image's affinity for UFOs, and vice versa.

Elsewhere in the screen UFO corpus, the playful, implicit self-reflexivity of the bait-and-switch is upstaged by an altogether more explicit self-reflexivity, forcefully asserting the unique cinematicity of the perspectival UFO. Most obviously, this takes the form of the distinct visual allusions to cinematic viewing generously scattered through film
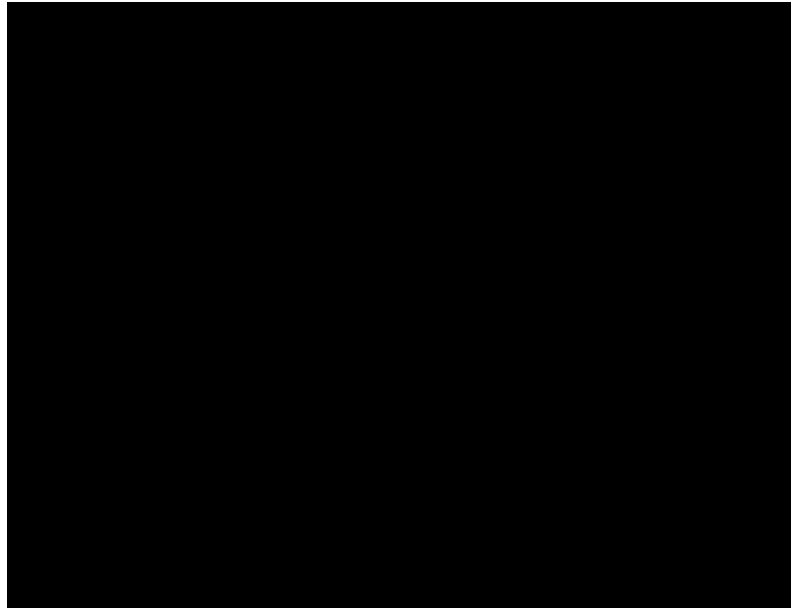
*fig. 13.9: Still from* The Day the Earth Stood Still. *Seated spectators observe the illuminated UFO in a manner visually redolent of a cinema audience.*

and television UFO narratives, such as the crescent of deck-chaired spectators in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, who resemble a cinema audience sat observing the landed UFO at a brightly lit press conference (see *fig. 13.9*). More intricately, however, films such as *Explorers* (Joe Dante, Paramount Pictures, USA, 1985) emphatically state certain distinct visual commonalities of film viewing and UFO witnessing. Early in the film, after the three leads Ben (Ethan Hawke), Wolfgang (River Phoenix), and Darren (Jason Presson), construct a spacecraft based on circuitry that appeared to Ben in a dream (images variously implied as having originated in telepathic communication with aliens, or from falling asleep during late night science fiction film reruns), the trio calamitously pilot the craft in the night sky above their suburban neighbourhood.[235] It is a Friday night, so they fly down to the drive-in film theatre, and as they do so, a woman

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[235] This is consistent with Martin Kottmeyer's "Bad Film Hypothesis," a theory in sceptical ufology asserting (with a markedly media-phobic tone) that the origin of the UFO phenomenon is strictly cultural, UFO sightings and abduction experiences emerging as a psychological byproduct of exposure to particular media technology and representational forms (Kottmeyer repeatedly identifies late night television as exerting a particularly strong influence). See Martin Kottmeyer, 'Entirely Unpredisposed: The Cultural Background of UFO Abduction Reports,' *Magonia*, January 1990 <http://magoniamagazine.blogspot.-co.uk/2013/11/entirely-unpredisposed-cultural.html> (Accessed 3rd December, 2017).

is seen looking up from her window, in confusion and awe, clearly mistaking the boys'
invention for something otherworldly (it is a UFO as far as she is concerned, and is pre-
sented as such, the film momentarily aligning with her earthbound perspective with a
shot gazing up at the craft). Arriving at the theatre, the boys stop for a moment to watch
the film (which, aptly, is a pastiche of hokey B-movie science fiction), hovering the craft
in front of the screen and obscuring the projection. The film cuts, at this point, to a shot
isomorphically-aligned with the diegetic drive-in screen, producing the impression that
the boys' craft is also hovering in front of the non-diegetic "screen" (an effect somewhat
lost in home media viewing, but undoubtedly striking in its original theatrical context,
visually reinforced by the appearance of the craft's shadow cast over the diegetic pro-
jected image) (see *fig. 13.10*).

Significant here is the manner in which *Explorers*, through what functions most
immediately as a gimmicky gag, momentarily aligns the perspective of both diegetic
and non-diegetic cinema audiences with the perspective of a UFO witness in such a
manner that the two are visually indistinguishable. Viewers already know the craft's
origin and occupants at this stage in the film, but in this instance, where the film poses a
momentary illusory challenge to the diegetic hermeticism of its image, it appears as a
UFO, an unidentified flying object, in front of the non-diegetic screen (unidentified in-
sofar as it visually complicates the viewer's attribution of its appearance to the fiction,
momentarily passing for an actual cinema intruder). Underscoring this, the film cuts to a
shot of a young couple in a car parked in the diegetic drive-in audience, the man haugh-
tily remarking: "That looks so fake." Across a similar (albeit more explicitly cinematic)
disjunction of perspective between viewer and diegetic witnesses previously observed
in the bait-and-switch, then, this is a calculated complication of film spectatorship as a
passive, epistemologically-prescribed mode of viewing. Between the non-diegetic per-
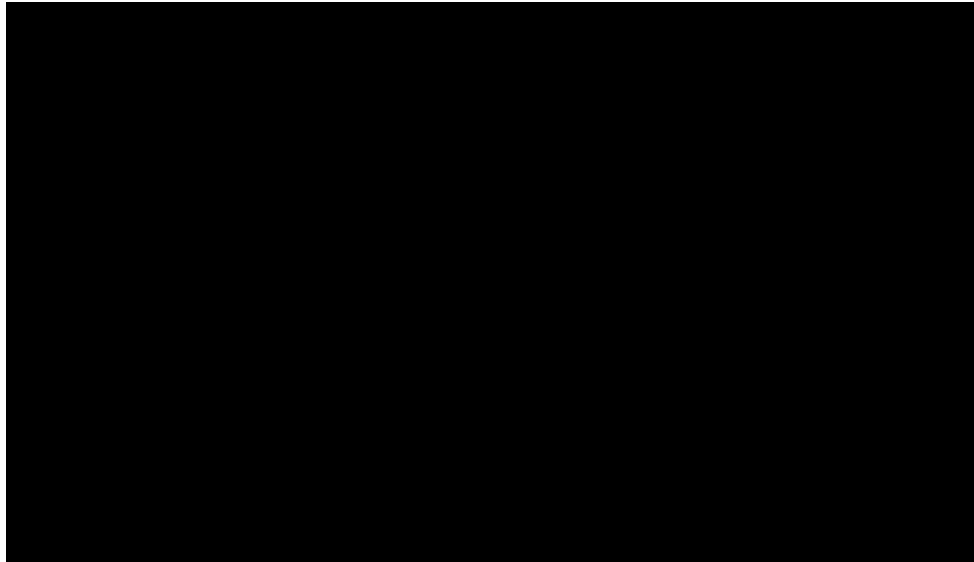
*fig. 13.10: Still from* Explorers. *The diegetic drive-in screen aligns with the film frame, producing an illusory impression that the boys' spacecraft is hovering in front of the film image.*

spective on events, and the diegetic perspective modelled by the patronising drive-in customer and his date, viewers experience, comparatively, two conflicting visual relationships to an identical UFO image. Where the diegetic cinema-goers do not even realise that what they are witnessing is, as far as they are concerned, a bonafide UFO, the non-diegetic audience knows the origin of the craft, yet are momentarily exposed to a particular perspective that temporarily unsettles that knowledge, producing a UFO where there is none. For the film to continue, this contradictory conflict of viewing relations must resolve, and *Explorers* does so by realigning the non-diegetic perspective on events with narrative omniscience at the moment the craft turns around and flies towards the diegetic audience, startling the patronising drive-in attendee with what he now understands as a legitimate UFO encounter.

In addition, then, to the bait-and-switch, this sequence from *Explorers* offers a deft visual condensation of the mutually complementary nature of the perspectival UFO and the cinema apparent in the material dimensions of the cinematic apparatus more broadly. The final representational strategy to be considered here, however, takes things a step

beyond representations of the UFO witness perspective. Directly contrasting with the anthropocentrically-aligned eye-line matches and "point-of-view" shots observed in the bait-and-switch, and the *Explorers*' self-reflexive UFO sighting, this final representational strategy employed in fictional moving image representations of UFOs consists of shots where a disembodied camera, untethered to any clear diegetic perspective, drifts over a terrestrial landscape, implicitly suggesting the point-of-view perspective of an imagined UFO. Typically achieved with a helicopter or crane, these images—which might be called "phantom UFOs"—often appear at the beginning or end of films in which UFOs appear, as in *Communion* (Philippe Mora, Pheasantry Films, USA, 1989), which begins with a tracking shot perusing the Manhattan skyline, and *Fire in the Sky*, which ends with a shot ascending into the sky from the site of Travis's abduction (see *fig. 13.11* & *fig. 13.12*).[236] The phantom UFO is significant for hijacking the ostensibly objective register of the establishing shot, familiar from the conventional cinematographic lexicon (typically used to directly state, *this is where this sequence is set*), to serve as a variously literal, or metonymic perspective of an airborne UFO. Routinely attributed, quite safely, to the non-diegetic narrative voice—largely detached, as it is, from the immediate surroundings of the principal cast, and the most significant aspects of individual settings—a phantom UFO might simply be a typical crane or helicopter shot, and nothing more, but in the context of the UFO narrative, its unseen, disembodied drift acquires an undeniable ufological connotation. At its most explicit, the phantom UFO adopts a near bird's-eye-view of events taking place below, as seen elsewhere in films and television programmes like *Fargo*, and *Mysterious Skin* (Gregg Araki, Fortissimo Films, USA, 2004). A particularly extreme iteration of this occurs in *Earth vs. the*

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[236] The word "phantom," here, alludes to the early cinema concept of the "phantom ride" film, where a camera strapped to the front of a moving vehicle—typically a train—offered late nineteenth century viewers a "phantom ride" through a particular location. "Phantom," in the context of the "phantom ride," denoted the impression of gliding along like a disembodied ghost, as the vehicle in question typically exhibited no direct visual presence (as is the case in "phantom UFO" shots).
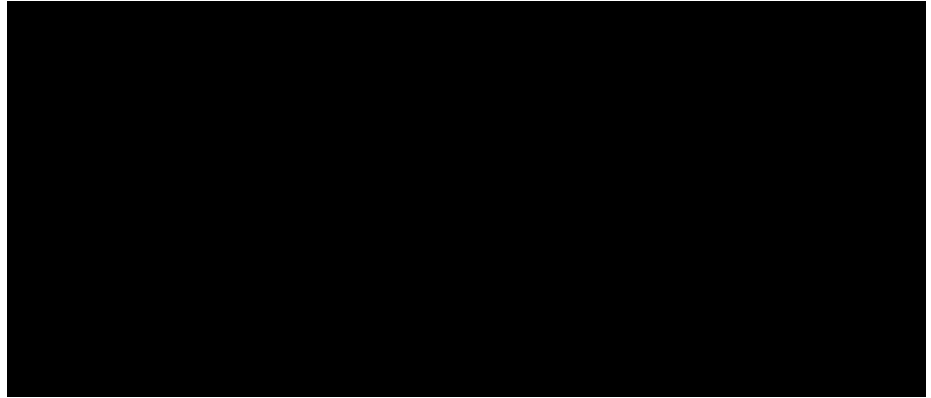
*fig. 13.11 (above): Still from the opening sequence of* Communion. *The aerial establishing shot is refig-
ured as extraterrestrial reconnaissance, the camera descending to scrutinise the Manhattan skyline.*

*fig. 13.12 (below): Still from the finale of* Fire in the Sky. *Where the "phantom UFO" of Communion
descends,* Fire in the Sky *ascends, the former suggesting arrival, the latter suggesting departure.*

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*Flying Saucers*, which eschews conventional cinematography altogether by employing

an aerial photogrammetric photograph, from which the camera is seen to whizz away

via an animated rostrum technique. Notable here is the manner in which the phantom

UFO motivates the incorporation of a specifically cartographic representation of the ter-

restrial setting (the desert military complex where the characters work), connoting

wartime aerial reconnaissance photography to suggest, through the figuring of the land-

scape not as terrain but territory, the imperialist designs of the eponymous invaders.

Images like that of the phantom UFO are not uncommon in moving image repre-

sentation more generally. Aerial cinematography has been routinely employed in film

and television for many decades, and the rise of affordable drones has yielded an explo-

sion of such imagery in even low budget productions that might not have been able to

afford the technology as recently as ten years ago. Of principal interest here is the man-ner in which—as in the earlier representational strategies—these instances recast the familiar cinematographic convention of the aerial establishing shot with the implication that it might represent the vision of an unearthly intelligence. Like the ufological "zoo hypothesis"—which posits that UFOs are simply here to observe, as humans watch an-imals in zoos—they serve to subtly suggest a reversal of the general assumption that the principal viewing relation in the UFO phenomenon is that of humans experiencing UFO sightings.[237] The phantom UFO perspective reflexively turns the conventional cinematic address in on itself in this way; the formerly unassuming illeism of the cinematographic third-person acquiring a more sinister, surveillant character.

The phantom UFO speaks in this way to the moving image's unique capacity for providing representations of nonanthropocentric forms of vision, UFOs and ufology narratively motivating the exploration of these possibilities. If, as Sobchack suggests, the "relative lack of subjective camera shots in SF film […] attempt[s] to link us visual-ly with nonhuman life," then one might regard the phantom UFO shot, interpreted as a quasi-subjectivisation of the formerly "objective" representational convention of the establishing shot, as a very literal alignment of the cinematic vocabulary with a distinct-ly nonanthropocentric perspective.[238] Here, the potential of airborne vision to "escape […] Euclidian neutralization," in Paul Virilio's words, is figured as the potential to de-tach perception from the human entirely (even if only in fiction, as these images are, of course, produced by humans using terrestrial technologies).[239] As in many of the photo-graphic UFO visualisations examined previously, scale is the principal modality here. In

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[237] The "zoo hypothesis" is most notable as serving among ufology's common set of responses to the "Fermi Paradox," physicist Enrico Fermi's observation that given the statistical probability of the exis-tence of intelligent extraterrestrial life, it seems surprising that humans have not yet made contact with extraterrestrials.

[238] Sobchack, *The Limits of Infinity*, p. 93.

[239] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 24.

the phantom UFO shots, helicopters, cranes, and high-altitude aerial survey aircraft function—like the microscopes that reveal the "alien implants" purportedly embedded in the bodies of alien abductees—as technological aids enabling the production of photographic images radically detached from the human perception of scale. Asked to make sense of these images, viewers align them with that of the alien observer, whose view of earthly activity, it is implied, is equivalently distanced and diminuating. By inducting the viewer into this narratively-established extraterrestrial perspective, then, the phantom UFO (like the extraterrestrial helmet in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers,* optimised for alien vision) is seen to grossly distort ordinary human vision, providing an opportunity to "try on" a nonanthropocentric perspective. This is destabilising at first, but may also help reveal that which could not previously be seen. As Jennifer Fay writes in her recent book on cinema and the Anthropocene:

> [P]hotography and cinema enable us to see the physical, fragmented world, including nature, outside of myth, and not only in hindsight. Whereas the single photograph may reveal the physical world through the unloving lens of a camera, cinema not only combines images but also, through its experiments of time and duration, stages the process by which physical reality is dissociated from meaning-giving, externally imposed form.[240]

Nowhere is this more explicit than in the phantom UFO.

Later in the thesis, moving image fiction's potential emancipation of the viewer from the anthropocentric limitations previously observed impeding UFO stills, will acquire a distinct aesthetic significance. For now, however, it is necessary to return to earth for a moment, to consider how ufology's approach to these issues might be deconstructed and reconstituted, beside its evidential concerns, towards the task of providing theoretical

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[240] Fay, *Inhospitable World,* p. 176.

perspective upon the moving image aesthetics of the UFO.

## 14. Hynek & Hitchcock: Ufology & film theory

Though this study is now well beyond its critique of ufology's evidential concerns, ufology's utility in the service of film analysis is not yet exhausted. The many structural similarities observed between screen spectatorship and UFO witnessing strongly suggest ufology's discussions of UFO visuality might helpfully inform analysis of the moving image, courtesy of its close consideration of the UFO's unique visual character. Consider, for example, the manner in which the concealed cinema projector fits the description of the "sourceless lighting" commonly described in UFO reports, a light that may or may not be illusory in nature, that disorientates (in the very literal sense of occluding one's sense of their immediate surroundings), and manipulates spatial awareness.[241] Regardless of the relative causality of these similarities, the notion that the ufological approach to UFOs might shed light on UFOs in the moving image—that ufological thought may contain its own nascent film theory—is a compelling one. The extent to which ufologists have already picked up on these similarities (albeit not necessarily in a direct fashion) appears to affirm that the suggestion that a meaningful comparison between ufological visuality and film theory is possible.

For one, British ufologist Jenny Randles uses an emphatically cinematic analogy as a diagnostic tool for gauging the anomalousness of a UFO encounter. Observing that UFO witnesses commonly report feeling as though their encounters take place in a "timeless, magical void," a temporary microcosm ostensibly initiated by the UFO itself, exhibiting a host of unusual characteristics, Randles evokes certain cinematic aesthetics associated with MGM's classic film adaptation of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, MGM, USA, 1939) to provide a familiar frame of reference for the phenomenolog-

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[241] Hopkins, *Missing Time*, p. 148.

ical peculiarities of the UFO sighting.[242] Randles christens this assortment of experien-

tial anomalies the "Oz Factor" (which includes, but is not limited to: that everyone else

at the scene of a UFO sighting seems to disappear; an absence of natural sound or a

strange hum; the passage of time appearing to dilate or compress; ambient temperature

rising or falling; feelings of peacefulness or unease; and the compulsion to look in a cer-

tain direction, whereafter the craft presents itself, almost theatrically), describing the

manner in which the UFO sighting seems to occur within a discrete "zone of influence,"

or sensorily-isolated bubble the witness is held in for the duration of the sighting.[243] A

portmanteau of "X factor"—denoting a certain yet undefinable quality—and "Oz," the

mythical setting of *The Wizard of Oz,* Randles hypothesises that the Oz Factor indicates

that the UFO experience might involve some kind of "direct feed […] from the source

of the encounter to the consciousness of the witness. Something makes them pay atten-

tion by tuning out the normal sensory flow and looking up to watch the show."[244] Ran-

dles' description bears an obvious likeness to cinematic presentation, chiefly, that the

ufological zone of influence exerts a comparable control upon sensory stimuli in aid of

an associated audiovisual presentation. Her suggestion that the UFO utilises a "direct

feed […] to the consciousness of the witness," recalls very directly, in both its emphasis

on the phenomenological and its performative connotations, descriptions of the cinemat-

ic apparatus as a media sensorium designed to suture spectators into the visual represen-

tation.[245] But there is more, arguably, to be made of the significance of *The Wizard of*

*Oz*, as a film text, in the context of the experiential characteristics associated with the

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[242] See Jenny Randles, 'In Search of the Oz Factor,' *BUFORA Bulletin*, vol. 26 (July 1987), p. 17, and Jenny Randles, 'Essay on the Oz Factor and the Strange Sensations of Altered Reality Reported by UFO Witnesses,' *Alien Jigsaw*, 1999, <http://www.alienjigsaw.com/et-contact/Randles-The-Oz-Factor.html>, (Accessed 13th February, 2018).

[243] Randles, 'Essay on the Oz Factor.'

[244] ibid.

[245] ibid.

Oz Factor.

It is significant that Randles' reference to Oz seems to refer less to the fantastical qualities of Oz itself, as a fairytale destination, than it does to the nature of one's transportation there. The definition of the Oz Factor as a concept principally describes, after all, how one's perception changes in anticipation of a UFO sighting. As such, this sensory shift has more in common with the cinematic representation of Dorothy's transportation to Oz than anything mentioned in Baum's story. In the original book Dorothy's journey is described as a durational experience rather than an audiovisual one: "as the hours passed and nothing terrible happened," Baum writes of Dorothy being carried away by the twister, "she stopped worrying and resolved to wait calmly and see what the future would bring."[246] By contrast, the film adaptation famously presents the transportation to Oz as occurring over a spectacular transition from stagnant sepia, to lavish three-strip Technicolor; Dorothy (Judy Garland) opening the door onto not only a different location, but a representational schema entirely distinct from that of where she left. Baum's original telling of the story makes a point of stressing the drabness of dust-bowl Kansas, reusing the word "gray" no less than three times to describe the landscape, before contrasting his description of Oz with a much wider semantic range. The film, however, articulates this profound sensory shift in audiovisual terms, arguably representing a much closer representational correspondence with the audiovisual alterations Randles describes in the Oz Factor. As such, one might reasonably assert that it was the film of *The Wizard of Oz*, not the book, that Randles had in mind when conceptualising the Oz Factor, and this is significant insofar as this cinematic reference point posits, from within ufology, the possibility of a quasi-cinematic dimension to the UFO phe-

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[246] L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (New York City, NY: G.M. Hill Co., 1899), pp. 15-16.

nomenon (and a quasi-ufological dimension to the cinematic).[247]

Clearly, under certain circumstances ufology is drawn to aspects of the cinematic when it comes to attempting to theorise its object of study. Taking this a step further, then, perhaps ufological theories of the visual can serve the close textual analysis of particular film scenes? This section will consider the possibility that one of the most well known ways in which ufologists have theorised the perspectival configurations generative of UFO sightings (J. Allen Hynek's "Close Encounters" system) has the potential to serve as a means of theorising the expressive yield of the UFO representation in the moving image (specifically, in this case, in relation to what is conventionally theorised as "shot scale," the relative distance of the camera from its principal subject). As an opportunity to "do film studies" with ufology, treating Hynek's Close Encounters system as a ufological analogue of conventional film studies shot scale will outline both the affordances and the limitations of established ufological visuality in the context of the moving image, serving as a springboard into the conceptualisation of this study's own ufologically-informed approach to screen UFO aesthetics.

Hynek's Close Encounters system is ufology's most rigorous systematisation of the relationship between perspective and relative comprehensibility in the UFO sighting. Like shot scale in film studies—which categorises shots for their correspondence with particular intervals in the camera's proximity to its subject, and figures these categories as a determinant of aesthetic expressivity—the Close Encounters system employs an equivalent structure of categorisation to outline how proximity between UFOs and witnesses determines witness comprehension, and the strength of eyewitness testimony. The analogous structure of these disciplinarily-distinct, yet structurally parallel theoreti-

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[247] It is worth recalling here that the story of Oz culminates in the revelation that the titular Wizard is, like the chess-playing Turk, really no more than an ordinary man operating a complex mechanical illusion. While this might potentially serve as an unwanted association in the context of Randles' original formulation, weakening its contribution to assertions of UFO evidence, it does, however, neatly dovetail with this thesis' assertion that the artificial UFO is no less visually interesting than the "authentic" UFO.

cal concepts is clear to see. But this is not to suggest that they can serve as straightforward substitutes for one another. For one, Hynek's systematic categorisation of different kinds of UFO sightings was conceived not, as is commonly assumed, as a hermeneutical framework—seeking to extract qualitative evidence from individual sighting reports—but rather out of statistical necessity, assisting in the meta-analysis of UFO sighting reports. "[I]t occurred to [him,]" Hynek's biographer Mark O'Connell writes, "that if he could place cases in discrete categories derived from the reliability of the witness and the nature of the sighting, then perhaps, over time, patterns might begin to emerge."[248] This, of course, runs contrary to the conventional use of shot scale in the analysis of cinema, which typically seeks to use the proximity between the camera and its subject in a particular shot as a metric for substantiating an exegesis of that image.[249] Similarly, where Hynek's Close Encounters system refers to the relationship between an eyewitness and a UFO, shot scale refers to the relationship between a camera and its subject. The possibility of a trade between the ocular perception of a conscious, human observer and the mechanical "eye unruled by man-made laws" of the camera lens has a number of unforeseen consequences that will be considered in more detail shortly.[250] Prior to that, however, it is necessary to provide a more detailed outline of the Close Encounters system.

Even before any further specification takes place, "Close Encounters" is itself a distinction, concerning, as the name suggests, instances in which UFO witnesses report

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[248] Furthermore, Vallee notes that methodologies such as the Close Encounters system were also vital in terms of privacy, and diplomatic immunity. Being able to talk of a "CE-II" or "CE-III" rather than "landings" and "UFOnauts" lent an air of objective sobriety to the subject that eased over many of the difficulties UFO researchers faced both socially and professionally. Mark O'Connell, *The Close Encounters Man* (New York City, NY: Harper Collins, 2017), p. 223, and Jacques Vallee, *Forbidden Science: Journals 1957-1969* (New York City, NY: Marlowe & Company, 1996), p. 64.

[249] Though there are, of course, many theorists that do also employ shot scale in a metanalytical capacity more consistent with Hynek's intended use for the Close Encounters system, most notably figures like David Bordwell, and other associated formalist practitioners.

[250] Stan Brakhage, *Metaphors on Vision* (New York City, NY: Film Culture Inc., 1963), p. 23.

sightings that take place not at great distance, but in relatively close proximity (Hynek varies on the precise dimensions of this, offering distances ranging from **"**less than 500 feet" to "sometimes 20 feet or less," also positing the activation of stereoscopic vision as a potential threshold for "close"-ness).[251] The implication of this initial distinction is that at close proximity, one would reasonably expect many typical explanations for misidentification not to apply. "[I]t is hard," as Hynek writes, "to label a large object reportedly sighted just a few hundred feet away as Venus or a helicopter."[252] Proceeding from this more general "close-ness," then, the system breaks sightings down into a number of further categories, consisting, in its original formulation, of: "Close Encounters of the First Kind" (CE-I), "Close Encounters of the Second Kind" (CE-II), and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (CE-III).

Succeeding Hynek's earlier, designatory triumvirate of "nocturnal lights," "daylight discs," and "radar-visual cases," the three categories of the Close Encounters system were formulated to organise sighting reports according to quantities and qualities of sense-information, encompassing both remote senses (sight, sound, scent), and contact senses (touch, taste).[253] The first of these categories, the CE-I, describes reports in which there is "a close encounter with a UFO but there is no interaction of the UFO with either the witness or the environment," "a sighting that is close up but which "does" little more than firmly impress itself into the memory of the witness."[254] CE-II describes reports in which "the UFO is observed interacting with the environment and frequently with the witness as well."[255] These interactions can involve both living creatures and inanimate objects, ranging from landing marks and burnt foliage, to effects as

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[251] Hynek, *The UFO Experience*, pp. 44, 116, and Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report*, p. 29.

[252] Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report*, p. 145.

[253] ibid., p. 29.

[254] ibid., pp. 29, 145.

[255] ibid., p. 30.

diverse as conjunctivitis in witnesses, and "reduced milk production" in cows.[256] "The significance of such physical interactions is obvious," Hynek writes, "they offer opportunity for physical measurement and the promise of 'hard data.'"[257] From a semiological standpoint, the distinction between CE-Is and CE-IIs is also significant for their clear relation to Peirce's semiology, and specifically the distinction between iconic resemblance and indexical causation (indeed, the diversity of Hynek's examples of the evidence presented in CE-IIs is also reminiscent of Peirce's many varied examples of indexical signs). CE-Is, in Hynek's original formulation, describe iconic signification, where CE-II combines iconic signification with an indexical trace or gesture. Finally, the third category, CE-III, describes reports where, in addition to a UFO of some kind, occupants are also observed ("the most puzzling aspect of the UFO phenomenon," Hynek writes).[258] This final category is striking for its apparent divergence from the interrelational schema of the two previous categories. In a break from a trajectory defined by increasing proximity and tangibility of evidence, CE-III advances semiologically perpendicularly to the progression from CE-I to CE-II (and the move from the iconic, to the iconic and indexical), appending an additional iconic distinction (the sight of beings accompanying the UFO).

Clearly, then, given CE-III's disjunctiveness proceeding from CE-I and CE-II, the semiotics of the Close Encounters system are not determined by a progression along a trajectory of increased proximity and greater sensory accessibility. In fact, Hynek never specifically addressed the way in which the categories of the Close Encounters system were conceived as relating to one another, or, indeed, whether they ever were even intended to do so. Given this disrupted semiological progression, the Close Encounters

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[256] ibid., p. 171.

[257] Hynek, *The UFO Experience*, p. 145.

[258] Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report*, p. 31.

system might be better considered less an assortment of unconnected categories, than a graduated scale, broadly analogous to that of cinematic shot scale. Given that an implied causal relationship between proximity and semiology no longer stands, however, for the inconsistencies already noted, what is the common variable across the three stages of the Close Encounters system? Given the increasingly extraordinary character of the Close Encounters categories as they numerically ascend (and the many additional categories ufologists have appended to the system in later years seem to affirm this) they appear to be ordered in such a way as to address increasing levels of perceived anomalousness, or, to draw another term from the ufological vocabulary, increasing levels of "high strangeness."[259]

Another of Hynek's diagnostic concepts, "high strangeness" refers to aspects of UFO sightings that remain stubbornly unassimilable with a hegemonic worldview; strange but unshakeable details that seem to present themselves only to obstruct the possibility of deriving meaning from the UFO experience. As Hynek notes, many UFO encounters "[seem] designed to "outrage common sense.""[260] This should not be surprising, as Vallee observes, given that "the behavior of a superior race coexisting with us on this planet, would not necessarily appear purposeful to a human observer." It is "much more likely that we would find in their actions only random data and incoherent pictures, much as a dog would if confronted with a mathematician writing on a blackboard."[261] Like the Close Encounters system, high strangeness is not strictly analytical, but meta-

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[259] Of the several additional CE categories ufologists have since appended to Hynek's original three, there is, most famously, "CE-IV's" (alien abduction), "CE-V's" (communication with extraterrestrial intelligences), "CE-VI's" (cases that involve the death of either a witness or a UFO occupant), and "CE-VII's" (describing sexual intercourse and/or hybridisation of humans with alien beings). These are, however, much less commonly employed than the original categories, and will not be considered in detail here. ibid., p. 265.

[260] Hynek quoted in David Dreier, 'A Close Encounter with Professor Hynek,' *North Shore* (December 1980), quoted in O'Connell, *The Close Encounters Man*, p. 330.

[261] Jacques Vallee, *Passport to Magonia: On UFOs, Folklore, and Parallel Worlds* (Washington D. C.: H. Regnery Company, 1969), pp. 116-17.

analytical, and in two key ways. High strangeness acknowledges the inherent obscurity of the ufological subject, ensuring that these incomprehensible elements remain fore-grounded, where appropriate, and not overlooked. As ufology is the science of UFOs, and UFOs are purported to represent anomalous aerial phenomena, it is important to preserve the anomalous characteristics of UFO as they are the principal object of study (if the UFO did not defy expectation then it could not be considered anomalous, but sci-entific orthodoxy typically dismisses anomalies as outliers). Equally, as Vallee has writ-ten, the spectacular character of high strangeness is integral to ensuring the endurance of the UFO as a cultural phenomenon. Referring to the more lurid elements in fairy lore (which he famously considers a historical antecedent to the UFO phenomenon, perhaps even an earlier cultural understanding of the same phenomenon), Vallee writes: "With-out the sexual context—without the stories of changelings, human midwives, intermar-riage with the Gentry, of which we never hear in modern fairy tales—it is doubtful that the tradition about fairies would have survived through the ages."[262] The same is true, arguably, of high strangeness and UFO culture (which, itself, famously pivoted towards the sexual as the original saucer wave waned, and abduction narratives emerged in the 1970s and 1980s). It is difficult to offer general examples of high strangeness because it is, by its very nature, characterised by a lack of generalisability, both with the known order and other ufological events. Indicative examples, however, might include the "strange electronic-sounding beeping" Barney and Betty Hill—often considered the first UFO abductees—reported emanating from the boot of their car during their UFO sight-ing, Scottish UFO witness Robert Taylor's report of a UFO releasing two floating spheres with razor-like appendages that flew down and slashed his trousers, or the "[r]apid visions" of "flashing dog pictures," as if someone "were turning the pages of a

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[262] ibid., pp. 116-17.

book" Ed Walters claims overwhelmed his consciousness during one of his UFO sightings; details of events that bear no obvious purpose, or relation to the ufological subject, yet stand out for their singular, irreducible incidence.[263] As a significant elaboration of the "run of the mill" CE-I or CE-II, CE-III, and particularly the strange and unpredictable forms reported of UFO occupants over the years, also represent high strangeness.[264]

Perhaps, then, the Close Encounters system can be considered a scale organised along ascending degrees of "strangeness"? Distant sightings, lacking detail even to qualify for CE-I, represent encounters of a low strangeness index. The additional visual information witnessed in the CE-I represents something stranger, the physical evidence of the CE-II stranger still, and the nonhumans witnessed in CE-III's strangest of all.[265] Equally, however, by virtue of their designation as "Close Encounters," and the implications of proximity and reliability with regard to observing anomalous activity, the Close Encounters scale is significant for the manner in which it figures strangeness as proportional to a decreased likelihood of misperception. As Hynek explains in *The UFO Experience*, plotting UFO reports on a graph according to their relative "Strangeness" and "Probability," being closer to the objects in question makes the objects and events, however strange, considerably more likely to have taken place than if they had been perceived in such a way from a further distance.[266] This, and not simply "probability" and/ or "strangeness" in isolation, is the assumption on which the ascending categories of the

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[263] See John Fuller, *The Interrupted Journey* (New York City, NY: The Dial Press, 1966), p. 18, Nick Pope, *The Uninvited* (New York City, NY: Overlook Press, 1998), p. 85, and Ed Walters & Francis Walters, *The Gulf Breeze Sightings: The Most Astounding Multiple Sightings of UFOs in U. S. History* (New York City, NY: W. Morrow, 1990), p. 30.

[264] Turning attention to high strangeness is also appropriate at this stage in the thesis for how it suitably expresses the reduced role played by visual indeterminacy in the spatiotemporally detailed UFO representation of the moving image. Unlike the blurriness and diffuseness chiefly responsible for the ufological ambiguity in still UFOs, high strangeness offers an alternative ambiguity of stubborn, yet baffling detail.

[265] Though, again, the additional CE categories ufologists have since added to Hynek's original three extend and complicate the system's initial semiotic trajectory, and its relative increase in strangeness.

[266] Hynek, *The UFO Experience*, p. 42.

| CE: | Definition: | Strangeness: | Probability: | Proximity: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **CE-1** | UFO observed nearby | Strange | Unlikely to be mistaken | Close |
| **CE-2** | UFO interacts with surrounding environment | Stranger | More unlikely to be mistaken | Closer |
| **CE-3** | UFO occupants seen | Very strange | Very unlikely to be mistaken | Very close |

*fig. 14.1: Table charting projected values of strangeness, probability, and proximity across J. Allen Hynek's conceptualisation of the original three categories in his "Close Encounters" scale of UFO sighting reports.*

Close Encounters scale operate.

With these notions in mind, then, the categorisation of the Close Encounters system may be best understood in terms of the conditions outlined in the table above (see *fig. 14.1*). It shows how the values of probability and proximity ascend proportionally to the rise in high strangeness as extrapolated from the intervals of Hynek's original formulation of the Close Encounters system. The Close Encounters system can be understood as an ascending scale in this way. To adjoin this to the cinematic metric of shot scale, one need only to turn to any textbook written for film studies students to appreciate the extent to which, like the Close Encounters system, shot scale is similarly entwined with notions of modulating viewer engagement and access to information. For instance, in the textbook perhaps most widely listed on undergraduate reading lists—David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson's *Film Art*—the authors write: "Close ups can bring out textures and details we might otherwise ignore. […] Long shots can permit us to explore expansive spaces," implicitly linking shot scale to a spectrum of "detail" versus "expans[e]," micro versus macro.[267] (It is also no coincidence that, in Bordwell and Thompson's words, "the standard measure [of shot scale is] the scale of the human

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[267] David Bordwell & Kristen Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (Fifth Edition) (New York City, NY: McGraw Hill, 1997), pp. 241-2.

body," as when the "*plan américain*" is described as "framed from about the knees up," and a "close-up" is typically of a face.[268] Conventionally, shot scale is an anthropocentric measure of photographic representation, and the introduction of UFOs into this equation should only further disrupt this chauvinism.) In the sense that shot scale is intimately linked to the modulation of access to visual information—that close-ups offer less visual information in greater detail, and long-shots offer more information in less detail—one can easily see how the moving image may be uniquely equipped to present ufological perspectives with unique complexity. But how exactly might the Close Encounters scale inform an understanding of cinematic shot scale, and vice versa?

To explore these possibilities fully, it is necessary to select a film to examine in close detail. As far as the classics are concerned, one in particular stands out for containing arguably the most iconic cinema UFO of all time, *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock, MGM, USA, 1959), and specifically, its famous crop-duster sequence. Of course, referring to the crop-duster sequence as a "UFO" encounter, risks what some might consider an overly liberal use of the term. The object in question is, after all, immediately identifiable, and adequately describable, as a "crop-duster." It is worth leading with this example, however, as although the *North by Northwest* crop-dusting biplane may appear as a crop-duster (just as the activity more conventionally thought of as "UFOs" can take the form of balloons, gliders, stealth jets, and even saucers), its behaviour, wholly uncharacteristic of ordinary crop-dusters, singles it out as an unidentifiable flying object. Who is flying it? What is its purpose? Why is it shooting at Cary Grant? Furthermore, there are few more canonical case studies available to film studies than the films of Alfred Hitchcock, whose innovations within the stylistic parameters of Classical Hollywood Style, pored over by film scholars to the present day, firmly position him as the

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[268] ibid., pp. 237, 238.

quintessential "film studies" director. As such, his film is an ideal sounding board for testing the legitimacy of this ufological approach to film studies (if it works on Hitchcock, it can be safely assumed to work more widely). Consistent with the ufological logic of the Close Encounters scale, the crop-duster sequence effectively illustrates the way in which the movement of objects in relation to the camera, and the film's mapping of proximity between those objects modulates viewer expectation and understanding. Working as a uniquely ufological interpretative framework for analysis of shot scale, and the relationship between subject and object in moving image diegetic representation, Hitchcock's framing in the sequence can be read as operating in accordance with the ufological logic of high strangeness—in which strangeness increases proportionally to close proximity and the improbability of misperception—establishing a fictional world in which, at any moment, the familiar and apparently innocuous can unexpectedly transform into a grave threat.

The sequence begins with Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) talking with a stranger at the bus stop. The moment in question occurs after the stranger catches the bus, and Thornhill is alone, checking his watch before the camera cuts, initially unmotivated—he does not look, and there is no change in sound—to a crop-dusting biplane on the horizon. Previously, the crop-duster has been shown in a cut-away simply going about its ordinary business, so its reappearance here is not wholly unexpected. This begins a sequence, however, where a shot taken from a fixed perspective, slowly panning to follow the crop-duster in the sky, is broken up with a series of reaction shots of Thornhill, who is increasing startled by the plane as it makes an unexpected turn towards him. There is no music, no explicit indicators that anything is out of the ordinary, but the rising vol-
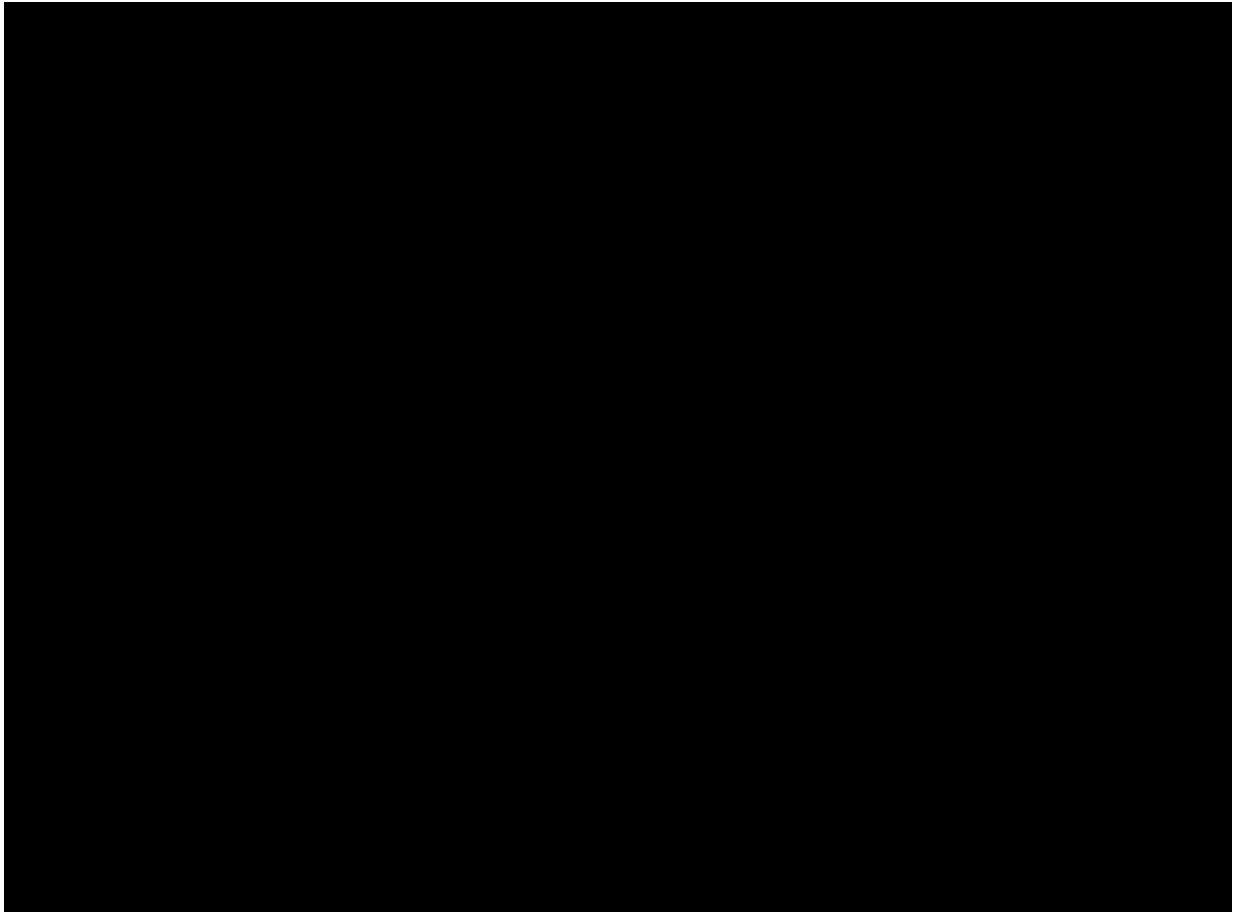
*fig. 14.2: Diagram delineating the shot sequence from the crop-duster scene in* North by Northwest.
*(The letters along the* x *axis denote the three shot positions used in the sequence, and the numbers
along the* y *axis outline their sequential progression.)*

ume of the plane's engine as it makes its approach, ratchets a considerable tension.[269]

In the short, ten-shot sequence outlined in the diagram above (see *fig. 14.2*), Hitchcock orchestrates the crop-duster's transition from innocuous occupant of the setting to unexpected adversary in a manner cinematically didactic of the logic of Hynek's Close Encounters scale. This can be appreciated by observing Hitchcock's mapping of relative spatial proximity (represented by the shots of the plane in column B of the dia-

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[269] Insofar as the sound of the engine continues to rise during the shots where Thornhill is shown looking at the crop-duster while it remains offscreen, the engine sound accords to what Pierre Schaeffer theorised as "acousmatic" sound—sound that, in the absence of a visual anchor, attains an ambiguity that demands a more timbral, associative approach to listening—and, specifically, Michel Chion's introduction of the principles of the acousmatic to the consideration of film sound. The sound of the engine can be considered, in this regard, as working in conjunction with the visual elements of the sequence to make a "UFO" of a crop-duster, its acousmatic ambiguity serving as a prompt to question its nature. See Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux: Essai Interdisciplines* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), p. 95, and Michel Chion, *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, trans. James A. Steintrager (London: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 112.

gram), in relation to the rate at which Thornhill's (and, of course, the viewer's) expectations of how the world is expected to operate are increasingly overturned (represented by the shots of Thornhill in column A). In terms of proximity, the consistent perspective on the plane as it moves towards the fixed spatial coordinate occupied by the camera in the shots in column B denotes the plane's proximity to Thornhill in a manner instructive of the spatial relationship between Thornhill and the plane, holding each shot long enough that the plane's movement closer is experienced as a visible progression through a spatiotemporally unified field. These images are paired with a series of reaction shots of Thornhill in column A, which reorientate ninety degrees between shots A1 and A2, tracking slightly inwards between A4 and A5. The progression here, enhanced by editing between these three gradually encroaching shot positions, charts Thornhill's growing panic as the plane increasingly transgresses its expected function. Specifically, then, the relationship between these two sets of gradually evolving images illustrates how the Close Encounters scale corresponds with cinematic shot scale. The initial unmotivated cut from Thornhill checking his watch to the plane on the horizon begins almost as a mid scene establishing shot, offering seemingly objective information about the scene's setting. Once Thornhill notices the plane turning, however (a recognition made between shots A2 and A3), Hitchcock increasingly aligns the shots in column B with a perspective substituting for Thornhill's point-of-view, Grant's performance paced at an equivalent rate to the plane's approach. In other words, as the plane's behaviour becomes increasingly unusual, the viewer is increasingly aligned with Thornhill's perspective, and so Hitchcock can be seen visually articulating the extent to which Thornhill and the viewer's understanding of the diegetic world is challenged in terms directly corresponding with the ufological Close Encounter.

In other words, while the crop-duster is identifiable as a crop-duster when it is seen

dusting crops at a comfortable distance, Hitchcock's direction of the sequence—specifically his devising of a cinematographic schema of shot scale consistent with the logic of Hynek's Close Encounters scale and ufological high strangeness—enacts precisely the perspectival shift that makes a crop-duster into a "UFO." The sequence does not just depict a "UFO" arriving from nowhere and disappearing, it shows, along a clear, continuous progression, the perceptual transformation perspective is capable of enacting upon an entirely ordinary object, turning it into an unidentifiable flying object. Where the still UFO photographs of the first half of the thesis arrive before the viewer in a pre-existing state of ufological ambiguity, here, Hitchcock orchestrates the dawning of a perspectival UFO. It is in this respect that the relationship between the "UFO" and the camera in this scene offers both a clear demonstration—unique to the moving image—of the centrality of perspective in the UFO sighting, as well as a representation of the ufological logic that the closer something is seen, and the more sensory information an anomalous subject yields, the greater the challenge it poses to its reconciliation with existing expectations of the world. After all, the exact purpose of the crop-duster attack is never made clear. It appears primarily, on a purely sensory level, as one of many wrinkles in the fabric of the diegesis that occur throughout *North by Northwest*, reminding viewers that the world of the film harbours hidden, malign forces, whose emergence cannot be reliably predicted (a suspicion aptly reminiscent of ufological paranoia and conspiracy theory). While UFO encounters cannot be predicted, then, this sequence from *North by Northwest* clearly demonstrates how they can emerge from anywhere at any time as the consequence of a perspectival shift, offering visual insight into the UFO, even if it cannot specify the UFO's true nature. As per the title of the book in which Hynek first outlined the Close Encounters scale, *North by Northwest* serves as a reminder that a UFO is never just an object, it is constituted in a very particular kind of

viewing "[*e*]*xperience*,"[270] a viewing experience which—to invert the familiar hermeneutical logic of elucidatory approach—proximity and detail confound before they reveal.

Concluding, then, while one might hesitate to call the UFO "*inherently* cinematic," and this appropriation of Hynek's Close Encounters system for the benefit of film analysis does not provide a definitive reading of this much-discussed scene, what can be said for sure is that there is a clear symbiotic affinity between moving image and the UFO sighting, and this sequence from *North by Northwest* helpfully illustrates the coefficiency exhibited between certain ufological and cinematic ways of deriving meaning from audiovisual experience. Applying the principles of the Close Encounters system to an examination of Hitchcock's use of shot scale provides a motivating structure to the sequence of shots that introduce the crop-duster sequence in *North by Northwest* persuasively accounting for what might be inferred of the desired expressive effect of presenting the scene in this way. Indeed, one might speculate as to how the principles of the Close Encounters scale and its relationship to ufological high strangeness might aid an analysis of other films, not least other Hitchcock films, including perhaps his most famous depiction of aerial adversity, *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, Universal, USA, 1963). (Maybe similar inferences can be drawn from the fact that the famous scene in *The Birds* depicting a seagull attacking Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) as she takes a rowboat across the bay, does so by depicting the bird interrupting an otherwise conventional close-up of Daniels' face, once again using close proximity to subvert expectations of the close-up as an uninterruptedly anthropocentric unit of moving image representation?) If this concept from ufology appears capable of offering new ways of thinking about arguably the quintessential film studies subject (the films of Alfred

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[270] See Hynek, *The UFO Experience.*

Hitchcock), then UFOs undoubtedly have the potential to pose a uniquely effective theoretical and aesthetic interruption upon many familiar cinematic principles too often taken for granted.

What, then, do the unique aesthetic characteristics of the UFO—its perspectival mutability, representational instability, and gestures of self-reflexiveness—ultimately achieve? Since the UFO image remains the primary locus of attention, and not ufology per se, it makes sense that this theorisation should emerge from a consideration of UFO images, and that moving ahead with what has been learned from reading ufological texts through an aesthetic filter, ufology can, at last, be left behind. If existing ufological thought cannot wholly account for the UFO's unique aesthetic affordances, it will be necessary to conceive of an aesthetic schema that is capable of containing and organising the unruly representational characteristics unique to the UFO. This is the aim of what remains of the thesis, which begins by focusing on one moving image UFO in particular, the UFO that serves as a catalyst for the events that take place in the second series of *Fargo*. Just as the semiological difficulties presented by the UFO photograph seem to offer nascent schematisations of certain ways of looking at images (inasmuch as any image, of course, might be said to do the same), the UFO in *Fargo* (and, more specifically, how its appearance in the programme is contextualised by that surrounding it) lays a foundation for a new framework for approaching screen UFOs. Of particular interest is the means by which the fiction and its characters incorporate the UFO into a narrative in which it plays a vital, but essentially ambivalent role. This can be observed, most notably, in a disjunction between how the UFO is presented, what it appears to do, and what can be inferred of how the characters understand this. In this way, like any useful approach to art or visual media, the UFO will be allowed to speak for itself, without the imposition of any ufological "alien qualities" unduly predetermining the

course of its interpretation.

## 15. "FUBAR"

Given all that has been considered of the moving image UFO so far, how exactly might the screen UFO outline a unifying theory of its unique aesthetic character? There is one particular screen UFO that stands out. Its appearance, behaviour, and thematic resonances offer not only a structure, but a name for a speculative theoretical aesthetics of the moving image UFO grounded in this thesis' perspectival redefinition of the UFO. The UFO in question appears in two (maybe three) significant moments in the second series of *Fargo*, which, coupled with a term repeatedly uttered by its characters, auspiciously encapsulates the uniquely disruptive aesthetic character of the screen UFO.

Set in the U. S. Midwest in the late 1970s, the second series of *Fargo* weaves an ensemble cast through an array of intersecting narrative threads. At the centre of the narrative is the disappearance of petty gangster Rye Gerhardt (Kieran Culkin) of the Gerhardt crime family, who while leaving the scene of a fatal extortion attempt in a Luverne, Minnesota diner, is distracted by the unexpected appearance of a UFO. Also distracted, hairdresser Peggy Blumquist (Kirsten Dunst) hits Gerhardt with her car, apparently killing him, and in a panic, she bundles his body into the boot and drives home. Rye's disappearance—a direct consequence of the UFO's unexpected arrival—sets into motion a series of events that bring together the Gerhardts, the rival Kansas City crime family, local law enforcement, and a number of unsuspecting civilians in a variety of surprising and often violent configurations. Displaying a conspicuous narratological self-awareness, the UFO makes another unexpected appearance during a life-and-death confrontation in the series' penultimate episode, nudging events towards a new, but im-

perfect equilibrium.[271] (There is also a moment at the end of the series' second episode where the UFO's distinctive turquoise glow momentarily illuminates the setting, though whether this truly represents an appearance from the UFO is left deliberately ambiguous.)

The precise ways in which this UFO emblematises the aesthetics of the screen UFO will be considered in due course, but first, attention must turn to the previously noted term that seems to volunteer its conceptual structure to this new theoretical approach. The term in question is first used in the third episode of the series when state trooper Lou Solverson (Patrick Wilson) meets with Detective Ben Schmidt (Keir O'Donnell) at the Fargo police station before visiting the Gerhardt family home. Idly chatting, talk turns to their service in the Vietnam War, where Schmidt alludes to similarities between events in Vietnam and their present situation, remarking: "We had a saying: FUBAR…" "Yeah, we had that too", Lou replies. Later, when several characters are killed in the events following the second UFO encounter, Schmidt reprises this reference, positing: "FUBAR, ya?" Lou affirms his suggestion: "FUBAR." Like the UFO—whose precise nature is never truly revealed—*Fargo* does not allow its characters an opportunity to define this acronym. Deliberately brought into close proximity with UFOs in *Fargo*, however, this phrase provides a vital organising structure to the forthcoming theorisation of moving image UFOs.

*Fargo* is acutely conscious of its citation of the UFO as an image capable of exerting a disruptive effect. The series offers a number of self-reflexive expressions of the UFO as a MacGuffin-like narratological catalyst (during its final appearance, for instance,

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[271] "Equilibrium" here draws upon Todorov's use of the term in his canonical essay 'Structural Analysis Of Narrative.' In *Fargo*, the UFO occupies the curious position of motivating both the disruption of an initial state of equilibrium, and its eventual reestablishment, despite having no other direct involvement in the series' narrative. Such a linkage of integral narrative function with an emphatic sense of contingency—more commonly associated, perhaps, with the brazen orchestrations of *deus ex machina*—is one example of the deconstructive disturbance produced in the UFO's contact with conventional narrative structures. See Tzvetan Todorov, 'Structural Analysis of Narrative,' trans. Arnold Weinstein, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 3, no. 1 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 70-76.

where Peggy Blumquist casually remarks to her husband (Jesse Plemons): "It's just a flying saucer, Ed, let's go"), and the wider intertextual significance of the UFO image in the Coens' filmography (a UFO plays a similar, though less narratively centralised role in *The Man Who Wasn't There* (Joel Coen, USA Films, USA, 2001)). There is also a pronounced irony to the UFO's function as a distinctly inhuman arbiter of the series' anthropocentric moral agenda. It is conspicuously convenient that it takes the quasi-divine-intervention of the UFO's arrival to uphold the triumph of the "goodies" and the downfall of the "baddies," readjusting the trajectories of those it had previously unsettled with its earlier appearance. "FUBAR" is uttered three times in *Fargo*, and though never in direct reference to the UFO, always as an equivalently outward-facing acknowledgement of the mess the UFO has made. "FUBAR" functions in this respect as a self-reflexive gesture equivalent to the famous line from *The Thing* (John Carpenter, Universal, USA, 1982) ("You've got to be fucking kidding!") Steve Neale influentially theorised in relation to the self-reflexive aesthetics of special effects.[272]

What, then, might the concept of "FUBAR" offer by way of critical reevaluation of the aesthetic particularities of the screen UFO? Certainly, the "FUBAR" acronym exerts a significant etymological resonance in this regard. Recalling the origin of the "UFO," "FUBAR"—standing for "*fucked/fouled up beyond all recognition*"—also originated in

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[272] Neale suggests the line "You've got to be fucking kidding," uttered by an incredulous Palmer (David Clennon) during the infamous defibrillator set-piece in *The Thing* (John Carpenter, Universal, USA, 1982), doubles as a diegetically concomitant expression of disbelief, and a self-reflexive device modelling the received experience of the spectator with regard to the film's impressive creature-effects. See Steve Neale, ''You've Got to be Fucking Kidding!' Knowledge, Belief and Judgement in Science Fiction,' in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 160-168.

U. S. military slang in the latter half of the Second World War.[273] In fact, similarities between the two terms run surprisingly deep, and an imperfect but compelling synonymity might even be deduced from the terms' shared descriptions of situations in which an event eludes comprehension (whether an *unidentified* flying object, or a situation that has been fucked up *beyond recognition*). This near-synonymity of "FUBAR" and "UFO" comes into tighter focus when one considers, as this thesis has argued, that the term "UFO" is better understood not as any distinct ontological category, but as a perceptual scenario characterised by a privation of the conditions necessary for identification and understanding. In this regard, "FUBAR" describes the very essence of the UFO encounter; an event, visually and thematically unstable, troubling the ordinary parameters of experience by withholding or frustrating sensory stimuli, and often extending its disrupted state upon all encompassed within its anomalous perspectival configuration. A UFO descends, and whether literally or figuratively (but always visually) it *fucks things up*, often beyond recognition.

But what are the key representational characteristics of FUBAR? The UFO in *Fargo* helps answer this question. The primary function of *Fargo*'s UFO is as a reflexive narratological intervention in the vein of *deus ex machina*, arriving to catalyse the series' plot, and reappearing so that all it set into motion can satisfactorily conclude. The extraordinariness of the UFO's incursion upon the terrestrial is emphasised through its stark contrast with the quotidian signifiers of small-town mundanity (previously identified as

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[273] The saying is said to have originated in the Second World War, the *Oxford English Dictionary* identifying its earliest known use in print in a January 1944 issue of *Yank* military magazine. The acronym would later be bowdlerised into the word "foobar", the syllable "foo" appositely recalling that of "foo fighter", the antiquated term for UFOs in which "foo" is understood to have originated from the French "*feu,*" (for "fire") or "foe" (as in "enemy"). Broken up into the constituent syllables "foo" and "bar", "foobar" has also occupied a significant role in computer science as a common example of what is known as a "metasyntactic variable," a placeholder in code, and is said to have originated at MIT in the 1960s. It also performs a certain jocular function in geology, where the portmanteau "Fubarite" is commonly used to refer to samples of rock whose origin is too difficult to attempt to determine. See Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. 'fubar, *adj.,*' *Oxford English Dictionary* <https://0-www-oed-com.pugwash.lib.warwick.ac.uk/view/Entry/249546> (Accessed 18th October, 2019), and D. Eastlake, C. Manros, & E. Raymond, 'Etymology of "Foo,"' *IETF Tools*, 1st April, 2001 <https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc3092#page-2> (Accessed 18th October, 2019.)

characterising the kind of marginal locations in which UFOs commonly appear), local shops, diners, motels, petrol stations, and bars. Its arrival is foregrounded with a number of ufologically-associative representational strategies preceding its appearance (like the headlights on the highway previously outlined), and long before that in *The Man Who Wasn't There*.[274] When it first arrives, it appears ambiguously, obscured by trees and an elaborate pattern of swirling lens flair. As it rises into view, a series of shots from the perspective of Rye reveal a rotating triangle of illuminated points that mask its structure behind a luminous turquoise glow. Moments later, it whisks off into the night, but only after holding Rye's attention just long enough to be hit by Peggy's car. Reappearing near the end of the series, it distracts those involved in a motel siege just long enough to al-low Peggy and Ed to escape the assassin Hanzee (Zahn McClarnon), and for Lou to free himself from the stranglehold of Bear Gerhardt (Angus Sampson). The UFO is shown in more detail this time, but, consistent with the previously outlined logic of the Close En-counter, this only provides more information at the cost of its comprehension. Seen from the perspective of Lou, lying beneath Bear on the motel carpark asphalt, the UFO seems to distort his vision, stretching the image out of proportion. The craft itself has a densely textured surface, and extrudes an unknown fluid. It also appears circular, prompting viewers to ask—after seven hours of screen time have elapsed—is it even the same UFO from the first episode (which appeared more triangular)? A long-shot, from no particular embodied perspective, shows the UFO hovering above the carpark in front of the motel balcony, providing a seemingly objective authentication of the UFO's diegetic actuality before, again, the UFO lifts away, leaving no evidence of its existence besides the consequences of intervention upon the expected course of events.

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[274] This intertextual dimension to the UFO is also affirmed by the fact that *Fargo*, as a series, is haunted by the wider Coen Brothers filmography. For instance, more obvious than the UFO connection is Ed's rendering of Rye's body through the butcher-shop mincer, recalling Carl Showalter's (Steve Buscemi) fate in the original *Fargo* (Joel Coen, Gramercy Pictures, USA, 1996) film.

If the UFO in *Fargo* serves as a model from which to derive a provisional aesthetics of moving image FUBAR, then, how can its functions and characteristics be summarised at this stage? First, the visual instabilities of the UFO, discussed throughout this thesis, function to ensure its ontological and epistemological ambiguity. Second, these ambiguities enable the UFO to function as a neutral (almost non-narrative) force of narratological intervention, setting events into motion. Third, its appearances hark back to, and derive some significance from, the appearance of the UFO in *The Man Who Wasn't There*, establishing the UFO as an iconographical unit with thematic resonances across the wider Coen Brothers filmography.[275] Initially these levels of the UFO's function in *Fargo* might appear distinct, but they all have something in common—*disruption*—and this how is FUBAR most directly describes the aesthetics of the screen UFO. In a literal, visual sense, the UFO's disruption of photographic representation, as performed via its diffuse, ambiguous appearance, and later its stretching and blurring of the image, fuck the *image* up beyond all recognition. At a broader, narrative, and conceptual level, the UFO disrupts *Fargo*, its appearances inducing collisions between people and places in such a way as to constitute the plot; it fucks the *diegesis* up beyond all recognition. At a textual level, with its introduction of intertextual associations that puncture its diegetic homogeneity, the UFO disrupts the series' internal logic, agitating and displacing local signifiers with links to a much wider pool of associations; it fucks the *text* up beyond all recognition. As much as the UFO's principal role in *Fargo* might superficially appear as unification, then, serving as the central figure in an unruly and chaotic narrative, it is really better thought of as enacting a disruptive influence at each of these three represen-

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[275] One can also consider the UFO's appearance in *Fargo* an allusion to the real UFO incident that took place over Fargo in 1948. In an event widely referred to in ufology as the "Gorman dogfight," Second World War veteran George F. Gorman pursued a UFO in a P-51 Mustang for almost twenty minutes on the evening of the 1st of October, 1948. The incident was investigated by Project Sign and the UFO Gorman witnessed was determined to be most likely an optical illusion, but the event was widely publicised and contributed to the popularity of the initial flying saucer wave. See Ruppelt, *Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, pp. 41-44.

tational levels. The unruliness of this chaotic narrative is unified by the UFO only inso-
far as the UFO is responsible for this disruption. Without knowledge of the UFO's true
nature and purpose, the only reliable measure of the UFO's significance is the many
consequences its appearance has upon those caught in its sphere of influence.

What, then, in sum, does FUBAR describe of the aesthetics of the screen UFO at this
provisional stage? Moving within and between texts, the UFO commands the represen-
tational opportunities afforded by the moving image to plough visual and conceptual
furrows into the recognisable surface of the everyday. Via the distortion of conventional
visual representation, disjuncture across cuts, and a host of unstemmable intertextual
exchanges, the moving image gives tangible shape to the spatiotemporal collage the
UFO enacts in its extraordinary travels. In this respect, perhaps the primary aesthetic
characteristic of the screen UFO, considered in terms of FUBAR, is a robust and dra-
matic participation in the foundational principle of filmic grammar (according to Eisen-
stein, at least); collision, dialectical juxtapositions that interrupt established patterns of
the visual to construct new representations of the world.[276] There are at least three dis-
tinct levels in the aesthetics of FUBAR at which these collisions occur. Either side of a
principal narrative level—that which dictates the spatiotemporal interrelations of the
fiction—there is an immediate visual level, the concatenation of elements in the indi-
vidual image; and a wider, less-discrete, intertextual level. There is significant theoreti-
cal precedent for what the screen UFO can be observed enacting at each of these lev-
els—including a number of existing theories of how UFOs and adjacent iconography
function in the moving image that are also predicated on forms of juxtapositional colli-
sion—and these will be considered in the course of an examination of each of these dif-
ferent levels of what can be referred to as "FUBAR," across an assortment of appropri-

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[276] Sergei Eisenstein, 'Beyond the Shot [The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram],' in Leo
Braudy & Marshall Cohen (ed.), *Film Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.
20-21.

ate film and television examples.

*15a. Spatiotemporal FUBAR*

Starting with what can be called "spatiotemporal FUBAR"—and beginning its consideration with particular focus on the spatial—the most overt expressions of FUBAR can be observed in the manner the UFO disrupts the relationship between narrative content and its organisation in its motivation of unusually acute spatial juxtapositions. Anyone who has seen a film containing a UFO will already be familiar with the notion that UFOs manipulate space and time in different ways. Recalling the ufological "zone of influence" and Randles' Oz Factor, the most obvious form of spatial FUBAR are the effects screen UFOs are shown to exert upon their diegetic surroundings. A voice over the loudspeaker at the landing site in *Close Encounters…*, for instance, warns base personnel to "beware of low gravity" in the vicinity of the alien craft, an effect witnessed earlier in the film when a spectacular volume of junk in Roy's truck is violently upturned by the UFO's unseen presence, an instance where the UFO's effect on its environment is harnessed as a means for its indirect visual representation. This kind of FUBAR incorporates the immediate narrative function of screen UFOs. As in *Fargo*, this is a disruption enacted at the level of the narration, catalysing, in diegetic space, the development of the plot.

Any discussion of space in relation to science fiction iconography requires consideration of Sontag's treatment of the subject in her canonical essay "The Imagination Of Disaster," and Sobchack's uptaking and expansion of Sontag's ideas in the 1970s. Sontag and Sobchack describe a formal tendency in science fiction cinema to present a "visual movement […] from *montage* to *mise en scene*," a progression characterised by

an approach of oppositional forces ("images to which we respond as "alien" and those we know to be familiar") culminating in their spectacular intersection in a single perspectively-continuous, verisimilitudinous image, the simultaneous presentation of the familiar metropolitan cityscape and an alien monstrosity with "the spatial density of something real."[277] In this climactic moment, the viewer's patience is rewarded with an image that brings together the alien and familiar, not in unity but collision; a "cinematic realization of an *imaginary action* occurring in what seems to be documented *real space*," "the visual integration of actual and impossible in the same frame."[278] This is an "aesthetics of collision," in Sobchack's words, a "flamboyant demonstration of incongruence," between worldly and otherworldly iconography.[279]

Broadly, the spatial dimensions of FUBAR are consistent with this. In its travels between the furthest reaches of outer space and earth at its most familiar, the UFO leads moving image narration on a merry chase, bringing all manner of people, places, objects, events, into what is often a highly unstable mix. Ranging from *Arrival*'s depiction of twelve UFOs motivating a range of diegetic and non-diegetic links between twelve, otherwise unconnected terrestrial locations, to *Fargo*'s comparatively modest depiction of the UFO's linkage of Rye and Peggy at the Luverne Waffle Hut, with Lou, Peggy, et al, in a nearby motel forecourt, these are the kind of spatial juxtapositions screen UFOs commonly enact. UFOs are unique, in this respect, for the manner in which they not only bombard the familiar with the alien (as in Sontag and Sobchack's theorisation of science fiction aesthetics), but determine novel recombinations of typically unrelated aspects of the familiar. In other words, in the visual and thematic implications of the spatial collisions enacted by the UFO, the UFO often has the effect of recontextualising

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[277] See Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster,' pp. 42-48, Sobchack, *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film,* p. 87, and Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster,' p. 50.

[278] Sobchack, *The Limits of Infinity*, pp. 140, 141.

[279] ibid., pp. 136, 142-3.

different aspects of the familiar so that they appear alien (and often alien to one another). It is not just the arrival of UFOs from outer space that produces a spatial conflict, then, but how UFOs motivate—even *direct*—conflict and resolution between different characters, settings, and narrative threads. As a paranormal phenomenon chiefly characterised by an object of unknown, even arbitrary origin, undertaking vast spatiotemporal leaps, the activities of the UFO forcefully compel the moving image's undertaking of a spatiotemporal *collage*, of which the medium is innately capable, but rarely finds the narrative impetus to exercise. As an object of popular fascination, and esoteric iconoclasm in equal measure, the UFO is uniquely capable of insinuating itself into a variety of moving image texts, including cinema at its most broadly commercial, compelling them to comport to its uniquely disjunctive spatiotemporal regime, one that arguably has more in common with experimental and avant-garde forms than the representational grammar of the average summer blockbuster.

A significant subcategory of spatial juxtaposition commonly motivated by the UFO occurs through inconsistencies in scale. Unlike more typical (anthropocentric) popular cinema narratives—whose representation of scale is generally contained to within a spatial range allowing for comprehensive representation of the human body—there is, as Parker Tyler writes of *Fantastic Voyage* (Richard Fleischer, 20th Century Fox, USA, 1966), a "micromacrocosmic tension" inherent to the ufological subject, that challenges such conventionalised parameters.[280] Between the "nanotopograph[ies]" of alien implants, and the *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (Nathan Hertz, Allied Artists Pictures Corporation, USA, 1958), screen UFOs repeatedly incur a FUBAR of scale that scrambles ordinary proportions.[281] Ufology provides a useful point of reference here. Concerning

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[280] Parker Tyler, *The Shadow of an Airplane Climbs the Empire State Building* (New York: Anchor Press/ Doubleday, 1973), p. 128.

[281] The term "nanotopography" is lifted here from the documentary *Patient 17* (Jeremy Kenyon Lockyer Corbell, JKLC Productions, USA, 2017), which follows Roger Leir, a surgeon who claims to have removed purportedly extraterrestrial implants from the bodies of alien abductees.

what he regards as the misrepresentation of UFOs in the books of sceptic Donald Men-
zel, Vallee writes: "his books […] are like those manuals on natural history, as Jonathan
Swift says, where the elephant is always much smaller than reality, and the flea much
bigger."[282] An implication of Vallee's Swiftian rebuttal is that such distortions of senses
of scale are a direct consequence of mediated representation. In the moving image, then,
the typically anthropocentric dimensions of cinematic representation provide a familiar
spatial schema allowing the UFO to exploit the anthropomorphic cinematographic
frame as a stable reference against which it can figure the true extent of its bizarre spa-
tial constellations and influence through a continuum of intersecting scales. This is, of
course, what Kracauer means, when he observes that the cinema is uniquely capable of
depicting "objects too small to be readily noticed or even perceived by the naked eye
and objects so big that they will not be fully taken in," and Erwin Panofsky's suggestion
that dynamic variation between such extremes of scale can serve as an effective "means
of stirring the emotions and creating suspense," is precisely what screen UFOs routinely
achieve in spatial FUBAR.[283]

Perhaps the spatial implications of FUBAR are best understood, then, as a si-
multaneous reification and refutation of Kuleshov's notion of "creative geography"; "a
device" in Kracauer's words, consisting of "[p]ictures of material phenomena taken in
different places […] juxtaposed in such a way that their combination evokes the illusion
of a spatial continuity which of course is found nowhere in nature," "dissolv[ing] given
spatial interrelationships."[284] The manner in which the UFO casts trails across vast dis-
tances and unlikely configurations in space, forcing previously distinct spaces against
one another, recalibrates the viewer's spatial awareness of the universe and the relation

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[282] Vallee, *Forbidden Science*, p. 116.

[283] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 48, Erwin Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures,' in
Daniel Talbot (ed.), *Film: An Anthology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1959), p. 19.

[284] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, p. 48.

between objects in it, offering a clear, but perhaps startling representation of how these systems might look from a wider, nonanthropocentric perspective. Spatial FUBAR presents certain challenges to conventional viewing in this respect, and there are a number of ways in which filmmakers mitigate the often bewildering spatial reorganisations the UFO initiates. The preponderance of text captions in UFO fiction, for instance, explicitly designating changes of location and time, are symptomatic of filmmakers' attempts to maintain spatial legibility between the various locations of site-specific significance typically implicated in UFO narratives. Few other films hurtle so wildly from one setting to another, and such unequivocally declarative expositional gestures on the part of the filmmaker are all but essential for ensuring viewer comprehension.[285] Alternatively, the UFO might also be considered a unifying image in FUBAR, serving to cohere the spatial dislocations associated with its "creative geography," ferrying them into the realm of aesthetic palatability. Consider, for instance, how the spatial structures UFOs commonly compel of cinematic representation recall Jeffrey Sconce's discussion of David Bordwell's conceptualisation of the "parametric narration" in radical modernist cinema to reclaim the idiosyncratic modes of address seen in the psychotronic exploits of directors like Ed Wood.[286] Where the diegetically unmotivated cuts of what Bordwell termed "parametric narration"—where filmmakers "systematically manipulate a certain stylistic parameter independent of the demands of the plot"—typically served in the midcentury new waves as gestures of auteurist virtuosity, and in Sconce's "badfilm" as tokens of idiosyncratic incompetence, the same variously grand or clumsy moves appear in screen UFO narratives, only they seem more comprehensible as they are directly

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[285] In many cases these practical, functional elements even become incorporated with the film or television programme's signature aesthetic, as in the case of *The X-Files'* distinctive, unfurling typewriter text captions.

[286] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison, WI: University Of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 275, and Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style,' *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4 (Winter 1995), p. 284.

motivated by the activities of a diegetic UFO.[287] Insofar as, consistent with Sconce, the only objective distinction between artsy "parametric narration," and the bungled conventionalism of Wood, is the unifying presence of the UFO, it is significant that, despite their equivalent diegetic disjunctiveness, films featuring UFOs often seem capable of reaching far wider audiences than Bordwell's art films and Sconce's psychotronic cinema. The UFO seems to wrest a degree of auteurist agency from the filmmaker in this regard, assuming control of the spatial diversity it demands from the film. Like "creative geography," then, FUBAR makes a spectacle of the disparateness of its spatial coordinates, but unlike "creative geography," FUBAR refuses to massage its content into an illusory continuity. FUBAR can only be thought of as a synthesis insofar as the UFO assumes responsibility for these spatial collisions.

As much as FUBAR is an aesthetics of collision, the function of a UFO in any given diegetic setting is, however, often uniquely attuned to the specificities of place. After all, in the perspectival interpretation of the UFO sighting, the UFO and the site of the UFO encounter are inextricably interrelated. Any reading of a screen UFO must, therefore, involve consideration of the location in which it appears, a task significantly complicated by the manner in which UFOs, by their very nature, frustrate clear distinctions between nature and culture, technology and wilderness. Consider, for instance, two contrasting UFO encounters depicted in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*; the violent encounter at the military base, and the peaceful encounter on the beach. Here, the behaviour of the UFOs appears linked, via an associative harmony, to the connotations of the settings in which they appear; the militarism of the base inciting aggression, and the placidity of the beach quelling hostility. This synchronisation with the specificities of the location appears as part of the previously described strategy of integration by which UFOs work

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[287] Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy,' p. 384.

with the landscape as they work against it, asserting their credibility as much as their anomalousness.

Furthermore, space is also the principal metric via which the relative forcefulness of the collisions associated with FUBAR is visibly articulated. Arguably the most direct illustration of the varying intensity of FUBAR's aesthetic and philosophical disruption as demonstrated through space, is the moment of the UFO's initial incursion upon the terrestrial, which typically takes the form of one of two variously orderly possibilities, landings and crashes. As Paul Virilio writes, "When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck," and FUBAR's relative forcefulness ranges between these two possibilities for the UFO's arrival.[288] Compare, *The Thing…* with *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, two films released the same year that offer highly contrasting representations of UFO contact. *The Thing…* concerns a UFO crash that occurred near the North Pole in the ancient past. The crash itself is not seen, however, a team of scientists are shown discovering the craft frozen in the Arctic ice—which appears as a single squaline fin—who retrieve its alien occupant with an intense thermite detonation. The being turns out to be a bloodthirsty humanoid that goes on to wreak violent havoc. Aware of the consequences should the Thing reach civilisation, the crew neutralise its threat by vaporising the creature in an electrified trap. Compare this with *The Day…*, which stages a surprising, yet orderly UFO landing in a Washington D. C. public park. Unlike the nameless Thing, its occupant, named Klaatu, is not only humanoid, but *super*-human. In a form of peaceful interplanetary protest against the use of atomic weapons, Klaatu temporarily disables the planet's electricity (except in hospitals and other vital institutions), sparking global panic while remaining resolutely non-confrontational. When Klaatu is shot dead and is later technologically resurrected, reappearing messianically from behind the sliding

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[288] Virilio continues: "Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress." Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst: An Interview by Philippe Petit* (New York City, NY: Semiotext(e), 1999), p. 89.

door of his spacecraft, he issues humanity not a threat or an ultimatum, but a choice: stop using nuclear weapons or "face obliteration." The non-interventionist interpretation of the latter option, in which Klaatu's suggestion is understood as humanity eventually destroying itself if it is not careful, is reinforced by his swift departure.

These two distinct examples of UFO arrival are emblematically proportional to the relative visual dynamism and affective forcefulness of the aesthetic collisions initiated by FUBAR. The overzealous, explosive retrieval of a crashed UFO in *The Thing…* is not simply spectacle for spectacle's sake, it is a visual representation of the violent eruption of an atavistic alien threat from the ancient past, as if the exposure of the craft's alien interior to the terrestrial world is so volatile an intersection, it cannot help but erupt in a fiery explosion. *The Day…*, on the other hand, offers a considerably less dramatic depiction, essentially of interplanetary diplomacy. An alien dignitary lands quietly and peacefully, before cooperating with media attention in the political capital of the United States. Contrary to the treatment of the UFO in *The Thing…*—which is both presented and treated as a threat from its first appearance—the future-shock of Klaatu's arrival is downplayed in two significant ways. The sleek, contourless UFO was designed in collaboration with Frank Lloyd Wright, whose architecture famously emphasises harmonious integration with the natural (earthly) landscape, a quality observable in the flushness of the UFO's landing-gear-less base with the ground where it settles. Secondly, the visual alignment of Klaatu with Christian iconography—notably his death and resurrection, and emergence in the final scene from behind the craft's sliding door—seems to offer the character as a symbolic substitution for Christ, deescalating the alienness of the encounter via this familiar association. In this respect, the excessive spectacle of the explosion that unearths the alien in *The Thing…*, and the comparatively leisurely arrival of the UFO in *The Day…* do not function solely as the literal means by

which their narratives prescribe the characters as encountering the UFO. They also function as metonymic substitutions for the intersection of the ancient and the modern, terrestrial and extraterrestrial, human and alien. In *The Thing…*, this is figured as an explosive, destructive, violent, malevolent crash; in *The Day…*, this is figured as a controlled, constructive, peaceful, benevolent landing.

All that has been described thus far of spatial FUBAR occurs in moving image representation over time, and there are a number of distinct temporal implications to consider. In addition to the microtemporalities of moving image operation previously discussed in relation to Izatt's films, FUBAR operates at the level of diegetic or narrative time (the representation of time passing in the events depicted), historical time (the "objective" time that situates the text in a broad historical continuum), and textual or perceptual time (the time passing for viewers watching in the present). Of course, the operation of the moving image, in both production and exhibition, is predicated on *manipulating* time, not only in terms of threading a series of stills into a linear sequence of fixed duration, but also in terms of the content of its footage belonging to particular spatiotemporal coordinates that are typically presented out of their original order, with significant elisions.[289] In spatiotemporal FUBAR, the UFO is often figured as directly responsible for such temporal manipulations.

Manipulations of time are integral to ufological representation.[290] Ufological lore has its own theorisations of the temporal disruptions associated with the UFO, including

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[289] Furthermore, though the UFO's relation to science fiction is somewhat ambivalent, science fiction—as, at the very least, UFO-adjacent—is arguably the film genre most inextricable from matters relating to time. Originating with the contractions of time implicit in Méliès' execution of his famous in-camera effects techniques, and later exemplified by René Clair's fictionalised spectacle of a time-stopping technology in *Paris Qui Dort*/*The Crazy Ray* (René Clair, Films Diamant, France, 1924), and the phantasmagorical representation of the future in *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, London Film Productions, U. K., 1936), it is difficult to think of a science fiction film or television programme that does not at least partially involve some manipulation of time, whether diegetic, historical, or textual.

[290] Vallee observes that augmentation of temporal flow, whether to slow or accelerate the passage of time, is a feature the UFO encounter shares with a number of other traditional forms of fantastical storytelling, most notably fairytales, which commonly feature details such as the appearance of time standing still. See Vallee, *Passport to Magonia*, p. 115.

most notably the concept of "missing time," which will here serve as a case study in a consideration of temporal FUBAR. As previously noted, the concept of "missing time" describes the UFO witness' experience of a "forgotten period of time[,] usually an hour or two," and is typically interpreted as evidence of a repressed UFO encounter.[291] In this regard, the term "missing time" is really an astute lexical manipulation of what is really a UFO-induced *amnesia*. After all, there is no missing *time* in "missing time," the individual is simply unable to account for how time has been spent. What is significant about moving image representation is that the same does not necessarily apply. It is entirely possible, through cinematic organisation, to achieve a missing time that is at once subjective and objective. In fact, arguably what is most interesting about the ufological concept of missing time from a film studies perspective is that it represents an experience readily comprehensible as the textual ellipsis of the cinematic cut. Missing time is like a cut that occurs in the firsthand sensory experience of the witness. As such, many moving image representations of UFOs attempt to reproduce the experience of missing time in a variety of ways, of which many are directly constitutive of temporal FUBAR.

On the one hand, missing time is a construction, introducing a temporal gap juxtaposing two narrative chunks against one another, before asking the viewer to make sense of the often unanticipated ellipsis. Such elision as collision stands at odds with the meticulous crafting of spatially coherent, and temporally gradual diegeses familiar from conventional narrative cinema more broadly. On the other hand, missing time is another instance of Dean's notion of "absence itself mark[ing] an alien encounter," introducing a paranoid doubt centring upon the conventionally inconspicuous cut.[292] The familiar narrative principle of "Chekhov's gun"—where a narrative focuses only on elements directly implicated in the plot—typically ensures the implicit suggestion that if there is a

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[291] Hopkins, *Missing Time*, p. 19.
[292] Dean, *Aliens in America*, p. 46.

cut, it is because what was cut is irrelevant. The ufological subject matter floods this omission with unease. Is the elision produced across any particular cut in a film a consequence of the filmmaker's editorial intervention, or the intervention of a UFO? Accordingly, filmmakers depicting UFOs have devised a number of techniques for signalling which cuts should be understood as representing missing time, and which should not.

*Mysterious Skin* contains a number of exemplary instances of temporal FUBAR elicited by representations of missing time. Namely, a number of moments in the film depict Brian (Brady Corbet) blacking out, experiences he understands as missing time, as explicitly stated in a conversation with fellow self-identifying alien abductee Avalyn (Mary Lynn Rajskub). Brian describes his first experience of missing time via voiceover narrating a visual representation of the event. The last thing he remembers, he says, is a rain storm at his baseball game, and this is matched to a shot of young Brian sitting in the dugout, but "what happened after that remains a pitch black void." Tellingly, rather than a straight cut, where the sequence at the baseball field suddenly ends, and a sequence depicting Brian's sister finding him in the basement cupboard five hours later begins, director Araki marks this ellipsis with a few seconds of empty darkness, a black screen. The missing time arrives abruptly and obstructively, in the middle of Brian's sentence, and is not simply elided, it is marked with a moment of visible nothingness. As Richard Misek notes: "the black screen typically appears outside the space-time of a film's diegesis (its *fabula*), so from a diegetic perspective, it does not exist at all. Yet it is integral to the narrative film's *syuzhet*, fulfilling a structural function equivalent to that of a white space in a book"; it is "an underlying presence that may occasionally become visible in the gaps between images."[293] The blankness of the black screen, then,

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[293] Richard Misek, 'The Black Screen,' in Beugnet, Cameron & Fetveit, *Indefinite Visions*, pp. 39, 41.

serves both as a representational paucity, and a thick, visual irreducibility (like Male-vich's "Black Square"), given rise by Brian's experience of missing time. It is both the object, and representation of temporal FUBAR; an undismissible nothingness erupting from the asymmetrical collision of two spatiotemporally distinct events. Of course, there is a significant degree of ambiguity concerning whether Brian's experiences of missing time truly represent ufological absences, or something more terrestrial, but nevertheless, these sequences, and particularly the blank screen, are exemplary of temporal FUBAR.[294]

UFOs zip effortlessly, with an accelerated but controlled deftness, through unthinkable expanses of space, serving as a causal link capable of bridging familiar local microcosms and the furthest interstellar reaches. This cosmic scale and the incredible speed of its manoeuvres forcefully remind viewers of both the inevitable linkage of space and time (spacetime), and how radically different the spatiotemporal dynamics of UFOs are to the spacetime of, say, the typical drama, or romantic-comedy. If, then, as is commonly suggested, the pace of the novel was accelerated in the eighteenth century by parallel developments in transport, and specifically the new conceptions of time and space experienced by those travelling by rail, then one might, for the sake of argument, posit that the pace of the cinema was accelerated in the mid twentieth century by the flying saucer.[295] More so than the ascent of commercial air travel, or even the aerial ac-

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[294] There are, however, examples of missing time in UFO cinema that occur without a cut. For instance, there is a moment in *Close Encounters…* where Roy falls asleep in the room where he constructs a sculpture of Devil's Mountain from dirt, the lighting quickly transforming to represent the rise of the sun across a simulated time-lapse, visualising the altered temporal awareness Roy has acquired following his alien encounters. This is not "missing time" in the ufological sense of the term, but it represents how the conventional markers of domestic time have eroded for Roy since his family left to escape his newfound interest in UFOs (just as the borders between habitat and wilderness disappear at the point he fills his house with dirt, plants, and garden-fencing). He is awake until the early hours, and when he does sleep he awakens unrested. Through this time-lapse device, viewers are also denied a rest, submitted to the unstable temporality of the contactee.

[295] See Nicholas Daly, 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses,' *ELH*, vol. 66, no. 2 (Summer 1999), pp. 461-487, and Alison Byerly, *Are We There Yet?: Virtual Travel and Victorian Realism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p.156.

robatics of Virilio's fighter jets, the wide-ranging spatiotemporal manoeuvres of the UFO, narratively motivating vast leaps in time and space and juxtaposing radically distinct spatiotemporal coordinates, are suitably captured in the abruptness of the (unextended) cinematic cut.[296] Just as UFOs seem to appear and disappear in a split-second, perhaps reappearing elsewhere just as fast, the cinematic cut—when it is not emphasised as a marker for missing time—routinely presents viewers with equivalent representations of near-instant appearance, dematerialisation, and reappearance.[297] In Deleuzian terms, these aspects of the UFO are an indication of its status as a "relation-image," the crystallisation of a concept into a single image, forming a symbolic nexus denoting the interrelation of images—space and time; places and moments—determining the order in which those images are arranged, and how they can be interpreted.[298] UFO's write the rules of their own representation in this way, and to variously explicit levels of didacticism. The UFO is an image in which "relation itself [is] the object," like the Hitchcockian MacGuffin (Deleuze's principal example of the "relation-image").[299] At the least spectacular end of this spectrum there is the advancement of the UFO fleet in *The War of the Worlds*, marked throughout the film by the consistent representation of the craft as moving from screen right to left. At the other end of this spectrum, however, more complex spatiotemporal organisations occur.

One example of particularly elaborate spatiotemporal FUBAR is the role played by a UFO in the 2008 "found-footage" monster film *Cloverfield (*Matt Reeves, Paramount

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[296] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, p. 24.

[297] The split-second relocations of the Empire fleet in the latest instalments of the *Star Wars* saga, for example (particularly *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (Rian Johnson, Lucasfilm, USA, 2017), offer a vivid demonstration of the commonalities exhibited between the cut and the UFO's movement. In such instances, it is as if the craft themselves don't "fly," but "cut."

[298] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* trans. Hugh Tomlinson & Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 204.

[299] ibid., p. 203.

*fig. 15.1: Still from* Cloverfield *with detail. A UFO plunges into the sea, appearing as an almost imperceptible grey streak in the sky.*

Pictures, USA, 2008).[300] In the final sequence of *Cloverfield*, observant viewers will notice a UFO silently descending into the sea as the film's central couple Rob (Michael Stahl-David) and Beth (Odette Yustman) video themselves riding the Coney Island Ferris wheel (see *fig. 15.1*). Taking place a month prior to the film's central narrative event, at the affordance of the film's "found-footage" aesthetic, this episode appears in the film's closing moments as a glimpse of an older recording resurfacing palimpsestically in the gaps between footage on the film's fictional digital videotape. Given *Cloverfield*'s deliberate inclusion of this non-chronological and otherwise narratively inconsequential coda, viewers might reasonably infer that this UFO is somehow responsible for triggering the arrival of the film's principal antagonist, the giant creature that destroys Manhattan. Crucially, however, between its integration with the film's *faux-verité* cinematography, and the associated deemphasisation of its narrative placement, its anticlimactic, inconspicuous appearance is neatly expressive of the manner in which the mere appear-

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[300] "Found footage" here refers not to the practice among documentary and avant-garde filmmaking of repurposing preexisting footage, but to a more recent development in the realist tradition—most closely associated with the horror genre—in which a film faithfully recreates the "look" of amateur home-video footage.

ance of a UFO, however elaborate, places enormous demands on the spatiotemporal structure of the text. FUBAR inverts the ufological notion of the photographic image as merely a receptacle of evidence in this respect, asserting the UFO not as a subject to be recovered from a text, but as a force within texts, enacting a disruptive aesthetic influence upon the media it inhabits. Its arrival arbitrary, and its nature a mystery, the *Cloverfield* UFO implies a number of possible explanations for the monster's arrival, but it does nothing to mitigate the destruction and evacuation of Manhattan—the collision of a far flung extraterrestrial future (or perhaps an ancient past) with the terrestrial present—audiences have already witnessed by this stage in the film. The explicit self-reflexivity of the UFO's fortuitous resurfacing on the fictional "Cloverfield" tape exemplifies the quasi-editorial function of the UFO upon its media representation. The constructed contingency of the UFO's appearance, presented as a chance occurrence, serves as the film's destabilising postscript, underhandedly signalling a heretofore undisclosed ufological influence. Such a gesture exerts a defamiliarising effect upon an audience that has spent eighty minutes comfortably within the familiar generic parameters of the "monster" film, only to find in its final moments that something entirely different may have been occurring all along.[301] After becoming familiar with the monster—a process culminating the film's only clear shot of the monster's body and face in the film's penultimate scenes—the appearance of the UFO *re-defamiliarises* the familiar. It is in this respect that the UFO can be understood as directing both the course of the film, and viewers' perceptions of it, crowbarring itself into a gap in the film's narrative, and thereby compelling the retroactive revision of all one has seen and understood to this point.

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[301] It is in this regard that genre is only of interest to this study insofar as it represents the adherence of a text to codes and conventions that establish familiar narrative contexts that the UFO can disrupt upon its arrival. Incongruities between a film's perceived generic disposition and the UFO's appearance often helps reinforce the disruptive influence of a UFO image. The UFO makes a crisis of genre, and genre represents another aspect of the moving image "fucked up" by FUBAR.

Recalling Misek's use of formalist vocabulary, then, spatiotemporal FUBAR posits the screen UFO as a *generator* of *fabula* (plot), and an *orchestrator* of *syuzhet* (story). Spatiotemporal FUBAR describes the screen UFO moving through the text, and, like RNA to DNA, unzipping portions of them—events, settings, characters—augmenting them, before zipping everything back together in a revised form. Centred around the figure of the UFO as opposed to a particular genre, style, or sensibility, FUBAR, in this instance, describes a spatiotemporal disruption originating within the text, rather than an exegetic byproduct of the text. FUBAR figures the UFO as an agent of disruption operating *in situ*, performing an editorial role from within the diegesis as a proxy for the interventions of the filmmakers. This is, of course, a fiction of sorts, along the lines of *deus ex machina*. These UFOs are scripted and subsequently represented as behaving this way by the filmmakers responsible for producing these films. But the contention of FUBAR is that this fiction is the byproduct of the manner in which moving image representations of UFOs centralise the UFO as the principal determinant of film content and its organisation.

Returning, then, to the MacGuffin, it seems that the UFO in spatiotemporal FUBAR can be productively understood as a relative of Hitchcock's arbitrary plot device. Gallerist Anthony Spira's characterisation of the MacGuffin-like role of the Loch Ness Monster in Gerard Byrne's photography project *Gestalt Forms of Loch Ness* is relevant here. Like the MacGuffin, the "existence [of the Monster] is entirely beside the point" in Byrne's photographs, Spira writes, it simply serves to link and provide motivation for a particular course through a series of images.[302] The same is true of the UFO, and not only are the narratological implications of this comparison relevant here, but so too is a significant metamedial implication. Take *Cloverfield*, for instance. Provided one notices

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[302] Anthony Spira, 'Loch Ness: An Enquiry,' in Gerard Byrne, *Gestalt Forms of Loch Ness: Grid, Site, Sequence* (Milton Keynes: MK Gallery, 2012), p. 61.

the UFO in *Cloverfield*, its role as a plot catalyst is hard to shake. It seems, quite obviously, to have served an instrumental role in setting the events of film into motion. However, like the MacGuffin, the UFO subordinates itself in this catalytic role so that the chain-reaction of the plot it facilitates is emphasised instead. This subordination takes a particularly acute form in *Cloverfield* courtesy of the unspectacular fashion in which the UFO appears, and the delaying of its appearance until the events it sets in motion have textually elapsed. *Cloverfield* neatly demonstrates FUBAR's positing of the UFO as an agent of both structuration—generating and determining the course of narrative organisation—and the intersectional aesthetic dynamics of FUBAR's emphasising of causation and consequence, as opposed to the UFO simply serving as the premise to an unanswerable ontological question. If the UFO's undramatic appearance at the very end of *Cloverfield* serves as any kind of evidence, then, while in a sense it is for the diegetic existence of the fictional UFO, more pressingly, it evidences the legitimacy of FUBAR as a ufological aesthetic of disruption. This sequence models the UFO's fictional, diegetic role as an object and event, and the forcefulness of its formal, non-diegetic role as an image coupled with an aesthetic effect, across a binary perceptual threshold of noticing or failing to notice the UFO. The UFO both builds upon, and diverges from the logic of the MacGuffin in this sense. If the MacGuffin is conceived of as enacting its structural functions with a diegetically hermetic inconspicuousness, driving the narrative from within, once noticed, the UFO's organisational agency is more forceful, and less diegetically homologous than the MacGuffin. Unlike the proverbial bomb in a suitcase, which emerges from and interrupts an emphatically anthropocentric diegetic world, and ultimately recedes back into it, all with a convincingly executed manufactured contingency, *Cloverfield* dramatically demonstrates how the UFO appears not as an emergence from the diegesis, but as an incursion upon it, revealing the anthro-

pomorphic limitations of diegesis. As a thing from another world, when the viewer notices the UFO in *Cloverfield*, it refuses to reintegrate with the narrative as previously experienced, and instead insists upon altering one's perception of the entire film in light of its revealed influence. The distinct, achronological media alterity of the footage resurfacing on the metafictional *Cloverfield* tape reinforces this effect, but this is a characteristic inherent to FUBAR.

Like the UFO in *Fargo*, then, the UFO in *Cloverfield* clearly demonstrates the manner in which screen UFOs appear, somewhat contradictorily, as nothing less than the narrative impetus, yet at the same time little more than hollow, weightless formal agents of disruption; devices that serve a purpose, yet remain insoluble with the diegesis. To use a grammatical metaphor, the UFO in *Cloverfield* is the full stop that both creates and ends the sentence. Part of the significance of FUBAR as a theoretical intervention, then, is that it helps disentangle these apparent contradictions, accepting that UFOs elude identification, and strategically remobilising this essentially anthropocentric interpretative concern, supplanting ufology's unyielding insistence upon assimilating UFOs into existing knowledge with an appreciation for the reckless influence of a fictionalised nonhuman agency upon the terrestrial *status quos*. Spatiotemporal FUBAR is a theoretical framework for the collected permutations a UFO compels of the established order of a diegesis and its representation. Viewed through this lens, moving image representations of UFOs are best understood not as evidence for or against the existence of actual UFOs, but as views upon speculative representations of structural reorganisation. It is in this way that the precise nature of the UFO is always unimportant. In FUBAR, the UFO's appearance is a cosmological crapshoot, a shuffling of the deck, the impetus for a plotting and appraisal of the chaotic consequences that ensue. The UFO exhibits a butterfly effect in this way; its intervention representing an initial condition whose disrup-

tive trajectory can be profound and far-reaching. These effects, as opposed to the UFO itself, are what FUBAR elects to trace. It does not describe what UFOs *are*, it describes what they *do*, and what that might represent for their photographic/cinematic representation.

## 15b. Representational FUBAR

Narrowing focus from the macro level of narrative and diegesis, the disjunctive collisions that characterise the UFO's spatiotemporal dynamism scale down to the individual shot (FUBAR within the frame). Chiefly, this takes the form of representational inconsistencies, collisions between different representational modes the film image holds in an unstable suspension, typically to the detriment of the image's photographic verisimilitude. This takes a number of different forms inversely exemplified by the means by which the classic science fiction film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, MGM, USA, 1968) avoided precisely this type of aesthetic disjunction. *2001…* is championed for its elaborate special effects used to present a spectacular, and visually coherent representation of a speculative future. This realism was largely achieved via the utilisation of practical and "in-camera" visual effects (including forced perspective) to maintain what critic Herb Lightman describes as a "single-generation look."[303] Essentially, many of *2001…*'s special effects—representing spaceships, anti-gravity, video-conferencing screens, and other future technologies—were devised to ensure that they could be produced without the retroactive imposition of "second generation" post-production effects that, in 1968, may have jeopardised the film's photographic verisimilitude. Generally, depicting screen UFOs requires liberal application of

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[303] Herb A. Lightman, 'Filming *2001: A Space Odyssey*,' in William Johnson (ed.), *Focus On: The Science Fiction Film* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 127.

precisely these kinds of post-production effects that Kubrick and effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull sought to avoid, adding to, subtracting, and otherwise distorting first-generation photographic images in such a manner as to often remain visibly legible. In other words, where *2001…* successfully mystifies, films depicting UFOs more commonly exhibit details that threaten to expose their construction. In what follows, representational FUBAR will be seen to rescue these details from rejection as flaws, refiguring them as a site of expressive ufological disruption.

Consistent with the shot-to-shot disjuncture exhibited in spatiotemporal FUBAR, the visual inconsistencies associated with representational FUBAR can also occur across cuts. There are numerous films in which a representational contrast (often between earth and space) is produced, either deliberately or by sheer necessity, by juxtaposing different representational media, most commonly the combination of photography with illustration, or computer-generated images. In *The War of the Worlds*, for instance, earthly settings are represented photographically where outer space is represented with paintings by the science fiction illustrator Chesley Bonestell. Here, such visually contrasting methods of representation between sequences, legible in the discrepancy of the illustrated image's qualitative properties—how the facture of paint subtly indicates its non-photographic-ness—expressively aligns the terrestrial and extraterrestrial settings with their own distinctly opposing representational schemata.

Representational conflict can be figured between shots more subtly via the juxtaposition of cinematographic material drawn from different aesthetic contexts. This is particularly explicit in a film like *Tribulation 99: Alien Anomalies Under America* (Craig Baldwin, Drift Distribution, USA, 1991), where director Craig Baldwin constructs a sprawling pseudo-documentary chronicling a history of the extraterrestrial colonisation of earth via the found-footage technique, employing a range of cinemato-

graphic material from a variety of sources (including science fiction films, newsreels, advertisements, and industrial film). The assortment of footage in *Tribulation 99* sees UFOs perambulate a wide variety of representational contexts, and although this constituent material is united by the film's satirical narrative—relayed via gravelly voiceover narration, histrionic music, and obnoxiously large text captions—arguably the film's principle spectacle consists in the juxtapositional jostle of its multifarious source texts. Lacking the editorial teleology of a film like *A MOVIE* (Bruce Connor, Independent, USA, 1958), where director Bruce Connor constructs the film according to an ersatz causality—a domino effect threaded together via editing—*Tribulation 99* employs the unruly, even contradictory visual conflict exhibited by its assembled source material to stage a sophisticated audiovisual parody of the incoherence of conspiracy theory.

These intertextual appropriations also occur in more conventional narrative filmmaking, often incurring equivalent representational consequences. In *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, for instance, desaturated footage of George Pal's scale model of Los Angeles City Hall—originally shot in Technicolor for *The War of the Worlds*—appears anatopically repurposed during the scene depicting the saucer attack on Washington D. C..[304] The film also uses authentic wartime archive material—visible for its discrepancy in grain, most likely for having been shot on 16mm, rather than 35mm film—during combat scenes, including footage of the 1941 sinking of the HMS Barham, footage of V-2, and Redstone missile launches, and images of a B-29 bomber exploding, typically matched-on-action to shots of saucers firing their ray guns, bridging the shots across a superimposed beam. In a useful turn of phrase, actor Vampira describes this kind of representational discontinuity (specifically in relation to Ed Wood's liberal use of tenuously motivated and poorly integrated found footage in *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Ed Wood,

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[304] Bill Warren, *Keep Watching the Skies!: American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), p. 243.

Reynolds Pictures, Inc., USA, 1959)), as a kind of "*découpage*." "He [Wood] didn't start with a master design," she says, "he grabbed what was handy and stuck it on to something else that was available, and so it grew."[305] More esteemed, perhaps, than *Plan 9…,* films like *Tribulation 99*, and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* proceed similarly with their own *découpage*, producing a recombinant aesthetic of legible disunion, a whole where the parts remain not only distinct, but in conflict with one another.

These kinds of representational inconsistencies are considerably more effective, however, when conflicting forms of representation occupy the same frame. These collisions within the image find particularly explicit expression in the variously physical and CG explosions commonly intended to obscure such collisions between distinct representational schemata, as in the interaction between the computer-generated images of the UFOs and aliens, and photographic terrestriality in *Mars Attacks!*. Seeking to mask the unstable combination of the actual and the digitally-imposed—like the ray gun beams of *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* enact between principal photography and archive footage—an illustration is inadvertently produced of the violent intensity of the collision of the human (rendered photographically) and the extraterrestrial (rendered digitally), within the same frame. Such collisions are emphasised, even exacerbated by the phlegmatic gaze of science fiction, an undramatic, objective detachedness contrasting with the spectacular content. As Sobchack quotes of critic Frank McConnell, film and television representations of UFOs frequently employ the "remorselessly plain camera angles" characteristic of science fiction in attempts to affect an impression of the amateur gaze in "authentic" UFO photographs.[306] Unlike "authentic" stills, however, where potentially disjunctive representational elements might, for just one image, achieve an

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[305] Vampira interviewed in *Flying Saucers over Hollywood: The 'Plan 9' Companion* (Mark Patrick Carducci, Atomic Pictures, USA, 1992).

[306] Frank McConnell, 'Rough Beast Slouching,' in Roy Huss and T. J. Ross (ed.), *Focus On The Horror Film* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1972), p. 32, quoted in Sobchack, *The Limits of Infinity*, p. 144.

illusion of cohesion, such an effect is difficult to sustain in the moving image, so distinct representational planes in the image often appear to reel out of phase with one another. The immediate consequences of this are a loss of verisimilitude. The secondary, more interesting, consequence of this is representational FUBAR.

Mike Kelley's writing on UFOs provides some theoretical precedent for this kind of representational disjunction, addressing UFOs in terms of what he regards as a juxtapositional heterogeneity inherent to their figuration. Kelley identifies in ufology's "fixation on the high-tech image of the flying saucer, paired with an alien being of monstrous form or other abject elements," the "meeting of high-tech fetishism and symbolic body loathing," an "aesthetic collision" he considers consistent with Georges Bataille's aesthetics of heterogeneity.[307] Bataille conceptualises heterogeneity in terms of the manner in which extreme opposites can be conceptually unified in their common status as outliers (an idea he illustrates with the figure of "a half-decomposed cadaver fleeing through the night in a luminous shroud," an image, recalling Christ's resurrection, that offers a stark contrast between divine transcendence and base abjection).[308] With this in mind, Kelley observes that the UFO presents an inherent heterogeneous tension in the contrast between the craft and its occupants. Though Kelley is not solely interested in screen representation, a useful example of a moving image UFO that embodies Kelley's Bataillesque heterogeneity can be found in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. The alien invaders—the last remaining survivors of their species—arrive in eerily beautiful spaceships (animated in stop motion by Ray Harryhausen), the appearance of which dramatically contrasts with the withered bodies of the alien beings that pilot them, who are encased in sarcophagus-like spacesuits to protect their frail forms and electronically-en-

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[307] Kelley, 'The Aesthetics of Ufology,' p. 401.

[308] Georges Bataille, 'The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade (An Open Letter to My Current Comrades) (1929),' in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1921-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 94, quoted in Kelley, 'The Aesthetics Of Ufology,' p. 402.

hance their ailing senses. Furthermore, the beings are kinaesthetically distinct from their craft; the laboured lumbering of the aliens—portrayed by actors in clunky spacesuits—visually contrasting with the agile manoeuvres of their stop motion saucers. Kelley's observations are vital to anyone wishing to initiate a departure from Jung's suggestion that the UFO's resemblance of a *mandala*—a circular figure representative of the universe in Hinduism—indicates that UFO sightings represent psychological projections of wholeness and stability during times of unease.[309] Instead, like the Taoist Yin Yang, the combination of the abject extraterrestrial body and its sublime spacecraft in Kelley's UFO, symbolically models—in abstract, dualist quintessence—the UFO's essential heterogeneity.

Where Kelley's heterogeneity outlines an image suspended in a constant, equilibrious contrast, FUBAR is more unstable, disruptive, and miscellaneous. Across the combinative succession of stills in animation, the evolution of a representation available to the moving image—in which the alien can emerge from the familiar, and vice versa—FUBAR is unlike the balanced juxtaposition of Kelley's heterogeneity insofar as it shifts, unfurling with an unpredictable unruliness into unforeseen aspects of the representation. In this sense, representational FUBAR might be understood as a relative of what Eisenstein described as the "montage cell," in which collisions within individual shots extend the dialectics of film montage down to a "molecular" level.[310] But unlike Kelley's heterogeneity and Eisenstein's montage cells, representational FUBAR specifically concerns the unsettling of the verisimilitudinous continuity of the photographic image through the imposition (or incidence) of incompatibilities between distinct representational schemata within the image. A useful example of this is the representational

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[309] Though, arguably, fissures in Jung's interpretation are present in his original discussion if one considers the various axes of bifurcation in the film projector dream previously discussed (that the UFO is not just a UFO, but a projection, and that that projection is the product of not just one projector, but of two competing film producers' projections). See Jung, *Flying Saucers*, pp. 18-20.

[310] Eisenstein, 'Beyond the Shot,' p. 20.

disjunction commonly produced by the discrepancy of physical characteristics between conventional cinematography and the use of scale miniatures, often employed in the moving image depiction of UFOs. Miniatures of various kinds, live action and stop motion, feature prominently in the first few decades of the saucer film cycle, though none perhaps more famously than Harryhausen's feted stop motion animation in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. These miniatures allowed the visualisation of the otherwise unfilmable events the film's depict, but generally do not convincingly efface all visual traces of their diminutive scale, introducing a distinct incongruity of scale into the film image. Whether it is a clash of grain texture when a miniature is matted over another image, or how conventionally photographed images, such as those of water and fire, appear too large or too fast for their supposed size, these subtle discrepancies in the use of miniatures contort the viewer's sense of diegetic space. Without Kubrick's mega-budgets, the UFO films of the 1950s and 1960s often fail to render their fantastical events verisimilitudinally convincing. But rather than decry this as a fault, considering such representational aberrations in terms of FUBAR allows for reconsideration of this phenomena not as a failure of realism, but as an otherwise undesirable aesthetic phenomenon the UFO imbues with meaning.

In one sense, these representational discontinuities play a vital role in keeping the UFO unidentifiable, or at least uncertain in origin. In another sense, however, as Michael Stern writes of the manner in which the use of miniatures in Japanese *kaiju* films of the 1950s worked "both to invoke and to contain the Japanese national experience of destruction […] deliberately miniaturiz[ing] this devastation making it comic and unreal," the representational FUBAR of the miniatures in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* use an imperfect combination of photographic material of differing spatiotemporal scales to supplement the representation of the otherworldly with a complementary

*fig. 15.2: Still from* Earth vs. the Flying Saucers. *The alien representational regime of stop motion invades the conventionally photographed terrestrial structure of the Capitol Building.*

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visual irrealism.[311] Placing the extraterrestrial craft on an entirely different representational plane to the terrestrial characters and setting, however representationally jarring, allows the film an extra dimension through which to extend its depiction of alien colonisation. In the film's depiction of the invasion of Washington D. C., shots depicting the UFO ray gun destroying architectural structures, most famously the Capitol Building, show not only the spectacular iconoclasm previously observed in relation to the computer-generated UFOs of *Mars Attacks!* and *Independence Day*, but the advancement of an alien representational regime—that of the stop motion miniature—upon the conventionally-photographed terrestrial world. Famously, in addition to building and animating the saucers themselves (the design of which was informed by George Adamski's advice), Harryhausen also animated many of the buildings seen destroyed by the alien craft, in some cases, painstakingly animating crumbling structures brick by brick (see *fig. 15.2*).[312] While the effect is not always photorealistic, principally due to the afore-

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[311] Michael Stern, 'Making Culture into Nature,' in Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone*, p. 67.

[312] Robbie Graham, *Silver Screen Saucers: Sorting Fact from Fantasy in Hollywood's UFO Movies* (Hove: White Crow Books, 2015), p. 67.

mentioned representational inconsistencies (the animated tumble of the bricks appears unnatural, and slower than one would expect of a conventionally photographed structural collapse), the infestation of terrestrial photography with alien stop motion visually extends the representation of the extraterrestrial invasion. Earthly structures are shown not only to fall, but as having been abducted from the photographic world altogether, and replaced with the representational substance (stop motion animation) of the extraterrestrial invaders.

Elsewhere in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* the representational continuity of the image is disrupted not only twice, but in three different ways simultaneously. One such moment occurs during the very first appearance of a UFO in the film, as Dr. Russell Marvin (Hugh Marlowe) and his wife Carol (Joan Taylor) drive along an isolated desert road, returning from their wedding. Significantly, this sequence takes place in a car, which would be unremarkable were it not for the fact that the space of the car holds a well documented ufological significance. (Indeed, several sequences this thesis has already examined have been staged in relation to cars and roads.) As Hynek writes: "It would almost appear that one's chances of seeing a UFO are greater if one is driving a car than if one is merely out in the open," and this is precisely what occurs in the opening minutes of *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*.[313] In ufology, the space of the car is considered particularly conductive to the experience of anomalous events. The first widely-publicised UFO abductees, Barney and Betty Hill, famously experienced their close encounter on a stretch of highway on U. S. Route 3, near Lancaster, New Hampshire, and a number of other famous UFO sightings have occurred in and around cars, and on roads, including Lonnie Zamora's 1964 UFO sighting near Socorro, New Mexico, and the 1980 "Cash-Landrum" incident. As ufologist Peter Rogerson writes, the car is "a

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[313] Hynek, *The Hynek UFO Report*, p. 206.

fragment of habitat penetrating the wilderness," and the car journey "represents a perpetual liminal zone," an almost permanently marginal space, between fixed coordinates; exactly where one might expect to encounter a UFO.[314] Calling to mind Michael Fried's famous treatment of sculptor Tony Smith's recollection of a revelation he experienced on the then-unfinished New Jersey Turnpike in the early 1950s, the space of the car is repeatedly posited in ufology as acting almost like a kind of filter, mediating one's surrounding environment in such a way as to make the events one encounters—ufological or otherwise—appear to present themselves to the driver/witness. Driving the unmarked, unlit freeway it occurred to Smith that although what he was experiencing was a certain kind of guided encounter with an artificial object, it "couldn't be called a work of art," and yet "it did something for [him] that art had never done."[315] Fried characterised Smith's experience in terms of "what might be called the theatricality of objecthood," an anthropocentric conception of the organisation of interrelating spectators and objects in space that Fried regards as antinomic, or even antagonistic, of art.[316] Aspects of the roadside UFO encounter appear broadly analogous to Fried's account of Smith's experience on the unbuilt highway, the space of the car seeming to channel the environment into a quasi-theatrical, anthropomorphic experience of space, in which a subjective experience acquires an elevated aesthetic significance.

Considered in relation to these ufological associations of the car, Fried's theatricality, and perhaps even the aspects of the UFO sighting experience outlined in Randles' concept of the Oz Factor, the multiple colliding levels of representation in the UFO's first appearance in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* supports a distinct set of ufological significances. Initially, the world of *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* presents itself from a high-

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[314] Peter Rogerson, 'Taken to the Limits, Part 2,' *Magonia*, 2013 <http://magoniamagazine.blogspot.com/2013/11/taken-to-limits-part-2.html> (Accessed 4th December, 2017).

[315] Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr., 'Talking with Tony Smith,' *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 4 (December 1966), p. 19.

[316] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' *Artforum*, vol 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), p. 20.

angle aerial shot—typical of the phantom UFO—depicting Marvin and Carol's car driving along a desert road. After cutting to a shot of a road sign indicating that the couple are entering restricted military space, the film cuts to a two-shot of the newlyweds in the car, Carol driving, while Marvin fiddles with a tape recorder. They chat for a while in the foreground of the shot, as rear screen projected images of the barren desert landscape roll behind them. As the film was produced in the mid 1950s, the use of rear screen projection for a scene set in a car does not appear out of place here. An industry-standard practice in the U. S. until at least the 1960s, rear screen projection enabled the filming of sequences that involved particularly dynamic movement by ensuring the consistency of lighting, and easing the logistical difficulties of resetting for multiple takes. But rear screen projection acquires a particular ufological resonance here in the manner it introduces a visual discontinuity into the image, facilitating representational FUBAR in arguably the quintessential ufological space, the moving car on a remote stretch of road. Between a discrepancy in grain between the foreground and the background, and an inconsistency between Marvin and Carol's stillness and the motion of the images behind them, the rear screen projection establishes a potent representation of the liminality ufology insistently asserts of the travelling car on a remote road.[317] The subtle disconnect between the foreground and the background, though naturalised by the production conventions of the period, produces a distinctly uneasy feeling here. In its audiovisual analogousness with the perceptual dissociation of the Oz Factor, it seems to invite the appearance of a UFO. As often occurs, the UFO announces its arrival aurally before it is seen, Marvin seen looking around with curiosity in registration of an electronic whirr gradually lifting on the soundtrack. Suddenly, a UFO drops into view of the car's rear window, hovering for a moment against the clear sky before manoeuvring in front of the

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[317] Of course, it is also significant in this regard that the use of rear screen projection in this sequence—particularly when the characters are seen looking at the UFO through the front windscreen of their car—reflexively recalls the appearance of audience members at a drive-in theatre.

*fig. 15.3. Still from* Earth vs. the Flying Saucers. *The saucer's arrival introduces a representational disjunction that splits the image into three irresolvably distinct parts.*

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car (the film cutting to a shot taken from behind the couple from within the car) only to zoom up and over the roof, and out of sight, vanishing as quickly as it appeared.

Significantly, the arrival of the UFO introduces a third representational disjunction to the sequence. In addition to the uneasy combination of Marvin and Carol sat in the car on a sound stage with the prerecorded rear screen projection of the desert road, Harryhausen's stop motion saucer is now matted over the rear screen image, as if to consolidate the separation of the "first generation" figures in the foreground, from the projected setting in the background (see *fig. 15.3*). As such, the arrival of the UFO occurs not only iconographically, but occasions further rupture to the image's representational continuity. The UFO arrives, and visibly splits the existing layers of the image apart. Significantly, this does not necessarily occur with any intentionality on the part of the filmmakers. Rather, the narrative motivation to depict a UFO in this particular scenario sees an otherwise conventionally-sanctioned representational disjunction in the film image (the use of rear screen projection in scenes set in cars) *fucked up beyond all recognition*

by the arrival of the UFO. This complex intersection of live-action principal cinematography, rear screen projected cinematography, and traveling matte stop motion animation is, of course, primarily intended to represent the characters' initial UFO sighting. But equally, it could be argued that each layer in this configuration resists any stable, established relation to the representation of a diegetic actuality. With each of these three cinematographic elements vying for principality (one cannot assume that the principal photography of Marvin and Carol represents the main diegetic substance in the sequence just because the conventions of the Classical Hollywood style are typically thought of as operating according to an anthropocentric representational schema), the UFO prizes apart the cinematographic construction, scattering its constituent components into an unresolvable ambiguity. Of course, the immediate function of this ambiguity, in narrative terms (at least at this early stage in the film), is to force viewers to question the reality of the encounter. The distinct representational form of the stop motion saucer appears incongruous to Marvin and Carol in the foreground, and the background setting, in such a manner as to potentially motivate interpretations of illusion or hallucination. As when later, in scenes of terrestrial destruction, stop motion animation serves to represent an alien representational form colonising the image, here the mismatched wobbliness of rear screen projection, and the fuzzy outline of the traveling matte, serve, like the anomalous sensory stimuli of the Oz Factor, as non-iconographical visual harbingers of ufological activity.

What this sequence illustrates, then, of the nature of representational FUBAR, is that even a fiction film that can afford to be straightforwardly declarative of the relative diegetic actuality of its UFOs, is subject to exactly the same irresolvable visual conflicts present in undecidable "authentic" UFO images. The collision of image texture and motion in this short sequence, unavoidable if the UFO is to appear at all, works against the

unambiguous presentation of a continuous and coherent cinematographic representation. Significant in this respect is the fact that the representationally disruptive capabilities of the UFO are not dependent on any conventional sense of realism elsewhere considered central to cinematic representation and ufology's evidential concerns. It is precisely the inconsistencies and faults between representational schema in the image—the fault-lines, perhaps, where realism ends and something else begins—that representational FUBAR embraces, presenting interactions between people, places, situations, species, with a uniquely expressive force generally inaccessible in the stylistic parameters of conventional cinematic representation. Reading this pessimistically, one might conclude that the UFO is an image incompatible with the coherent construction of a cinematic diegesis. Reading this optimistically, one might conclude that such disruption represents FUBAR—the screen UFO's unique aesthetics of visual disruption—at its most expressive.

*15c. Intertexual FUBAR*

Finally, the self-reflexivity of the cinematographic disjunction in representational FUBAR gestures outwards from the UFO's roles within individual films to the broader possibilities of the final form of FUBAR, intertextual FUBAR. There is a fairly recent film that will help introduce the wider implications of the UFO image upon the fiction film text here: Jim Jarmusch's zombie comedy *The Dead Don't Die* (Jim Jarmusch, Kill The Head, USA, 2019). In the climactic moments of *The Dead Don't Die*, police officers Chief Cliff Robertson (Bill Murray) and Officer Ronnie Peterson (Adam Driver) sit in their patrol car parked on a hill overlooking the zombie infested cemetery. After a brief conversation, local coroner Zelda Winston (Tilda Swinton) arrives unexpectedly in
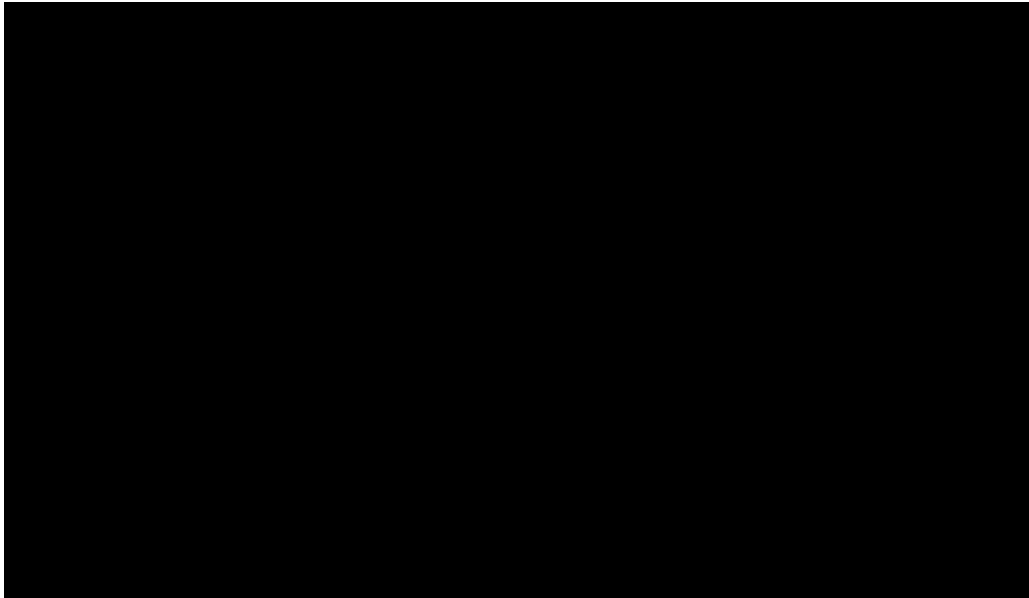
*fig. 15.4: Still from* The Dead Don't Die. *Zelda Winston is abducted by an extraterrestrial, perhaps* extratextual, *UFO.*

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the cemetery carpark, and they watch as she effortlessly descends the hill, keeping the zombie horde at bay with slashes of her samurai sword. As she approaches the middle of the cemetery, once more, an audible whirr announces the unexpected arrival of what can only be described as a rather stereotypical flying saucer decorated with a spinning ring of pale turquoise lights (see *fig. 15.4*). "Was that in the script?" Robertson asks. "Not the one I read," says Peterson. The saucer promptly lifts Winston up into a glowing porthole via a translucent turquoise tractor-beam, before whooshing away just as quickly as it arrived. "Well, that was unexpected…," Peterson mumbles. After this curious, *non sequitur* interruption, the film resumes as if this ufological turn had never occurred. Robertson and Peterson decide upon a plan of attack for the zombies overrunning the cemetery, and the film ends shortly after.

Why, then, is there a UFO in *The Dead Don't Die*? It is not immediately obvious. Indeed, there are a number of ways in which the sequence differs from the similarly unexpected appearance of the UFO in *Fargo*, chief among them, the fact that *Fargo*'s UFO (of strikingly similar colour and shape to the UFO in *The Dead Don't Die*) serves as

nothing less than a catalyst for the story-arc of the entire series, where here, the UFO

arrives and departs with little fanfare, and almost no discernible narrative consequence.

It is possible that one might even wish to posit *The Dead Don't Die* as a refutation of

FUBAR in this sense, an example of a UFO that does not initially appear to radically

disrupt the representation. But such an argument overlooks the considerable disruptions

this UFO enacts upon the film's textual borders. Consider, for instance, how the sheer

unexpectedness of the UFO's appearance in this sequence, powerfully reinforced by the

discrete conventional parameters of the zombie horror sub-genre, might even—seem-

ingly contradictorily—support readings of *The Dead Don't Die* as a quintessential mov-

ing image UFO text. Just as memory and kinaesthesia inform the rationale of empiri-

cism that ensures the unexpected ambiguity of the first-hand UFO sighting (that the

anomalousness of the UFO sighting is typically marked, in the most immediate sense,

by phenomenological novelty, that it is unlike anything the witness has previously expe-

rienced), here, familiar genre-codes and representational convention ensure that the

UFO in *The Dead Don't Die* appears similarly unexpectedly, and resists straightforward

admission to any obvious purpose or meaning. As a film that quickly establishes itself as

a "zombie comedy," then, to which viewers will reasonably expect to find the sardonic

humour associated with Jarmusch accenting motifs from horror cinema, the UFO's ap-

pearance in *The Dead Don't Die* is experienced as an otherworldly incursion and an ob-

stacle to interpretation in much the same way as UFOs appear to firsthand experience.

Genre, as a form of mutually agreed textual prescription (that is, a set of codes collec-

tively arrived upon by artists and their audiences in relation to both the text at hand, and

others like it), is employed here as a setup to the UFO's incongruous punchline. It is in

this respect that despite the apparent incongruity of the UFO in *The Dead Don't Die,* the

film is perhaps more faithful to ufological thought than a great many other films more

closely associated with UFOs (a faithfulness acquired at the expense of generic fidelity). After all, how can a UFO remain unidentified if one arrives at the film expecting to see one? It is in this respect that this sequence serves as a rare example where the narrative incongruity of a UFO's arrival (that, not unlike Gunning's cinema of attractions, or Mulvey's logic of fetishistic scopophilia, the scene represents a pleasurable disruption of the film's narrative progression) is deemphasised in favour of its perceived textual incongruities, that it has no precedent, did not appear in the script, and does not belong in the film.[318]

But it is not only the unexpectedness of the UFO in *The Dead Don't Die*, and its generic iconoclasm, that constitute intertextual FUBAR. There are a number of additional, more or less subtle cues in the film that function to support this kind of textual disruption. Take for instance, the stereotypical design of the craft (the metallic, saucer-shaped structure, its ring of turquoise lights, its column-like tractor-beam), and Robertson and Peterson's discussion of the film's metafictional script (a script evidently differing from the film's actual screenplay if it does not mention the UFO). *The Dead Don't Die* repeatedly introduces such self-reflexive motifs that function to frame the UFO as not only terrestrially other, but *textually* other. The appearance of the craft recalling other film and television UFOs (including *Fargo*'s, perhaps most notably), and the characters' reference to "the script," draw attention to the film as a representation, and the UFO's metafictional role in relation to it. Particularly, in the case of the reflexivity of Peterson's recollection that the UFO did not appear in the film's metafictional script, the interruption is literary rather than cinematic; viewers are *told* that this is the case by the characters speaking in a manner fictitiously cognisant of the film as a narrative construct. In this regard, one might consider the words of Driver's Peterson and Murray's

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[318] See Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,' in Thomas Elsaesser & Adam Barker (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative* (London: BFI, 1990), pp. 56-62, and Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema.'

Robertson as the film's own meta-commentary on FUBAR, and the fundamentally un-stable character of UFO aesthetics. The dialogue itself does not constitute FUBAR, per se (it is not visual), but it serves as an explicit expression of the fact that the arrival of the UFO serves as an unforeseen, extemporaneous incursion, self-reflexive, and funda-mentally cinematic. Furthermore, its explicit reference to "the script"—as a byword for both the film, and its construction—ensures both self-reflexive and intertextual implica-tions by not only drawing attention to the film as it is, but to the film as it might other-wise have been. The notion of the UFO going "off-script" introduces a division between the film—which is typically understood as rendering the script obsolete—and the script as an intended order of events the UFO has transgressed. The fictitious contingency produced by this detail figures the UFO not only as an unexpected narrative turn, or even to conjugate the narrative event in regard to its role as a spectacular attraction (as per Neale's reading of *The Thing*), but as nothing less than a diegetic interloper, an in-truder from some alternative, unseen version of the film. The suggestion in *The Dead Don't Die* that the UFO was not in the script neatly encapsulates the inherent textual un-ruliness of the screen UFO. Underscored by its conventionally familiar appearance, sound, and behaviour, the UFO in *The Dead Don't Die* is as much an invader from outer space as it is an invader from another film. It is in this respect that it does not only draw the viewer's awareness to *The Dead Don't Die* as a cinematic fiction, it opens the view-er's awareness out to the film's wider position in cinema culture in a manner strikingly destabilising of the otherwise consistent framework of generic conventions the film has drawn from with almost didactic rigour up until this point. *The Dead Don't Die* is no longer just a "zombie comedy" when the UFO appears. The UFO compels the viewer to retroactively reassess all they have already seen.

　　*The Dead Don't Die* highlights, and even self-reflexively remarks upon the manner

in which FUBAR is not limited to collisions within a single diegesis or text, but can oc-
cur in collisions between different texts that the UFO elicits through the diegetic and
textual rupture commonly incurred in its cinematic representation. UFOs often appear to
leave certain texts and reappear in others, and exhibit a tendency to crop up in unex-
pected places with the effect of bridging otherwise unrelated diegeses. UFOs open up
wormholes between texts in this way, materialising suddenly in places one might not
expect, and sometimes even carry over relics from other films. Consider, for instance,
how the enormous mothership from *Close Encounters…* clearly exhibits—as just one
detail upon its densely textured surface—R2D2 from *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 20th
Century Fox, USA, 1977), a film released earlier the same year (see *fig*. *15*.*5*). Of
course, there are a number of immediate functions such a surprise appearance might
serve. Representationally, this might be construed as a visual gag. Commercially, it
serves as a novelty, an "easter egg," a subtly self-reflexive audience prompt. Industrial-
ly, perhaps it served as a gesture of good will, from one of the top blockbusters of 1977
to another. But crucially, in terms of intertextual FUBAR, it represents the UFO's irre-
pressible puncturing of diegetic homogeneity. [319]

In fact, perhaps the most significant examples of screen UFOs blurring the
boundaries between distinct textual parameters are the many instances frequently con-
sidered by ufologists, where screen UFOs seem to reappear in the context of actual UFO

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[319] Another famous example of this is the "C-57D" flying saucer. The C-57D was a flying saucer design
first used on the set of *Forbidden Planet*, but later reappeared in several episodes of *The Twilight Zone*
(CBS, USA, 1959-present) after the production team acquired two of the original models and rights to
prerecorded stock footage of the craft. Of course, this is one, rather prosaic, industrial explanation for
exactly why this occurs, the recycling of preexisting materials serving as an economical solution to a
problem anthology television series might commonly have of depicting different flying saucers multiple
times between different episodes. Though there is no direct sense of a diegetic link to *Forbidden Planet*,
very little is done in *The Twilight Zone* to disguise the appearance of the C-57D (one episode, "The Mon-
sters are Due on Maple Street" (Series 1, Episode 22, 1960), simply flips footage of the craft upside
down, for instance), producing an uncanny sense of the C-57D's continued circulation beyond its original
narrative context. Indeed, the fact that one can currently (as of June 2021) stream both *Forbidden Planet*,
and episodes of *The Twilight Zone* on Amazon Prime, unites the texts upon a single media surface in such
a manner as to seemingly legitimise, perhaps even encourage the notion of a diegetic dialogue between
these two essentially unrelated texts.

*fig. 15.5: Still from* Close Encounters… *R2D2, a robot from* Star Wars, *is clearly visible on the underside of the alien mothership for a brief moment in the film's concluding sequence.*

experiences (a phenomenon typically used as an argument against the legitimacy of UFOs as an actual, material phenomenon). Whether unintentionally, as is alleged of Barney and Betty Hill, whose celebrated abduction case, sceptical ufologist Martin Kottmeyer suggests may have been unconsciously influenced by an episode of *The Outer Limits* (ABC, USA, 1963–65), or knowingly, as in the rephotographed images of the spaceships from the German science fiction television series *Raumpatrouille Orion/ Space Patrol Orion* (Germany, ARD, 1966) Billy Meier attempted to pass off for authentic UFO photographs, perhaps the most significant implication of intertextual FUBAR is that it reveals that the influence of even fictional UFOs (often patronisingly regarded by sceptics as corrupting the critical judgement of the wider population), cannot be reliably contained within the realm of fiction.[320] Like the uncannily autonomous manifestation of UFOs in still photographs, the transference of fictional UFOs into the experience of actuality occurs with an ease that lends itself equally to readings of ufological agency and sceptical rejection. As science fiction scholar Gary K. Wolfe notes, in relation to NASA's Space Shuttle Enterprise, named after the fictional spaceship from

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[320] See Kottmeyer, 'Entirely Unpredisposed', and Mahesh Karumudi, 'Outer Space Pictures – Orion spaceship,' *billymeieruforesearch.com,* 25th April, 2015 <http://www.billymeieruforesearch.com/photos-and-videos/outer-space-pictures-orion-spaceship/> (Accessed 10th October, 2017).

*Star Trek* (USA, NBC, 1966–69), UFO iconography "retains its power even when isolated from the context of conventional narrative structures."[321] In its unruly traversal of the borders between texts, the UFO unfurls an extended fiction forcing audiences to question their preconceived assumptions concerning the conventional limitations of representation. To reuse Focillon's biological metaphor of the "life of forms," the unruly intertextuality of the screen UFO appears as more than just an iconographical unit, but as an aesthetic force, occupying particular media habitats (in this case, films and television), that like any other organism draws from its environment at the same time as it exerts an effect upon it, organising and reorganising the films' spatiotemporal, representational, and textual parameters with all the ease and confidence of a native species.

Viewed from the familiar position in film studies where the forms and rhythms of a particular text serve as the film's irreducible core of meaning—even if they have not yet been fully deciphered—intertextual FUBAR reveals a certain incompatibility between the UFO and conventional interpretations of moving image fiction (where all content is essential, and functions according to an intrinsic logic). Films containing UFOs exhibit a leaky character, somehow failing to adequately contain their UFOs to a fixed role within their homogenous dieges. In a certain sense, this might partially account for how films depicting UFOs are rarely the subject of significant critical acclaim. The UFO is too unruly, too diegetically noncompliant to serve as a conventional narrative film subject. Viewed from another familiar position in film studies, that of auteurism—readings that privilege the artistic authority of the filmmaker in the interpretation of their films—intertextual FUBAR is significant for the extent to which it can be interpreted as unseating the figure of the authoritarian filmmaker. Here, the seemingly autonomous, intertextual perforations of the screen UFO can be seen wresting control from the tyran-

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[321] Gary K. Wolfe, *The Known and the Unknown: The Iconography of Science Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 16.

ny of the auteur by determining its own significance, on a scale larger than the individual text can contain. In this respect, the screen UFO assumes the role of a prime mover, an agent of organisation whose influence often runs counter to intention of the filmmaker, forging vast, rhizomatic networks of meaning, spanning films (from *Close Encounters…,* to *Star Wars*), media (film, television, literature, the visual arts), real events (NASA's Space Shuttle Enterprise), and even dreams (the UFO dreamt by Jung's psychiatric patient). In both views, the UFO serves less as the full stop that both creates and ends the sentence, than as a question mark, opening the sentence out in anticipation of an answer. Of course, the quasi-agential character of the screen UFO's appearance and activities—consistent with the notion of the "life" of the UFO image in screen media responsible for the UFO's apparent usurping of auteurist authority—should not be taken to suggest that UFOs represent actual "living" images, or even necessarily an actual, physical phenomenon. Rather, FUBAR serves an as acknowledgement of the fact that, due to the aesthetic particularities of the UFO image, one cannot necessarily assume that UFOs will work cooperatively with the text in the manner intended. In fact, often—as films such as *Close Encounters…* and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* plainly illustrate— the more filmmakers try to control the aesthetic function of their screen UFOs, the less their UFOs are willing to comply.

*15d. Summary*

It must be restated that this study posits FUBAR as a speculative, hypothetical theory of screen UFO aesthetics; a means of drawing out, and giving shape to the unique characteristics of the screen UFO. FUBAR should not be understood as a prescriptive summation of how screen UFOs function in the moving image, but rather as

this study's attempt to derive what the screen UFO expresses of its own aesthetic character from observations of its distinct representational tropisms. As such, what FUBAR provides is a useful model against which to recalibrate conventional approaches to the moving image in light of the challenges posed by depicting and viewing UFOs on screen.

By shifting emphasis away from the undecidable ontology of the UFO, and directing attention towards all that the UFO disrupts, FUBAR refigures the ufological enigma from unanswerable questions of what the UFO might be, to more manageable questions of what the UFO does. Registering what the UFO does—visually, and the narratological, and thematic implications of these visual expressions—FUBAR derestricts the range of interpretative possibilities available to the viewer of screen UFOs. As an inherently dialectical framework, in which the UFO stages collisions with the familiar, in addition to inciting further juxtapositions between various aspects of the familiar, FUBAR provides a strategy of ufological interpretation sensitive to multiple dimensions of the screen UFO, and its intersection with the world and its representation. FUBAR does not represent a hermeneutic of the screen UFO, in this respect, so much as a poetics of the screen UFO. In FUBAR, the screen UFO is recast as the chief determinant of expressive and narrational re/organisation of moving image representation, an agent of representational influence whose affect upon the systems and processes of screen texts provides no shortage of tangible "evidence" with which to better understand the nature of photographic UFO images. It is in this way that, consistent with the notion of the "dual signification" of paranormal phenomena outlined at the beginning of this thesis, FUBAR also serves as a refutation of the purely symbolic readings representative of much of the existing commentary on screen UFOs. The screen UFO is, of course, an image capable of supporting many possible symbolic readings, but FUBAR asserts that it is also, quite

concretely, a UFO, exerting a very literal influence upon the image and its representa-tions. In FUBAR, the UFO is both a photographic subject and an aesthetic force, capa-ble of articulating complex aesthetic configurations within and between images. The UFO is a "metapicture" in this sense, what Mitchell describes as an image that theorises its own behaviour and the nature of its representation.[322]

It is also significant that FUBAR reveals the moving image as a uniquely rewarding vantage point from which to observe aspects of the UFO phenomenon, even if, as pre-viously noted, ufology has historically favoured stills. The representational conflicts of FUBAR serve to powerfully demonstrate the extent to which the moving image pro-vides a rich audiovisual representation of the precise means by which the interminably mutable UFO manifests, eluding identification even as it enacts a tangible influence on the world. FUBAR provides valuable perspective upon the extent to which the UFO's figural (and narrative, thematic) ambiguity is not simply an incidental, essential state of the UFO image, or even a byproduct of poor photography or filmmaking, but an active process in which the UFO performs an elaborate balancing act of obfuscation and reve-lation. Again, in light of this thesis' refiguring of the UFO as a perspectival phe-nomenon, produced not by any quantitive combination of object and observer, but by configurations between objects, FUBAR—in spite of its manifold collisions and con-flicts—provides a more harmonious approach to appreciation of the fundamentally rela-tional character of the UFO as a visual event. Performing modulations of perspective and disjunctions of representational continuity in duration, FUBAR reveals the moving image as possessing a unique capacity for articulating the UFO less evidentially, than in the many other capacities in which it might be considered to function: as iconoclast, totem, *détournement* (or even a combination of all three).

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[322] Mitchell, *What do Pictures Want?*, p. 6.

Most importantly, although the origins of the term "FUBAR" might lie in wartime atrocity, it must be noted that the disruptions of screen UFOs in FUBAR can be positive as much as negative. Consider how the appearance of the UFO in *Fargo* triggers the chain reaction of grisly events that occur throughout the series, but ultimately thwarts the threat posed by the series' villains when it reappears later in the series. Elsewhere, other screen UFOs facilitate strictly positive, even utopian representations of new and better ways of organising the world. For instance, an earlier (longer) version of this thesis concluded with an extended demonstration of the sociopolitically progressive possibilities of FUBAR via consideration of the function of UFO iconography in Afrofuturist art, arguably the most prominent cultural site where the UFO exhibits a distinctly progressive sociopolitical thrust.[323] There, UFOs function, quite literally, as "vehicles […] for subversion," in the words of John Corbett, the aesthetic collisions theoretically outlined in FUBAR functioning to break up and remodel images of the world as it is, in the service of presenting "hyperbolic" representations of alternative presents and futures in which the African diaspora is not only no longer socioculturally subjugated, but a thriving interplanetary technoculture.[324] When this is the case, questions of the nature of the UFO evaporate before the sheer dialectical vigour of the screen UFO as an aesthetic phenomenon, its visual disruption providing compelling renewed (nonanthropocentric) perspective upon human affairs, and a host of alternative representational possibilities. (After all, how can an investigation of the extraterrestrial ever be truly justified for as long as structural inequality persists on earth?) To this end, FUBAR is most significant

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[323] Afrofuturism is a multidisciplinary aesthetic strategy, originating in mid twentieth century science fiction, combining the iconographies of cultures belonging to the African diaspora, with images of technological advancement, and extraterrestriality. The concept originates in a 1993 article by cultural theorist Mark Dery, and has since developed with a number of significant contributions from writers including Alondra Nelson, Greg Tate, and Kodwo Eshun. See Mark Dery, 'Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose,' in Mark Dery (ed.), *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture* (London: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 179-222.

[324] John Corbett interviewed in John Akomfrah's 1996 documentary on Afrofuturism, *The Last Angel of History* (John Akomfrah, Black Studio Film Collective, U. K., 1996), and Kodwo Eshun, 'Further Considerations of Afrofuturism,' *The New Centennial Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 2003), pp. 198-9.

for providing an interpretative framework in which the thematic dimensions of the screen UFO are rendered visually legible; the collisions and recombinations catalysed by the screen UFO serving both literally, as representations of ufological interruption, and figuratively, as emblems of alternative possibility.

# Conclusion

Using a mixture of textural analysis of visual and written material relating to UFOs, and critical consideration of film and photography theory, this thesis set out to determine the unique aesthetic character of the UFO as it relates to the challenges it poses to photographic representation. In the "authentic" UFO still, the ambiguous figuration of the UFO scrambles conventional semiotic approaches to the photograph, exploiting rhetorics of photographic automation to assert an illusion of paranormal agency. In the "inauthentic" images of moving image fiction, the same characteristics of the UFO image, divorced from the requirements of functioning evidentially, denature conventional moving image representation, both at the primary level of the animation, and a secondary narrative level, confronting audiences with hypothetical reorganisations of the world and its representation (as encapsulated in the disruptive aesthetics of FUBAR). Stepping back from these immediate concerns of the thesis, however, there are a number of additional conclusions that can drawn from this discussion.

All looking and thinking involves a delicate balance between focusing on details and generalising patterns. Science consists of carefully observing complex processes and tracing their abstract theoretical outline. What is lost, then, in science is the specificity of the anomaly. Conversely, photography is the medium of specificity and anomaly. Why take a photograph, and not a painting or a diagram, if not for its irreducibly individual particularity? As previously stated, a photograph of a chair does not only show a chair, it shows *that* chair. The UFO is an emblem of the anomaly, the detail disregarded as an outlier in science, but embraced by photography as an emblem of its medium specific aesthetic gravitations. UFO photographs arrestingly remind viewers of the unique affordances of the humanities, the embrace of specificity, the obscure appeal of that which cannot be sorted into neat, rational patterns. In this respect, UFO photographs

reveal more about the viewers of images than they do about the contents of the images themselves. UFO photographs bring into focus the interpretational difficulties present in even the most minute aspects of everyday interaction with photographic images. These decisions, often ideologically prescribed, or otherwise culturally imposed, determine entire strata of attitudes towards the world and its representation, yet so routinely escape close attention. The UFO forces viewers to question assumptions commonly made about photographs, what they mean, and how they are used (as to misjudge them is often to risk a loss of iconological and/or scientific credibility). The assumptions and conventions responsible for enforcing these attitudes, policing the interpretation of UFO images, prematurely foreshorten the possibilities available to photographic imaging and its reception. The UFO compels the viewer to think beyond such imposed limitations, and step outside the ordinary habits of viewing that typically determine the course of interpretation, many of which, as has been observed over the course of this thesis, are merely vestiges of more reactionary, conservative approaches to images.

Recalling, again, Cohen's work on the "monster," as "that which warns," if the UFO is a monster, or "*monstrum*" (a warning), it is a monster that warns against prescriptiveness, and the rigidity of interpretation.[325] Its radical ambiguity demands viewers assess, and reassess, and never settle on any single, reductive interpretation. Whether "authentically" extraterrestrial, an unintended byproduct of photographic (technological) automation, or a Hollywood special effect, the photographic UFO serves as an anthropocentric icon of the nonanthropocentric, exposing terrestrial prejudices (including the "correct" way of reading a photograph), challenging them, and asking how they might be productively altered. (This applies both to popular understandings of photography, and academic approaches to photography. As Mike Kelley suggests, photographic UFOs

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[325] Cohen, 'Monster Culture (Seven Theses),' p. 4.

confront viewers with the possibility that the familiar tenets of film and photography theory are no less "crackpot" than ufology's UFO theory.)[326]

As a speculative theory of screen UFOs, FUBAR functions in a supplementary capacity to these concerns regarding interpretation. If existing strategies of interpretation are insufficient, then FUBAR provides a possible framework for registering what the UFO image does, as opposed to what it evades or resists. Where ufology's evidential and scientific concerns see the UFO's essential ambiguity only undermine attempts toward establishing its scientific legitimacy, in FUBAR, ufological ambiguity is reformulated as a register of the unique representational opportunities available to the UFO as an image. Resisting scientific categorisation, the UFO demands that viewers remain hermeneutically agile. Contrary to the frustrating insufficiencies of "authentic" UFO photographs, FUBAR presents the UFO as a visual abundance, persuasively illustrating the constructive potential of the UFO image prised from the burden of evidence. To see a UFO in a photograph and not immediately dismiss it as a misrepresentation is a form of "radical misperception," to repurpose a phrase used by Rogerson, allowing the photographic UFO to open up a polysemic, hypothetical space, similar in appearance to lived experience, but distinct enough to offer visualisations of alternative possibilities.[327] Of course, the word "misperception" casts this decision with the character of an error, and UFOs are always errors, whether literally (in terms of a mistake in the photographic process), or, as Jane Marsching observes, as in the etymological root of the term in Latin, *errare*, meaning to wander, to err in course.[328] In this respect, the UFO image, whether an error or an err, invites viewers to consider photographs more creatively, revealing the productive possibilities of enthusiastic over-reading, as opposed

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[326] See Kelley and Wilder, 'Weaned on Conspiracy,' p. 393.

[327] Rogerson, 'Taken to the Limits, Part 2.'

[328] Marsching, 'Orbs, Blobs, and Glows,' p. 58.

to cautious under-reading. In the context of contemporary debates concerning the rise of conspiracy theory, and the wilful spread of misinformation, the intention of this thesis is to provide a demonstration of a legitimate space for the incorporation of the fantastical and the imagination in radical critique, even if this means wilfully misappropriating aspects of the fantastical cultures this might implicate, and otherwise working against some instinctive academic conventions (such as honouring, if not necessarily concurring with an author's intent).

In a contemporary image culture where it is the expectation that photographic images require supplementary verification sooner than they require supplementary falsification, the UFO photograph also serves as both a warning of what happens when too much trust is invested in images, and an exhortation towards a more constructive approach to photographic interpretation. This project has deliberately deemphasised factual consideration of what "identified flying objects" the UFOs in photographs often turn out to be —that is, "authentic" but ultimately misrepresented photographic UFOs—as to dwell on the relative truthfulness of UFO photographs by the conventional criteria of photographic evidence is to miss precisely this point. Why should UFO photographs be considered any less "truthful" than more readily comprehensible photographs of more quotidian subjects just because they misrepresent the objects they fail to provide a comprehensible image of? Is there not a truth to the manner in which the UFO photograph projects a double-image, in many ways indicative of photography at large, of both inadequate evidence and desirable possibility? It is in this respect that the value of the UFO as a cultural artefact is as an epistemic totem, an image that serves to mark precisely where conventional approaches to photographic interpretation end, and where new interpretative possibilities begin. Why must the ambiguity of whether a UFO photograph "truly" represents any actual anomalous phenomenon serve only to fail to provide meaningful

evidence? Why can this ambiguity not serve as a viable space for speculative thought? One might know, with reasonable assuredness, that Billy Meier's UFO photographs are hoaxes, but what if it is possible to move past assessment of Meier's intentions for the images (as interpretable as "authentic" UFO evidence), and put his photographs to different uses?

It is in this way that UFO photographs ask whether any photographic image can be considered more "truthful" than any other. Dismantling preconceived notions of representational veracity, photographic UFOs emphatically demonstrate the relative uselessness of the "authentic" photograph compared to the, at times, surprising constructiveness of the "inauthentic" image, reversing the general assumption that "real" photographs are more useful than "fake" ones. After all, just as the UFO serves variously as meaning or mystery in fictional UFO narratives—either the revelatory explanation that ties previously disparate narrative strands together, or the ambiguous interruption that destabilises everything thought assured—ufologists will always find new methods to both produce evidential UFO images, and devise new arguments to explain how their images are "authentic," just as sceptics will always find means to refute their claims. What matters is that, whether "authentic" or "inauthentic," the UFO image remains, as Erica Rowell writes, a powerful "[totem] of doubt," introducing an intractable kink into the hegemonic reception of photography.[329] If any truth can be pulled from the wreckage of photographic UFO evidence, it is precisely this, not a better understanding of what makes a photograph appear more "authentic" than any other, but a more sensitive approach to photography, better capable of identifying not what the image is "of," but the many things it might be taken to mean. In the increasingly polymorphous, and polysemic image culture of the digital present, the analogue photographic UFO images of

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[329] Erica Rowell, *The Brothers Grim: The Films of Ethan and Joel Coen* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2007), p. 178.

the past in particular serve to helpfully remind viewers that these photographic ambiguities are no new phenomenon. Furthermore, the insistent, investigatory focus on the material contours of analogue media in ufology and UFO representations, anticipates the variously critical and nostalgic returns to analogue materiality in the popular UFO representations of the present, revealing the afterlife of analogue photography—the medium to which UFOs might owe their birth, and certainly their popularity—as far from exhausted, presenting new possibilities for representation and reception with every passing moment. UFO photographs reveal that there is still much to uncover in images from the past.

Perhaps most significantly, this study hopefully overturns two unhelpful preexisting biases: that against the UFO as a legitimate subject of academic consideration; and that against readings of UFO photographs as necessarily evidential. Rather, what this study has shown, is that considered outside the limitations of evidence, the UFO image is capable of exposing the anthropocentric, and otherwise chauvinist preconceptions that inhibit one's ability to think critically in relation to photography and the world at large. This, of course, runs contrary to what is commonly perceived as the largely negative cultural legacy of the UFO (that UFOs and ufology have miseducated children about science, mislead the public and spread disinformation, or have otherwise distracted from concerns considered more pressing), and screen UFO media (whether in terms of the xenophobic paranoia alleged of the original saucer cycle, or the nostalgic infantilisation alleged of the resurgence of UFO films in the 1980s). Of course, this all depends on one's willingness to approach the paranormal—and particularly representations of the paranormal—critically, and not over credulously. Theodor Adorno, for one, warns of how the "pseudo-rationality" of paranormal literature, and particularly the "commercialized occult" of the astrology columns, which he takes as his source material in his 1953

essay 'The Stars Down to Earth,' can surreptitiously indoctrinate the reader into a defer-

ence and dependency upon quasi-fascistic authorities who claim mystical access to oth-

er realms (a charge that could be alleged of many "contactees," and UFO "whistleblow-

ers").[330] But provided viewers are measured in their consideration of UFOs and the ufo-

logical, paranormal phenomena like UFOs do not have to serve purely symptomatically,

as indices of a reactionary expression of, say, scientific and governmental disillusion-

ment. Thoughtful consideration allowing, an image like the UFO can serve as a radical-

ly agitational, wondrous, and potentially even utopian image. As Philip Fisher writes,

wonder is "the most neglected of primary aesthetic experiences within modernity," the

site where "intellectual curiosity" meets "the pleasure of amazement," typically in reac-

tion to an instantaneous visual experience, where "the entire object and all its details

present at once."[331] Does this not describe what this thesis has shown of the experience

of viewing historical UFO images? One might not be able to definitely say what these

images actually represent, but why should this impose a limit on what else might be

done with them?

Returning, finally, then, to the ATFLIR videos introduced at the beginning of this

thesis. Over the last three years, these images have been variously posited as among the

very best publicised UFO evidence, or shambolic misinterpretations of specialised tech-

nical imaging. At the time of writing this conclusion, the U. S. Government is approach-

ing its deadline for publishing its first major public report concerning its investigation of

UFO phenomena. But even if this report were to announce that UFOs can be definitely

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[330] Theodor Adorno, 'The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column,' in Theodor Adorno, *The Stars Down to Earth* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 46, 49.

[331] Elsewhere in the book, Fisher even notes "the domination of the phenomena of the sky in any work on wonder" (referring to Descartes' assertion that "We naturally feel more wonder for those things above us, than for things at our own level"), and how "[o]bjects that are too rarely seen never stabilize themselves in human language […] or, worse, their very reality is disputed since most people have never seen them even once," recalling UFOs in more ways than one. Philip Fisher, *Wonder, The Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 2, 11, 17, and René Descartes, 'Letter of February 22, 1638,' in René Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, vol. 1 (Paris: Garnier, 1967), p. 719, quoted in ibid., p. 44.

identified as a previously unknown weather phenomenon, formerly secret aviation or weapons technology, or even extraterrestrial craft, it would not even remotely approach the possibility of answering all the questions posed in the course of this thesis regarding the aesthetics of the photographic UFO. It might reveal what some of the UFOs in these images are, but it could not reveal what these UFO images are capable of doing. The UFO image is a photographic aporia, reemerging in new, ever-inscrutable guises every time it is assumed it has been figured out, casting doubt over all that has been previously assumed. Suitably, the French acronym "OVNI" (*objet volant non identifié*)—a translation of UFO—doubles up in France as slang for the new and exciting, and just as the ATFLIR videos demonstrated in December 2017 ("authentic" or otherwise), the continually reinventing form of the UFO photograph remains no less compelling today, than it was in 1947.[332] To this end, may they never determine convincing explanations for all photographic UFOs, for as Nelson Goodman asserts, "[an] answer, once found, is dull."[333]

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[332] The acronym "OVNI" is also used in Spain (*objeto volador nada inteligente*), Italy (*oggetto volante niente di intelligente*), and Portugal (*objeto voador nada inteligente*) as an equivalent to "UFO."

[333] Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1977), p. 1.

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# Filmography

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*Arnulf Rainer* (Peter Kubelka, Arnulf Rainer, Independent, USA, 1960)

*Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, Paramount, USA, 2016)

*L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (Auguste & Louis Lumière, Société Lumière, France, 1895)

*The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock, Universal, USA, 1963)

*Capturing the Light: The Dorothy Izatt Phenomenon* (Frank Longo, Outside The □ Productions, Canada, 2007)

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, Columbia, USA, 1977)

*Cloverfield* (Matt Reeves, Paramount, USA, 2008)

*Communion* (Philippe Mora, Pheasantry Films, USA, 1989)

*Conversations with a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (USA, Netflix, 2019)

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*The Dead Don't Die* (Jim Jarmusch, Kill The Head, USA, 2019)

*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (Fred F. Sears, Columbia Pictures, USA, 1956)

*Explorers* (Joe Dante, Paramount Pictures, USA, 1985)

*Fantastic Voyage* (Richard Fleischer, 20th Century Fox, USA, 1966)

*Fargo* (Joel Coen, Gramercy Pictures, USA, 1996)

*Fargo* (USA, FX, 2014-present)

*Fire in the Sky* (Robert Lieberman, Paramount USA, 1993)

*The Flicker (*Tony Conrad, Jonas Mekas, USA, 1966)

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*Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 20th Century Fox, USA, 1996)

*Ivan Grozny/Ivan the Terrible, Part I* (Sergei Eisenstein, Mosfilm, Soviet Union, 1944)

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*The Lighthouse* (Robert Eggers, A24, USA, 2019)

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*Mars Attacks!* (Tim Burton, Warner Bros., USA, 1996)

*A MOVIE* (Bruce Connor, Independent, USA, 1958)

*Mysterious Skin* (Gregg Araki, Fortissimo Films, USA, 2004)

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*Polaroid* (Lars Klevberg, Dimension Films, USA, 2019)

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