# THE UFO MOVEMENT

## A Sociological Study of Unidentified Flying Object Groups

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**PhD Thesis**
**University of York**
**1984**

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# INTRODUCTION

The unidentified flying object (UFO) or flying saucer[a] has become a fascinating part of popular culture since the end of World War Two. Newspaper stories about 'little green men', books about crashed 'saucers' and films like 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind' have contributed to a popular interpretation of UFOs as extra-terrestrial spacecraft. Spokesmen for science have rejected the proposition that the Earth is being visited by aliens, putting most reports of UFOs down to misidentifications of known objects, and this has encouraged the view that anyone taking anything other than a light-hearted interest in such things must be slightly crazy. So what kind of people take a serious interest in these reports ? Why do people continue to report UFO experiences ? And why has the idea of extra-terrestrial visitation remained so popular ?

The essential difference between my attempt to answer these questions and previous research on the subject, is that I focus on the UFO movement as a whole, in the belief that the different parts can best be understood in relation to one another. Rather than examine one particular UFO group, as a number of researchers have done (Festinger, Riecken and Schachter, 1964; Jackson, 1966; Buckner, 1965; Wallis, 1974; Balch and Taylor, 1977; Stupple and McNeece, 1979), or look only at popular belief that UFOs are extra-terrestrial visitors, as others have done (Warren, 1970; Resta, 1975; Littig, 1971; Fox, 1979), I have considered these as aspects of a broader social movement.[b]

There are a number of advantages in taking this approach: Firstly, it enables previously neglected aspects of the UFO movement to be examined in greater detail. For instance, although six out of seven previous studies of UFO groups have concentrated solely on groups formed around those who claim to be in contact with aliens (contactees), another type of UFO group exists. This is the UFO research group which investigates UFO reports, and it has been mentioned only by Schutz (1973) in his comparative study of UFO groups, in the USA.

Little is known about this type of group, in fact virtually nothing about British groups, yet many such groups exist. Given this lack of information, a substantial part of my research involved an investigation of UFO research groups in the UK. Data was collected from a questionnaire survey of members of the British UFO Research Association, open-ended questionnaires administered to members of a local UFO group, interviews with members of other groups, postal requests for information from a large number of groups, letters to lapsed subscribers of a UFO newsletter, and an analysis

of publications produced by these groups (see Appendix A, for further details of the research methods used).

The UFO research group is also of particular interest because members consider themselves to be 'ufologists'; that is, researchers in the field of 'ufology', a controversial subject which is considered by many scientists to be a 'pseudo science', but by others such as the sociologist Joseph Blake (1979), to be a developing science. Subjects frequently referred to by scientists as 'pseudo science', or 'anti science', have grown in popularity over the last two decades (Remy, 1981; Wallis, 1979) and appear to be part of a revival of interest in the occult (Truzzi, 1972; 1974; 1977; Hartmer, 1976; Galbreath, 1977; 1982). Although occultism and pseudo science seem to be inter-related phenomena, they have generally been analysed from two different perspectives; the sociology of religion in the case of the occult revival, and the sociology of science where pseudo science is concerned. A second advantage of examining the UFO movement as a whole is that it enables the relationship between these two phenomena to be explored. Both occultism and pseudo science[3] are important elements of the UFO movement and an analysis of the relationship between these two forms a significant part of the thesis.

The analysis of publications produced by UFO groups suggests that research groups are in the majority in Britain; but groups formed around contactees (contactee cults), which were so popular in the late 1950s and early 1960s following the publication of the book Flying Saucers Have Landed (1953), by George Adamski and Desmond Leslie, have not disappeared altogether. In fact organisations of this kind are still emerging: the most recent new group to gain any great degree of publicity in Britain being The Raelian Movement, formed by Claude Vorilhon after a 'meeting with aliens' in 1973; Vorilhon appeared on the ITV programme 'Some You Win' interviewed by Sir David Hunt. To help in the interpretation of previous studies of contactee cults, research on this type of group was also carried out: an analysis of the publications they produce, and a small number of interviews with group members.

Although UFO groups form the core of the UFO movement, there are other aspects. A third advantage of taking an approach which considers the UFO movement as a whole, is that it provides information which can be used to analyse 'belief in UFOs' and interest in allied subjects such as 'ancient astronauts'. Popular interpretations of survey questions relating to belief in UFOs generally assume that all those who indicate a 'yes' response to this question believe UFOs to be extra-terrestrial spacecraft. Similarly, analyses of the modern myth of ancient astronauts assume that all readers

of books by Erich von Daniken and the like, believe the Earth was visited by spacemen at the dawn of human history (Ashworth, 1980; Carroll, 1977). An examination of the beliefs of those recruited into UFO groups provides additional interpretations and suggests that interest in these subjects may now frequently involve a fascination with 'the unexplained' rather than a belief in extra-terrestrial visitation.

A fourth advantage is that this approach provides a better framework for generating explanations for the continued reporting of UFOs. Previous explanations have been incomplete and so rather unsatisfactory. For instance, UFOs are frequently explained as largely due to misperceptions of known objects (Hynek, 1974; Hendry, 1980). No doubt most are, but why should common celestial objects such as the planet Venus suddenly become ambiguous ? Some UFO reports are considered to be due to a form of mass hysteria (Hynek, 1978; Smelser, 1962), but why do outbreaks of sightings occur in a number of countries simultaneously and how is hysteria connected to world events ? When other aspects of the UFO movement, such as researchers and popular literature, are included in the analysis, some of the problems of previous explanations can be overcome.

It is clear from the above that a variety of diverse social phenomena are included under the general heading of the 'UFO movement' and consequently this has necessitated the use of material from a number of different areas of social science, particularly the sociology of religion, science, and social movements. However, at the heart of the movement is a disenchantment with current science and a lack of satisfaction with modern religion and so a central theme of the research is an exploration of popular attempts to re-unite science and religion.

I say 'attempts' rather than 'attempt' because the UFO movement is not just a combination of technology and the Bible as many aware only of Erich von Daniken would allow. The UFO has become the focus for a tremendous amount of popular creativity and this fact alone, makes it an important subject for social science research.

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Footnotes

a) According to Strentz (1970) in his survey of press coverage of UFOs between 1947 and 1966, although the term 'flying saucer' was used

widely from 1947, the term 'unidentified flying object' or its abbreviation UFO, appears to have come into popular use only since 1956 or 1957.

b) I should point out that different explanations for the 'unexplained residue' of UFO reports are treated here as part of the UFO movement: conflicting explanations are discussed in Part Four, but only to analyse the different positions involved. Throughout, I have tried to maintain a position of 'methodological relativism' with respect to the different views involved.

c) Some studies of a more general nature have considered them both together, as an aspect of popular culture (eg. Campbell, 1972; Truzzi, 1972 ).

d) Throughout the research, I have used the description 'marginal science' in preference to that of 'pseudo science' because of the derogatory connotations of the latter.

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# PART ONE: AN OUTLINE OF THE UFO MOVEMENT

# CHAPTER I

## A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE GROWTH OF THE UFO MOVEMENT

Any attempt to understand the growth of the UFO movement must take into account the major events in its development. The historical description which follows has been compiled from Hynek (1978), Jacobs (1975), Steiger (1976) and Story (1980) unless otherwise stated.

Strange aerial objects have been reported throughout history but it is only since 1947 that they have received popular attention as 'flying saucers', UFOs, or extra-terrestrial spacecraft. For instance, many people reported seeing airships in the USA in 1896 (before the airship had been invented) and about a hundred in Britain during the spring of 1909, but the belief that these sightings indicated the presence of extra-terrestrials was not particularly popular.[a] Most people in the USA seemed to think that an unknown inventor had successfully constructed a flying machine, while in a later, post-invention Britain, the major suspicion was of German spies. Also 'foo fighters' were reported by fighter pilots during World War Two and on the Scandinavian border in 1946, but thesewere thought to be a new form of enemy weapon.

The popular concept of the 'flying saucer' was created following a sighting by Kenneth Arnold on June 24, 1947. Arnold was flying his private plane near Mount Rainier in Washington when he reported seeing nine disc shaped objects which flew in loose formation and made an undulating motion, like "a saucer skipping over water". This report received widespread publicity although it was not the first of its kind: a few others had occurred in the USA earlier in 1947. These reports were channelled to the Air Technical Intelligence Centre (ATIC) at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, which was the agency responsible for analysing intelligence information of interest to the Air Force. Two schools of thought about UFOs quickly developed at ATIC and other intelligence circles: one felt that UFOs should be taken very seriously, that they were real and not visionary objects and that they might be interplanetary spacecraft; the other dismissed UFOs as misperceptions, a fad, postwar nerves or the effects of a 'silly season'.

As reports continued to arrive, ATIC recommended that a separate and formal project be set up to evaluate the situation and in January 1948,

Project Sign was officially established. In February 1949, Project Sign completed its evaluation of the 243 UFO reports which had been submitted to the project. The report concluded that:

> No definite and conclusive evidence is yet available that would prove or disprove the existence of these UFOs as real aircraft of unknown and unconventional configuration (Steiger, 1976, p.11)

During this month, the project name was changed to Project Grudge and in August 1949 evaluations were completed. A Department of Defense, Office of Public Information, Press Release, dated December 27, 1949, announced that Project Grudge had been terminated. Part of it read:

> The Air Force said that all evidence and analyses indicate that reports of unidentified flying objects are the result of:
>
> 1 - misinterpretation of various conventional objects
>
> 2 - a mild form of mass hysteria
>
> 3 - or hoaxes (Hynek, 1978, p.260)

The report also said that reports of UFOs to date demonstrated that the flying objects constituted no threat to the security of the United States and it recommended that the investigation and study of UFOs be reduced in scope.

During 1950 and 1951 UFO reports continued to occur and were recorded by ATIC at Dayton, but they did not receive as much newspaper publicity as in the three previous years. However, during these two years there was an increasing amount of popular interest in the subject, encouraged by the publication of a number of books, articles in various magazines, and films. The books published were: by Gerald Heard, The Riddle of the Flying Saucers: Is Another World Watching?; Donald Keyhoe, The Flying Saucers are Real; and Frank Scully, Behind the Flying Saucers. Two of the three books described a government conspiracy to cover up the true facts about UFOs. Articles appeared in magazines such as True, Time, and Newsweek, and the first film of this type, released in 1951, was 'The Day The Earth Stood Still', about an alien who lands in a saucer to warn those on Earth to stop developing atomic weapons.

In January 1952, the first civilian UFO group, the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation (APRO), was formed, and during that year at least a further two civilian groups emerged in the USA. These were the Civilian

Saucer Investigation of Los Angeles and the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB). In Britain there was an official representative of the International Flying Saucer Bureau. He was Capt. E.L. Plunkett who formed the British Flying Saucer Bureau the following year after the sudden closure of the IFSB, which was due, so Plunkett was informed, to a visit from "three Men in Black" (Plunkett, 1975).

In March 1952, Project Grudge was reactivated under the name of Project Blue Book and then in July of that year UFOs hit the headlines again. A number of unidentified radar returns were picked up by the Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base during the night of July 19/20 and again on the night of July 26/27. These events received widespread publicity. As Capt. Ruppelt, Director of Project Blue Book from March 1952 to February 1953 wrote in his book Report on Unidentified Flying Objects:

> They created such a furore that I had inquiries from the office of the President of the United States and from the press in London, Ottawa and Mexico City. A junior-sized riot was only narrowly averted in the lobby of the Roger Smith Hotel in Washington when I refused to tell the U.S. newspaper reporters what I knew about the sightings. (Hynek, 1978, p.20)

At an enormous press conference, General John Samford, USAF Director of Intelligence, explained the sightings as being basically due to weather phenomena.

The 'Washington Flap' sparked an increased interest in UFO reports by the US Central Intelligence Agency which had been monitoring the UFO phenomena from early 1949. The Agency was particularly interested in the possibility that enemy agents might clog military communications with a barrage of false flying saucer reports and so camouflage a real attack on the country. They sponsored the formation of a panel of scientists to review and appraise the available evidence on UFOs in the light of relevant scientific theories. The panel, under the Chairmanship of physicist Dr. H.P. Robertson, met between January 14 and 16, 1953. The Robertson Panel report, which guided Pentagon policy on UFOs for the remaining sixteen years of the existence of project Blue Book, concluded:

> ... the evidence presented ... shows no indication that these phenomena constitute a direct threat to national security... and that there is no evidence that the phenomena indicate a need for the revision of current scientific concepts.
> (Hynek, 1978, p.22)

It ended with the recommendation that national security agencies take steps to strip UFOs of the special status they had been given and the aura of mystery they had acquired.

During 1953 a second batch of UFO books appeared, including Desmond Leslie and George Adamski, Flying Saucers Have Landed, which contained Adamski's account of his meeting with a Venusian in the Californian desert. This book was the first of a number written by those who claimed to have contacted extra-terrestrials (contactees). It was the following year before Britain had its own contactees: Cedric Allingham's book, Flying Saucer From Mars, which detailed his encounter with a spaceman in Scotland, was published in 1954. It was during that year too that George King, founder of the Aetherius Society, started receiving messages from aliens (Wallis, 1974). In the USA in 1954, the first of many contactee gatherings took place. This was the Giant Rock Space Convention convened by contactee, George Von Tassell, which took place every year between 1954 and 1970 and was the major annual event in the world of contactees. Large organised contactee groups were formed shortly after that first convention; in 1955, Understanding Incorporated and, in 1956, the Los Angeles Interplanetary Study Groups and the Aetherius Society. Contactees like Adamski and Von Tassell also toured widely giving accounts of their experiences.

The year 1954 was also notable for the large numbers of UFO sightings reported throughout Europe. In France, many of these reports involved sightings of landed objects and entities (Vallee, 1969). Also during this year, the British-based international UFO magazine Flying Saucer Review was launched, although the first issue did not appear until spring 1955.

Over the next few years a fairly high level of popular interest in both contactees and research was maintained. Although some UFO researchers were hostile to the contactees and tried to expose their claims as fraudulent, there was a certain amount of overlap between the two different types of UFO groups. For instance, early issues of the research-oriented magazine Flying Saucer Review published articles by contactees and when, in 1954, the anti-contactee magazine Saucers polled its readers about who they considered to be the best authors on UFOs, they found that UFO

researcher Donald Keyhoe was the first in popularity, but contactees Adamski and Fry followed closely behind. The general public probably saw no difference at all between the two types of groups because contactees were featured on radio and TV chat shows, sometimes appearing with UFO researchers on the same show.

Reports of UFO sightings increased again in 1957 and then dropped right off. In Britain, only twenty-two reports were received by the Ministry of Defence in 1959.

Then in the mid-1960s UFO reports began to increase once more. In January 1965, UFOs were reported in Washington DC again, both on radar and from the general public. Astronaut James McDivitt reported three sightings of UFOs during his earth orbiting mission in Gemini 4 early in the year and in December astronauts Frank Borman and James Lovell of Gemini 7 reported a sighting. In Britain, the Warminster 'thing' made its first appearance and so began the development of Britain's UFO 'Mecca' (Shuttlewood, 1967). By September 1965, various strange aerial objects and peculiar noises had been experienced by more than two hundred people in Warminster and thousands of visitors flocked there in the hope of catching a glimpse of it themselves (Chapman, 1969).

It was during the mid-1960s that many British UFO research groups were established. The British Research Association was consolidated in 1964, although a parent organisation was created in 1962 when seven groups merged with the London UFO Research Organisation. Contact International (referring to contact between ufologists and not space beings) was founded by Brinsley Le Poer Trench in 1967.

In 1966 the University of Colorado was awarded a contract by Project Blue Book for an independent study of the UFO problem. Head of the study was Dr. Edward Condon, a prominent physicist. Dissent began almost immediately between those involved, ultimately resulting in the firing of the project co-principal investigator, Dr. David Saunders (a psychologist) and a research associate, Dr. Norman Levine (an electrical engineer). Saunders then published his own 'minority report' (UFOs? Yes! Where the Condon Committee Went Wrong). The University project's official report was released by the US Air Force in January 1969. The main conclusions that Condon presented were:

"... that nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge," and that" ... further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby." (Story, 1980, p.84)

In the meantime, however, UFO sightings, publicity and enthusiasm continued to increase throughout the USA and Europe. In Britain in 1967, the Ministry of Defence received 362 sighting reports. It was during these years that UFOs became associated with the counter-culture. Hippies camped out at Warminster and 'guru' John Mitchell's book View Over Atlantis, which draws connections between UFOs and the grail legend, was published. This book and others, like Jacques Vallee's Passport to Magonia (1969), which explores the connections between the fairy world and UFOs, encouraged a perception of UFOs as part of a lost mythical and symbolic world, a world which was in need of rediscovery. In addition, the messages of contactees were perfectly consonant with many of the concerns of the counter-culture: CND, anti-war sentiments, environmentalism, anti-materialism and concern over technical developments.

For UFO researchers, reports of sightings involving landed craft and entities became particularly important. In 1966 Flying Saucer Review published a special issue of its magazine called The Humanoids dealing with these cases and it was republished in paperback form in 1969. Reports of these cases, involving contact of a different nature to that of the 'contactees', increased. Instead of awe, fear was frequently the dominant emotion, as in one of the earliest cases; that of the alleged abduction by aliens of Betty and Barney Hill in 1961 (Fuller, 1966).

Shortly after the publication of the conclusions of the Condon Report and the termination of Project Blue Book at the end of 1969, popular interest in UFOs declined again. Newspaper and magazine publicity had virtually ceased by 1970. The Condon Report may have been responsible for this but there is some evidence to suggest that popular interest began to decline as UFOs became associated with the counter-culture. For instance, the US UFO research group NICAP (National Investigation Committee on Aerial Phenomena) steadily lost membership, from 12,000 in 1967 to 4,000 by 1971. Alternatively, it may have been the association of the subject with scientific research by the University of Colorado. For, instead of declining, scientific interest in UFOs increased, and the publication of the Condon Report caused a great deal of controversy, drawing criticism

from scientists like James McDonald and Allen Hynek, and organisations such as the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. The National Amateur Astronomers Association sponsored a symposium entitled 'Science and the UFO' in Colorado, and The American Association for the Advancement of Science held a symposium on UFOs in Massachusetts in 1969.

As a newspaper and publishing venture, UFOs were usurped by 'ancient astronauts' during the early 1970s. Erich von Daniken's Chariots of the Gods? was published in 1969 and another three of his books appeared before 1974. Possibly, the materialistic philosophy of ancient astronauts as the origin of myths and legends was a popular reaction against the idealism of the counter-cultural underground.

In 1974 popular interest in UFOs began to revive again. In the USA this coincided with a spate of reports of UFO sightings at the end of 1973. More UFO books were published and the topic of UFOs became the subject of media attention. It was during this year that astronomer Allen Hynek established the Centre for UFO Studies, an organisation with a core of twenty-six scientists, which was featured in the British scientific magazine Nature shortly afterwards. Many British groups began to organise and consolidate themselves at this time. BUFORA became legally constituted in 1975 as a nonprofit company in order to obtain sufficient funds for in-depth research and investigation. A coalition of eighteen groups in Northern England, called the Northern UFO Network, was formed in 1974, and another national group, the British UFO Society, was established at this time.

From 1975 to the present, this trend of organisation and rationalisation has continued throughout Europe and the USA. In Britain, a team of scientific consultants and experienced UFO researchers, called the UFO Investigators Network, was formed in 1977. UFO groups in Southern England and the Midlands have joined together to form the Southern UFO Network and the Midlands UFO Network, respectively. BUFORA organised the first of subsequent international UFO conferences in 1979. Lord Clancarty (Brinsley Le Poer Trench) introduced a debate on UFOs in the House of Lords in 1979. In France in 1977 the government organised an official UFO study group (GEPAN). In the USA, the UFO research group, Ground Saucer Watch, filed a lawsuit requesting the release of CIA documents about UFOs, in 1978, and as a result about 900 pages of official records about UFOs were released from Pentagon files. A pressure group called Citizens Against

UFO Secrecy (CAUSE) was also established.

As far as beliefs about UFOs are concerned, rationalisation also seems to have taken place. UFOs have become one part of a much broader topic of 'strange mysteries' or 'the unexplained'.[b] UFO researchers have increasingly concentrated on the similarities between UFO experiences and psychic experiences, and groups investigating both types of phenomena have been formed: in Britain, a notable example is the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP), formed in 1981.

Although ideas about what UFOs might be have steadily broadened among members of UFO groups, at the popular level, extra-terrestrial visitation still seems to be the main theme, as the success of films such as 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind', 'Hanger 18', and 'ET' show. Despite this apparently high level of popular interest, however, reports of UFO experiences have steadily declined in number since the last 'wave' in 1979.[c]

To summarise this brief history of the UFO movement, it is possible to divide its growth into four stages, although the dates of each stage are only approximations: Firstly, the stage of initial concern, when UFOs became a focus of popular attention (1947 - 1952). Secondly, the stage of group formation when contactee groups and UFO research groups were formed (1953 - 1965). Thirdly, the stage of counter-culture involvement, when UFOs became part of broader cultural changes involving a revival of interest in the occult and new religious movements (1966 - 1973). Fourthly, the stage of rationalisation, when both organisations and beliefs began to be systematised and ordered (1974 - present).[d]

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Footnotes

a) Although the extra-terrestrial interpretation was not particularly popular, this is not to say that interest in extra-terrestrials or fear of alien invasion did not exist. It has been estimated that about half of New York City were taken in by the famous moon hoax, perpetrated by the New York Sun, in 1835: this consisted of a description of apelike creatures seen on the moon by the British astronomer, Sir John Herschel. There is also the later occurrence of Hallowe'en, 1938, when about one million out of six million people who heard it, took Orson Welles's radio version of H.G. Wells's

War of the Worlds seriously enough to be frightened by it to some degree, (Gardner, 1957). The recent publication of a manuscript entitled An Account of a Meeting with Denizens of Another World (1979), which supposedly details an encounter with extra-terrestrial visitors by William Robert Loosley in 1871, implies that UFO experiences similar to those which have been reported since 1947 may have been recorded much earlier. However, this manuscript may well be a hoax perpetrated either by Loosley or by the editor, David Langford, who was associated with one of the highly dubious discoveries of that "lost masterpiece of occult literature" The Necronomicon, a book invented by the writer H.P. Lovecraft, but still the subject of numerous 'discoveries' since Lovecraft's death in 1937.

b) See, for instance, the popular British part-work The Unexplained and W.H. Smith's book series "Great Mysteries" which offers "an absorbing journey into the great unexplained".

c) A UFO wave is an unexplained increase in the number of UFO sighting reports over a certain period of time. The number of sightings reported builds to a peak and then decreases to normal, pre-wave levels (Story, 1980, p.389). The decline in UFO reports has become the subject of much discussion among British ufologists. See, for instance, Peter Rogerson's article: 'Why Have All the UFOs Gone?' in Magonia, No. 7., 1981.

d) In using the term 'rationalisation', I am, of course, drawing upon the work of Max Weber, who basically argued that the rationalisation of religious belief and economic activity is the main feature of modern society, leading to the 'disenchantment' of the world. That is, through an increase in the use of calculation, reason and a methodical approach, the world is becoming less mystical or 'sacred'.

However, the notion of rationalisation is a complex one and has more than one meaning, and it is for this reason that I have separated the rationalisation of UFO organisations from that of UFO beliefs, because the same type of rationalisation may not be occurring in both areas. Weber included both the clarification and systematisation of ideas, and the development of a pragmatic and methodical approach to life in his use of the term. In clarifying this issue, Campbell (1982) writes:

> 'It is necessary to distinguish between two different senses of the term 'rationalization', the one referring to the process whereby any set of cultural symbols is rendered more coherent, systematic and subsumed under a higher order principle; the other, the process whereby the values of rationality, technical efficiency and calculability are introduced into areas formerly governed by traditional or intuitive values.' (p.239)

Whilst UFO organisations are clearly undergoing rationalisation in the second sense, in that the goal is increased efficiency, it is unclear whether the same process is occurring with UFO beliefs. To include them within the wider topic of 'the unexplained' may be a way of making them more rational in this sense of the term, but where intuition, feeling, and imagination retain their importance, rationalisation in the first sense is more likely to occur. With the rationalisation process being such a recent one in the case of the UFO research movement, it is as yet difficult to judge which of the two types of rationalisation will prove to be the dominant one.

# CHAPTER 2

## RESEARCH ON THE UFO MOVEMENT

Research on the UFO movement has been by no means extensive, but it has been quite varied. Historical (Jacobs, 1975), bibliographical (Catoe, 1979), psychological (Haines, 1979; 1980), critical (Klass, 1968; 1974) and more general studies (Sagan and Page, 1972; Hendry, 1980; Story, 1980), have been made, but only social science research will be examined here. Studies within this area can be roughly divided into three main subject areas: Firstly, those concentrating mainly on the question of why people see UFOs. Secondly, those which are mainly interested in popular belief in extra-terrestrial visitation. Thirdly, those which take UFO groups as their subject of interest.[2]

### Why do people see UFOs?

The earliest explanations of why people see UFOs are probably those expressed by the US Department of Defense, in a press release in 1949, where UFO reports were said to be the result of either misinterpretations of various conventional objects, a mild form of mass hysteria, or hoaxes (Hynek, 1978).

The explanation that most UFO sightings are due to errors of the human mind and senses is widely accepted by 'sceptics' and 'believers' alike. The problem with this explanation is that it is limited. It cannot account for why UFOs are consistently misinterpreted in a particular way (i.e. as extra-terrestrial vehicles) or why celestial objects such as the planet Venus should suddenly become a source of confusion to people.

The hoax explanation can only account for a small number of incidents (less than 2% of reports analysed by Project Blue Book) and in any case it poses the further question of why people should perpetrate hoaxes of this particular kind. The subject of lying and deception has been examined by a number of researchers (e.g. Fingarette, 1969; Zuckerman et al, 1981) but there has not as yet been any detailed examination of the hoax UFO report and its place within the UFO movement, although it is mentioned by Westrum (1979).

The "mild form of hysteria" explanation has been expressed in slightly different form by a number of writers. One of the explanations

offered by Meerloo (1955), for instance, is that of "mass delusional escape" due to anxiety. In a similar fashion, Smelser (1962), basically considers UFO reports to be due to a hysterical belief produced by anxieties concerning nuclear war. A slightly different emphasis upon the same basic theme was provided by Jung (1959) who described UFO sightings as a collective "visionary rumour" with symbolic meaning, which he considered to be a modern myth. The cause of the rumour was said to be collective distress, danger, or psychic need; in this instance due to world events such as Russian policies, over-population, and the hydrogen bomb. Jung considered UFOs to be symbols which could be interpreted in a manner analogous to that used in dream analysis. In this way round UFOs (i.e. discs or spheres) could be interpreted as similar to the symbol of totality - the mandala or circle. They are thus a modern symbol of order and also individuation. The view that UFOs are symbolic and mythological is also expressed by Sanarov (1981). In an article drawing comparisons between sightings of flying saucers and their occupants, and folklore tales such as those of the world-tree, he concludes that flying saucer images carry the same functional load as other myths, differences being due only to social development, situation, and beliefs.

The main problem with explanations in terms of hysteria, rumour, and myth, is that, in their present form, they do not specify how world events are related to psychic stress. For instance, they cannot explain why waves of UFO sightings occur: that is, why large numbers of sightings are reported in some years, such as 1952, 1957, 1966, 1973 and 1979. Nor can they explain why these waves are sometimes global and sometimes restricted to a specific country, or why they sometimes involve a particular type of UFO experience such as the one involving many sightings of UFOs and occupants in France in 1954. Also, as yet, these explanations cannot predict when UFO waves will occur.

A further explanation, and one which is perhaps more familiar to social scientists, is that of Warren (1970), who used the 1966 Gallup Poll data to argue that statusinconsistents (such as people with high education and low income) were the most likely group to report seeing UFOs. How accurate is this theory? Apart from the problems connected with the theory of status inconsistency (Knoke, 1972; Nelson, 1973; Jackson, 1962),

Warren has failed to replicate his findings in subsequent studies (Fox, 1979). Also, Westrum (1977) found in an analysis of the 1973 Gallup Poll data, that UFO experiencers were not very different from the general population. The hypothesis that those who see UFOs are status inconsistent, then, would seem to be rather doubtful.

In sum, UFO sightings have been explained in three main ways: as due to errors of mind and senses; as due to hysteria caused by psychic stress; and as due to status inconsistency. Some of the problems associated with each of these explanations may be overcome by fitting them together in some way. For instance, most UFO sightings could be due to misperceptions which are occurring because of collective hysteria due to psychic stress and it is possible that, in some cases, status inconsistents are particularly susceptible. There would appear to be the rudiments of a more complete theory here but many problems still remain unsolved. These will be examined in Part Five, when the question of why UFO sightings have continued to be reported will be discussed in the light of research on other aspects of the UFO movement.

More generally, one of the main problems with these explanations is that they cannot account for why some people who believe UFOs are extra-terrestrials actually have sightings, while others who believe this, do not; or even why only some people in our stressful world 'believe in UFOs'. This question of belief has been examined by other researchers.

Popular 'belief in UFOs'

Why do some people 'believe in UFOs'? Resta (1975) found a statistically significant relationship between the degree of externality (an external individual is one who feels powerless to control his own destiny) and strength of belief in UFOs. Littig (1971) found a significant correlation between strong affiliation motivation (the desire for friends) and belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrials. However, Fox (1979) found that the results of a questionnaire survey on belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrials, did not support a psychological theory ('open-mindedness' using Rokeach), or a social psychological one (derived from Warren's research on status inconsistency). She found such theories to be effective in accounting for the behaviour of small numbers of isolated individuals, but less useful in explaining the behaviour of large number of people over large

periods of time, such as in the case of belief in UFOs. Fox's study showed that the best predictor of who believed UFOs to be extra-terrestrial spacecraft was a belief in the existence of extra-terrestrial life elsewhere in the universe. This led her to the hypothesis that:

> ... belief in flying saucers is consistent with the United States world view and has emerged as a collective attempt to understand ambiguous and problematic stimuli. (Fox, 1979, p.23)

Clearly not everyone who believes in the existance of extra-terrestrial life believes that UFOs are extra-terrestrial vehicles and so Fox suggests a number of other factors are probably important, such as a lack of knowledge about perceptual psychology and astronomy, and the beliefs and attitudes of friends and other significant people.

While this explanation can account for the perpetuation of belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrial visitors, it cannot really explain why ordinary aerial objects should have become anomalous on such a wide scale in the first place. Fox is suggesting that the belief emerged to explain the ambiguous stimuli, but a susceptibility to belief in extra-terrestrial invasion was present before UFO sightings made headline news, as the panic created by the 1938 radio production of H.G. Wells's War of the Worlds illustrates. Not only that, but the belief would appear to involve an emotional commitment not usually expected in an "attempt to understand". C.G. Jung writes in the preface to his book Flying Saucers that after expressing himself in a sceptical way about UFOs during an interview to a Swiss weekly newspaper in 1954, the world press quoted him as a saucer-believer. What is more, when he issued a statement to the United Press giving a true version of his opinion, hardly anyone took any notice of it! This led him to draw the conclusion that

> ...news affirming the existence of UFOs is welcome, but that scepticism seems to be undesirable. (Jung, 1977, p.x)

Echoing Jung, we might ask: why should it be more desirable for saucers to exist than not? Fox's analysis does not seem to provide us with an answer to that question.

Three further studies have concentrated on belief in visitation by ancient astronauts, which is closely related to a belief in UFOs as extra-

terrestrials, although not identical with it. Carroll (1977) in fact answers the question posed above, although he relates it to ancient astronauts rather than UFOs. That is, he asks:

> ... why is it that so many people want to project a belief, say, in ancient astronauts, onto such ambiguous data? (p.542, emphasis in original)

His answer is:

> ... such theories resolve the same dilemmas resolved by myths in primitive cultures, and it is this that accounts for their tremendous popularity. (p.542)

Obviously, this explanation is similar to that offered by Jung (1959) and Sanarov (1981) in connection with UFO sightings. Carroll follows his answer by presenting a structural analysis of the stories of Atlantis and ancient astronauts showing that, like all myths, these two resolve oppositions of nature/culture, life/death, and high/low. Like those in primitive cultures, then, modern man is concerned with the resolution of certain universal oppositions. But why is it that not everyone in our culture accepts these myths? Carroll admits that structuralist theory does not have an answer to such questions, but he offers a suggestion: the human mind seeks to overcome oppositions because these produce what social psychologists call 'cognitive dissonance' and the blurring of these oppositions (through mediation) reduces the psychological discomfort associated with dissonance. Since individuals vary in the degree that they can tolerate dissonance, he suggests that only those whose tolerance for dissonance is relatively low would need the dissonance-reducing structures provided by myth.

A rather similar structural analysis of the Atlantis and ancient astronaut stories is provided by Ashworth (1980). However, he sees the modern myths as structurally related to Judaeo-Christian millenarianism and Greek Materialism, on the one hand, (ancient astronauts or 'Danikenism'), and to Platonic Eleaticism, on the other ('Atlanticism'). Unfortunately, Ashworth has no explanation for why not everyone believes them. Also, he considers the myths to be structurally distinct such that people are likely to believe either one or the other but not both, unlike Carroll who argues that when the two myths are put together they resolve all three of the major universal contradictions, so that a combined myth may be more satisfactory, and he mentions some literature which combines the myths in

this way. Finally, Ashworth considers the evidence offered to support the myths to be genuinely anomalous, but contrary to his suggestion, both science and religion do actually offer explanations for subjects such as UFOs, the Easter Island statues, the Turin Shroud, and the Bermuda Triangle. Those who read popular books on these subjects are not satisfied with the explanations offered and that is why they consider them to be unexplained or anomalous. In other words, these anomalies are socially constructed (as is all knowledge).[b]

There is some support, though, for the association of von Daniken's work with certain philosophical strands of modern science, which Ashworth mentions. Palmer (1979) argues that von Daniken appears plausible to many people because of the modern 'common-sense' separation of fact and theory which has its roots in positivism. The positivist belief in the autonomy of the factual is deeply embedded in modern culture and so von Daniken is able to state that certain historical 'facts' have not been explained, enabling him to offer an explanation based on his idea that the human race was visited by astronauts millions of years ago.

There are two main problems with these analyses of belief in ancient astronauts: firstly, they assume that everyone reads the books in the same way and that readers believe the theme offered by the author rather than fitting it into an alternative scheme of their own; secondly, they ignore social conflict. Why are these books frequently seen as a 'challenge to science'?[c] Why is it that these particular myths have become popular and not others available in our culture?

An explanation which offers a solution to the second of these two problems is provided by Sheaffer(1981). He considers belief in UFOs to be part of the revival of interest in occult beliefs which he explains as regression to an earlier magical world-view due to disenchantment with the scientific world-view. He writes:

> ... there can be no reasonable doubt that the UFO movement as a whole represents a regression to pre-scientific modes of thinking. (p.236)

In other words, Sheaffer is arguing that myths are returned to because science has been rejected. Unfortunately, this explanation assumes that everyone in the UFO movement has regressed to a magical world-view, a

rather questionable supposition, not only because of its global character, but also because it assumes that magical beliefs involve regression from a previously held scientific world-view. Among other things, this does not take into account any variations in attitudes towards science. Such an argument is no doubt prompted by a desire to defend the supremacy of the scientific world-view, but is science really under attack by those in the UFO movement? An attempt to correlate attitudes towards science with attitudes towards UFOs and related subjects was made by Simon (1979). This study was intended as a replication of a factor analysis of a questionnaire on science and UFOs carried out by Saunders (1968). Unfortunately, Saunders's science factor did not show up in the replication and so the relationship between this factor and those involving various beliefs about UFOs could not be examined. However, Cotgrove (1973) identified a growing anti-science movement in the early 1970s and so it is possible that a rejection of science is part of the UFO movement.

In sum, research on why people believe in extra-terrestrial visitation falls into two general camps: those who seek to explain belief in terms of normal social psychological traits such as externality or affiliation motivation, and those who explain it in terms of more general cultural processes such as the generation of myths. Again, these explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Those who generate and believe the 'new myths' may rate highly on certain social psychological trait scales. This type of explanation may be relevant, but it does tend to overlook possible variations in the framework into which beliefs are fitted: our society is a highly differentiated one and there is no reason to assume that myths will be appropriated in the same way as they are in traditional societies. Also, in traditional societies there are social and cultural institutions which reinforce myths: are there any such institutions which reinforce the 'new myths' in our society? These questions will be considered in Part Five, when the topic of popular 'belief in UFOs' is examined in depth.

A more general problem with these studies is that they do not take into account variations in the level of commitment: such beliefs may have little impact on the lives of those concerned. One way to overcome this possibility is to focus on organisations, because members are usually obliged to act on their beliefs.

Research on UFO groups

Most research on groups interested in UFOs has been concerned with those which claim to be in contact with extra-terrestrial entities. Festinger, Riecken and Schachter (1964) studied a group organised around a contactee whose communicators predicted catastrophes and promised to rescue members of the group in flying saucers. Fifteen years later a rather similar group achieved notoriety when over 30 people in Oregon suddenly disappeared after attending a lecture about flying saucers. At the meeting, a man and woman, called 'the Two' by their followers, claimed to be members of the kingdom of heaven who had taken human bodies and they promised that followers would be taken to heaven in UFOs if they could overcome all of their human emotions and wordly attachments (Balch and Taylor, 1977). The Aetherius Society, an organisation led by George King, who claims to be the 'Primary Terrestrial Channel' for various extra-terrestrials, including the 'Master Aetherius' from Venus and the 'Master Jesus', has been the subject of two studies (Wallis, 1974; Jackson, 1966); and a group concerned with building a flying saucer under the direction of a man who claimed to be receiving instructions from extra-terrestrials was studied by Stupple and McNeece (1979).

A slightly different type of group was studied by Buckner (1965). Here, although contactees gave lectures at the first meetings in the late 1950s, by the early 1960s a variety of speakers were being invited. Buckner called this an 'open door cult' because the flying saucer group was really an open platform for the presentation of any view which would build a 'better world'. A similar type of group was identified by Schutz (1973; 1980) in a comparative study of social movement organisations within the UFO field. He called this type of group the 'platform society' and distinguished it from the 'religious cult' which was more directly organised around a contactee.

A third type of group was also identified by Schutz. This was the 'investigations group' which conducted research and investigation into UFO sightings. Apart from Schutz's study, this type of group has been neglected and yet it would seem to be an important part of the UFO movement. Members of research groups consider themselves to be conducting research into ufology, a subject which has a controversial scientific status, although some writers, such as Blake (1979), consider it to be a developing science.

In addition to the three types of group described above, there would appear to be other types of organisation within the UFO movement. Schutz, for instance, mentions two: organisations which exist only to publish a UFO magazine, and short-lived discussion groups which spring up and soon die from lack of support. There may also be more loosely organised 'collectivities' held together by similar interests and beliefs, as is suggested by Stupple and Deshti's (1977) study of subscribers to the Saucerian Press.

Out of eight studies specifically concerned with UFO organisations, then, six of them have been concerned with very similar types of groups and this gives the impression that these groups are in the majority and are representative of the UFO movement as a whole. Such a view may well be misguided and it is obviously important to examine all the different types of organisation within the UFO movement before making decisions about its nature.

The above description of research on UFO groups gives no indication of the major concerns of the writers. What kind of questions do they try to answer? Apart from descriptions of the history of the group and the beliefs and activities of members, the researchers seem to be interested in three questions:[d] in what way the group can be categorised - that is, the type of group and the place it takes in society; what kind of people join the group; and the reason why they join it. The answers they give to these questions will now be examined.

The majority of studies consider the contactee groups to be a cult. Jackson, Buckner, Balch and Taylor, Stupple and McNeece, and Schutz, all categorised this type of UFO group as a cult. However, Schutz considered Buckner's classification of the 'open door cult' to be incorrect, stating that a cult "by definition must have a unifying dogma or formalised belief system". In his opinion, this type of group was a platform society and the groups which were more tightly organised around a contactee were cults - yet he later described this type of group as a sect! Also, rather than a cult, the Aetherius Society was considered to be a mystagogic congregation which later changed into a sect, by Wallis.

Although there is a certain amount of consensus about how the contactee group can be classified, this is not based upon any obvious agreement as to what constitutes a cult. Only Wallis (1974a) has examined the cult category in any detail and this has led him to classify one of these groups as a sect. The cult category has in fact been the subject

of much theoretical discussion (Jackson and Jobling, 1968; Nelson, 1968; Eister, 1972; Campbell, 1972; 1977; 1978; Wallis 1974a; Stark and Bainbridge, 1979; Swatos, 1981) and so an examination of contactee groups could well contribute material useful to this debate. In addition, it is important to find out whether other types of UFO organisation, such as the UFO research group, and the 'collectivity' can be classified as cults, or if they should be placed within another context.

As far as membership details are concerned, there is as yet only information about those in contactee groups and this seems to be very varied. Those who joined the group Buckner studied were mainly elderly women of the upper-working/lower-middle classes, who had a low formal education level, were single or divorced, and in poor physical and mental health. In contrast, Wallis remarks that most members of the Aetherius Society seemed "altogether normal but for some rather curious beliefs concerning flying saucers". Many of those who joined the cult studied by Balch and Taylor were ex-members of the counter-culture, and the Institute for Cosmic Research (Stupple and McNeece, 1979) consisted of three subcultures with different social compositions. Contactee groups obviously recruit members from a variety of social backgrounds, but are there any common features? Also, is the membership of other types of UFO organisations as varied?

Finally, a common explanation for why people join UFO groups, is one which refers to a particular psychological predisposition which makes the individual susceptible, such as some form of deprivation, alienation, or anomie. Wallis, for instance, considers part of the motivation for membership of the Aetherius Society to be cognitive insecurity and political alienation, whilst Jackson considers it to be a need for absolute certainty; and those deprived of physical and mental health were attracted to the group studied by Buckner. However, the most all-encompassing explanation of this type is probably that of Glock and Stark (1973), who write :

> The entire occult milieu ... is made up of persons afflicted with psychic deprivation. Movements born in this setting, such as Theosophy, Vedanta, the I AM, or the various Flying Saucer Groups, are essentially religious innovations that reject dominant American religious traditions, and are classified as cults. (p.254)

Clearly such explanations can only account for why people are available

and not why they join a specific type of group. Balch and Taylor (1977) offer an alternative explanation which concentrates on the role of the cultic milieu in socialising individuals into the 'metaphysical world-view', so that joining a UFO group is merely part of a 'seeking lifestyle'. The cultic milieu is a subcultural environment which is conducive to the spawning of cults and is described by Campbell (1972) as the cultural underground of society. It includes:

> ... deviant belief-systems and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs. (p.122)

One of the sources of unity between these heterogenous cultural items is the common ideology of seekership, along with a common position of heterodoxy in relation to the dominant cultural orthodoxies, and the overlapping communication structures which exist within the milieu.

To examine the role of the cultic milieu in recruitment to contactee groups is certainly a useful exercise, but it does not answer the question of how people came to join the cultic milieu in the first place. Also, can this explanation account for membership of other types of UFO organisations, such as UFO research groups?

In sum, most research on groups interested in UFOs has been concerned with those which claim to be in contact with extra-terrestrial entities, but these are not the only type of groups in existence: UFO research groups which consider themselves to be engaged in ufology, discussion groups, and collectivities of those reading UFO books, have also been described. Contactee groups are usually categorised as cults, but there has been little agreement over what constitutes a cult: also it is unclear whether other types of UFO organisation can be fitted into this category.

Information about the membership of contactee groups suggests that they are from a wide variety of social backgrounds, but lack of data has prevented any comparison with those in other types of UFO group. Explanations for why people join UFO groups have tended to refer to the psychological predispositions of prospective members, although one study emphasised the importance of the cultic milieu in recruitment to a contactee group. However, it is unclear whether the cultic milieu is

important in recruitment to other types of UFO organisation.

Questions raised here about the membership of UFO groups will be considered in detail during Parts Two, Three and Four, which are devoted to an examination of UFO research groups, contactee cults, and the relationship between these two different types of organisation.

From this brief summary of previous research on the UFO movement, it can be seen that the tendency has been to deal only with various parts of the movement, and yet the relationship between these different elements could be important. Another reason for the partial nature of previous research could be that, apart from Smelser (1962), no attempt has been made to apply a general sociological theory to the UFO movement.[e] Smelser himself, however, only applied his theory to part of the UFO movement and so it will be necessary to extend his analysis. Before this can be carried out, though, it is necessary to take a look at Smelser's theory.

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Footnotes

a) The exception is the work of Westrum (1977; 1979) who is concerned with why scientists ignore or debunk the subject of UFOs.

b) Perhaps 'socially negotiated' would be more accurate in that I do not wish to imply a strongly relativistic position. For more information about the nature and categorisation of anomalies, see Westrum and Truzzi (1978).

c) For example; Vallee and Vallee (1966).

d) Apart from Festinger, Riecken and Schachter (1964) who were predominantly interested in examining cognitive dissonance theory.

e) Although, according to Marx and Wood (1975), Smelser's theory is "between middle range theories and entire systems analysis".

## CHAPTER 3

## AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLICATIONS PRODUCED BY BRITISH UFO GROUPS

Research on UFO organisations has been mainly concerned with contactee cults, but it does not follow from this that they are actually in the majority. Groups like the Aetherius Society are frequently the most publicly visible,[a] but would someone who decided to explore the UFO movement today find that this type of group was representative of UFO groups in general? The most appropriate first step in this process of exploration seemed to be to answer an advert., which appeared in issues of the most well-known UFO magazine Flying Saucer Review during 1981/82, offering a

> ... comprehensive world guide to UFO organisations, groups and publications, book suppliers, photo and cassette suppliers, and UFO news-clipping services,[b]

and to write to UK addresses[c] given in the directory for copies of their publications and information; then to follow up any new addresses found in these publications, and so on. As the object of the exercise was primarily to find out information about UFO organisations, only those publications which were produced by groups and which regularly featured material on UFOs or flying saucers were used for analysis (see Appendix B for full details of publications, and Appendix A for details of analytical procedure).

Analysis of the twenty-nine publications suitable showed that it was possible to divide them into two distinct categories which were distinguished by difference in publication format, style of writing, and content. These two categories were designated 'UFO Reporting' and 'Spiritual Teaching' from the main content of the publications in each category. By far the largest category (twenty-one publications) was that of UFO Reporting.

### UFO Reporting Publications

The main feature which identified this category was the presence of reports of UFO experiences.[d] The reports were usually compiled by 'UFO investigators' who typically belonged to either the group which produced the publication, or to an allied group, although most also included press cuttings of UFO reports. This kind of report was rarely

printed in publications within the Spiritual Teaching category and, if it was, it was presented in a different manner, being used to illustrate a 'lesson'. The reports were rarely absent from those within the UFO Reporting category. Other similarities across publications within this category occurred in publication format, style of writing and content.

Format : Publications usually took either a magazine or newsletter format. There was usually an editorial where current issues affecting the topic of UFOs was discussed, a section of general news about events occurring in the social scene surrounding UFO organisations, reports of UFO experiences, both local and world-wide, articles on various topics and a letters section.

Style of writing : This varied between two extremes. At the one end was a journalistic style which was fairly personal, included no references and plenty of description. At the other end was a style which followed the practice used in scientific journals, being impersonally written with references. For example, when a report of the same UFO experience was published in two different magazines, the accounts varied quite noticeably. Both Flying Saucer Review and The Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena published reports of a man who claimed to have encountered a UFO at Livingston in Scotland.

The Flying Saucer Review account[e] was written like a narrative: "The authors arrived in the area late in the afternoon of ..." etc. Reference to the authors made the account personal and the authors also included comments about (parapsychological) theories of their own. The writing style was descriptive and included many adjectives. Also there were constant references to the man concerned in the encounter, his comments and feelings, and his physiological state. The Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena account,[f] on the other hand, was written in an impersonal way, stating only what occurred, as if it were fact:

> On the morning in question, he left his house in Livingston at 10.00 GMT driving a Forestry Department van... etc.

There was no reference to the author and he included no comments of his own. Also there were no quotes from the man concerned and his feelings and physiological state were not included.

Where the writing of the articles was concerned, the personal style

did not contain references and was often labelled as personal, as in: "The UFO Phenomena - A Personal View by Skyscan Member, Brian Palmer"[g]. Sometimes, the articles were just written in a personal style, as in: "Where do they come from? I believe not from our solar system but somewhere beyond the stars."[h] As articles took on a more impersonal style, references were used and these could be from a number of different areas of knowledge as well as from UFO reports, as I will describe in a moment.

Content : Most of the space in all publications in this category was devoted to either reports of UFO experiences or to articles. What was the content of these?

Taking reports first : These were not generally included in a haphazard fashion but were categorised and frequently some attempt was made to assess them.[i] They would be presented in any length from lists giving basic details of time, date, brief description of the report, etc., to each report written separately from a few lines in length to a number of pages. For instance, in Bufora Journal, lists of reports were collected under the heading 'Sighting Summaries':

| Code No. | Date | Time | Place | Report | Class | Investigator/ Credit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1936 | September | 20.00 | Stone, Staffs. | Brown cigar shape | C3c | - |
| 1938 | August | - | New Malden, Surrey | Long tubular object | C3c | D. STONARD |
| 79-025 | 9.2.79. | 17.30 | London, NW3 | White globe | C4c | K. PHILLIPS |

(Bufora Journal, Vol.8, No.5, Nov.1979)

Whereas, Northern UFO News presented short reports under the heading 'Low Definition Cases':

72 ... 23 November 76 17.00 Ilkley Moor, W.Yorks. N. Mortimer Lev B
Man and wife saw green sphere moving 'v. fast' .. Disintegrated .. Probable METEOR

82 ...26 September 80 06.30 Oldham, Gtr.Manchester BUFORA Lev D
Very large W LITS, stationary for long time in SE ... Definitely VENUS

13 ... 11 January 82 19.20 Ilkley, W. Yorks. N. Mortimer Lev B

Another Pennine UAP Witness saw brilliant W oval, size of pea at arms length, shot in arc from NE to S in 3-4 secs. Father had seen similar object earlier in same area (November 1981). Objects surrounded by 'halo'

effect ... Meteors??

(Northern UFO News, No. 97, Sept.1982)

Longer reports generally received individual headings:

UFO SIGHTING OVER LEIGH SINTON

by Keith Knight

Skyscan, Worcester

There have been many sightings recorded in the Worcestershire area, especially since the birth of Skyscan, just over two years ago. But the one seen over Leigh Sinton, Nr. Malvern, Worcestershire, by a local government officer, was one of the most interesting and well-documented.

Following a report in the 'Worcester Evening News', two of our most experienced investigators, David Walford and Margaret Webb, went along to interview Mr. Derek John Craske, aged 46, and his wife, Jean, who had seen a UFO from their bedroom window at 5.15 am on 28th February 1977.

Mr. Craske said 'I was disturbed in my sleep by screeching cats; on going to the window to clear the cats away, my eyes were drawn to a large, bright object in the sky'. He went on to describe the object to our investigators as looking like a 'Rotating Child's Top'. He added that 'It was a bright, whiteish light, with a distinct halo round its middle, and moved to the left, and then the right, then upwards and downwards against a backcloth of stars!" etc.

(UFOs: a serious study, Vol.I, 1978)

UNKNOWN OBJECT OBSERVED IN DAYLIGHT

September 1, 1980. 7.15 p.m. Fir Tree Walk, Dagenham, Essex.

Mr. Byford, 39, was called out into the garden by his wife, who, while raising the washing line and therefore looking up, had spotted a bright object nearly overhead. Mrs. Byford at first believed it to be an 'early' star, but the sun was hours from setting, and shining brightly, therefore making her suspicious.

Arriving outside, Mr. Byford sent his son indoors for the binoculars, and, with these, the 'silver/metallic' object could be resolved into an elliptical shape, glinting in the sunlight, hovering at what was guessed as a few thousand feet altitude. Suddenly, the object moved slightly and then stopped again," etc.

(Earthlink, No. 11, March 1982)

Secondly, what is the content of articles featured in publications within this category? Most of the articles dealt with UFOs and when the occasional article on other topics was included, it was related to an interest in UFOs. For instance, there were sometimes popular science articles about astronomical events which provided information about possible

explanations for UFO reports; or there were articles on space research which helped in speculations about possible propulsion mechanisms for extra-terrestrial vehicles. Of course, these articles may also have been of interest to readers for their own sake, but they were certainly applicable to an interest in UFOs as well.

It would be reasonable to expect that the themes expressed in popular books on UFOs would form topics for articles. The most well-known of these is that extra- terrestrials are visiting the earth and that the governments of the world know about it and are covering up information (see, for instance, the books of Brinsley le Poer Trench, 1966, 1969, 1971, etc.). Others less well-known outside UFO groups concern Men in Black who harrass those who have had a UFO experience, or who do research on UFOs (e.g. Bender, 1962; Barker, 1956), the apparent connection between UFOs and animal mutilations (e.g. Keel, 1975), and the link between UFOs and psychic phenomena (e.g. Randles and Warrington, 1979; Tansley, 1979).

Articles dealing with these topics are certainly present in the publications, but they are in a minority when compared with other types of articles. Also, unlike the way these themes are presented in popular books, in the publications they mainly appeared as topics for discussion. For instance, Northern Ufology (issue 56, January 1979) took the topic of UFOs as extra-terrestrial spacecraft for discussion; two writers were in favour of the theory, one was not convinced there was enough evidence to support it, and the final writer was too cynical about the study of UFOs to come to a conclusion.

Most of the articles in these publications could be divided into two types: theories and speculations about what UFOs might be, and discussions about research procedure. Articles about what UFOs might be were commonly written in a style imitating (more or less accurately) that used in scientific journals. References were either to reports of UFO experiences or to other bodies of knowledge.

Where reports were used, they illustrated an idea about the nature of UFOs, or possible extra-terrestrials, by drawing on details from a number of reports. Where other bodies of knowledge were referred to, it seemed common for different magazines to specialise in drawing knowledge from particular areas. Thus, a count of the number of articles referring predominantly to natural science literature, revealed a total of fifteen

out of the forty-two articles which included references to other areas of knowledge, and most of these were in two magazines (UFO Insight and The Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena). The main other bodies of knowledge which were referred to were the human sciences, marginal sciences such as psychic research, and folklore. Nine out of the forty-two articles referred to human science literature, and these were mainly in two magazines (MAPIT Skywatch and Magonia); another nine used references predominantly drawn from marginal science and almost all of these appeared in Flying Saucer Review; six referred to folklore and they all appeared in Lantern; and the final three out of the forty-two drew on a combination of references from more than one area.

Articles concerned with research procedure took a number of different approaches to the subject. For instance, there were critical examinations of material presented in reports, such as in "Llanerchymedd: A critique of the facts as presented by Martin Keatman" which appeared in UFO Insight (Vol.1, No.5, June, 1980). There were also reflections on the state of ufology, as in "Ufology - a subject in search of an identity" which was published in MAPIT Skywatch (No. 39, May/June, 1981), or propositions for improving research procedure as in "Ethical factors of a UFO Investigation" from Investigation (Vol.1, No.1. 1980).

In sum, publications within the UFO Reporting category were mainly made up of reports of UFO experiences, and articles about what UFOs might be and ways of investigating them. They were written in a style which varied between the popular and the academic, and at least some of the publications tended to specialise in drawing material from different subject areas for references. These differences in style and resources may indicate variations in the aims of different UFO research groups, and this will be examined in more detail in Part Two.

## Spiritual Teaching Publications

The main feature which identified this category was the presence of instructions about spiritual matters.[j] These lessons could originate from specific space brothers and/or spiritual masters, or from general esoteric tradition.[k] Spiritual teaching was rarely printed in publications within the UFO Reporting category, and, if it was, it was presented in a completely different fashion, as the content of a UFO report, or as part

of the beliefs of a particular group of people. Other similarities in publications within this category occurred in publication format, style of writing and content.

Format : Publications took the form of pamphlets, newsletters, cassette tapes and magazines. That is, the range of format was wider than that in the UFO Reporting category with more emphasis on single-sheet leaflets, small pamphlets, and cassette tapes containing instruction. The larger magazines (such as The Atlantean and Viewpoint Aquarius) included articles about various spiritual techniques as well as messages from extra-terrestrial contacts, whereas the small newsletters, pamphlets and cassette tapes (such as Axminster Light Centre Newsletter and the Kingdom Voice cassettes) were mainly concerned with current world events and the imminent collapse of civilisation.

Style of writing : This was of a didactic form and contained instruction in spiritual matters, such as techniques to develop awareness of spiritual forces, or advice on how to view current events in the light of the esoteric tradition (the 'ancient wisdom').

Content : Where the content of articles and lessons was specifically related to UFOs, all publications put forward the same view; UFOs were evidence of superior extra-terrestrials whowere visiting the Earth in order to help the human race. These extra-terrestrials were usually seen as spiritually advanced beings who were aiding humanity in its spiritual evolution.[1] For example:

> Your space brothers are assisting the Earth planet for two main reasons: a) because they have a genuine desire to help people, and b) because they know that the people of the Earth have to suffer certain catastrophes in the near future, which could affect not only the destiny of this planet but also the destiny of the solar system.
> (Publication of The Atlanteans, by Helio-Arcanophus, called The Earth, Past, Present and to Come, 1976, chapter "Unidentified Flying Objects", p.35)

> These spacecraft have been surveying the Earth for thousands of years, but most particularly during the last quarter of a century... Had the intelligences intended to attack and take over this planet, they could have done so years ago... Their origins and purposes are no longer a mystery since telepathic communications from the crews of these crafts are now distributed through groups and centres

throughout the world.

(Axminster Light Centre newsheet "Unidentified Flying Objects - 'Flying Saucers'" No date)

Most of the general information offered in messages and teachings appeared to draw on metaphysical and occult philosophies such as Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Sometimes the source was easily identified because it was named. The magazine Viewpoint Aquarius, for instance, included in each issue a section about Theosophy which consisted of a study of books by H.P. Blavatsky. Other publications included information which was not so readily identifiable but which was of a similar nature. What are the main features of this knowledge?

Tiryakian (1974) has categorised occult and metaphysical knowledge under the broad umbrella of 'esoteric culture'. By this he means knowledge which is not taken for granted in our society; in fact, it is a secret knowledge of the ultimate reality and is traditionally handed down orally to a small number of ritually initiated people. This knowledge is of a participatory sort:

> ... namely, a knowledge (or gnosis) of the meaning of the world to human existence, in the progressive realisation of which the subject develops internally and liberates himself from the strictures of everyday life. (Tiryakian, 1974, p.265-266)

Esoteric culture includes not only religio-philosophical belief systems but also occult techniques and practices. These are:

> ...intentional practices, techniques or procedures which (a) draw upon hidden or concealed forces in nature or the cosmos that cannot be measured or recognised by the instruments of modern science and (b) which have as their desired or intended consequences empirical results, such as either obtaining knowledge of the empirical course of events or altering them from what they would have been without this intervention. (Tiryakian, 1974, p.265)

Tiryakian's definition of esoteric culture appears to include phenomena which other writers have described as mysticism and magic. For instance, two of the main elements of esoteric knowledge are that it is a participatory knowledge of ultimate reality. Two very similar components are also central features of mysticism according to Troeltsch (1931), who writes:

> In thewidest sense of the word, mysticism is simply the insistence upon a direct inward and present religious experience. (p.730)

Instruction to turn within for direct experience of spiritual reality was clearly present in the publications. For instance:

> God is within all and to experience the nature and reality of God we need only to seek an inward realisation of our spiritual essence to realise also the profundity of life and our ex stence here.
>
> (Foresight, No. 37. Aug/Sept. 1976. "The Search for Truth")

> You must learn to be sensitive TO THE VOICE WITHIN THAT CAN TELL YOU WHAT IS TRUTH, and what is confusion, chaos and untruth. Learn to listen to the voice of truth WHICH IS WITHIN YOU, and you will lead yourselves on to the path of evolution.
>
> (Viewpoint Aquarius, No. 70, May 1978. Emphasis in original. This was part of a message which claimed to come from space and which broke into a scheduled news bulletin on Southern TTV on 26.11.77. It was printed in a number of publications in the Spiritual Teaching category.)

Troeltsch distinguishes between general mysticism which is emotional and spontaneous, and mystical religion which is intellectual and has a definite philosophy. An important feature of this mystical philosophy is the doctrine of the Divine Seed or Spark which lies hidden within every soul, stifled by sin and by the finite but capable of being quickened into vitality by the touch of the Divine Spirit. The notion of the Divine Seed was also present in the publications:

> Each soul on Earth has the potential to live without matter. Within each soul is hidden the seed of understanding wherein the natural means of overcoming distance between all things is contained.
>
> (Helios News, No. 2, May 1981, "Teachings from Jamie")

> The soul is really the Divine Spark, the spiritual being, immortal and eternal, an expression of the mind of God, a separate breath of the bsolute.
>
> (Foresight, No. 60, June/July 1980, "The Soul")

Other features of mystical religion mentioned by Troeltsch, such as individualism, universalism and tolerance, were also present in the publications.

Another important aspect of mystical religion is that it is said to be associated with a particular attitude towards life. This is generally called a 'seeking lifestyle' and is the result of a continual search for inner experience of God which creates an emphasis on growth and development (Campbell, 1972; 1978). The ideology of seekership has been identified by a number of writers. Buckner (1965), for instance, mentions that those who joined the flying saucer club he examined were occult seekers, and he writes:

> Seekers stay with a cult until they are satisfied that they can learn no more from it, or that it has nothing to offer, and then they move on. (p.15)

Balch and Taylor (1977) describe those who joined 'the Two' as "metaphysical seekers" and remark that to them "life is an infinite series of growth experiences". This seeking attitude was clearly present in publications within the Spiritual Teaching category:

> The individual's search for harmony is a familiar stepping-stone for anyone engaged in the development of an inner understanding of life ... Jamie's words have soothed and encouraged many at their different levels of understanding. His aim being not to give those who listen to him the answers, but to start them seeking on their own, reveals him as a true master of the trials and tribulations that continually confront and bewilder the people of earth.
>
> (The Universal Chord, inspired by Jamie, preface)

> The question, therefore, that should be paramount in the mind of any spiritually seeking person is: how can I optimize my life? How can I gain the most from it and, in gaining the most from it, help my fellow beings? Because the type of experience you undergo in a physical body is one which you need to relate to and harmonize with others in order to gain from your experience.
>
> (The Atlantean, No.182, p.3)

Finally, Troeltsch writes that mystical religion is syncretistic, and certainly a wide variety of subjects were covered in the publications, from UFOs to Atlantis, ley lines, healing and meditation, all woven into a slightly different combination in each publication. Troeltsch also writes that this syncretism makes mystical religion even open to scientific thought. Indeed, there is a certain affinity with science because mystical religion shares its critique of religious doctrine. Other factors such as the conception of a universal, non-changing, immediate presence

of God, and the view that the spirit must be redeemed through the intellect, are also in harmony with scientific thought. In the publications, only science which was seen to deny the existence of a spiritual aspect to life, was rejected, and usually science was seen to be moving towards an idealist view, rather than existing in contradiction to it. For instance:

> It is now commonly accepted scientific fact that reality as we know and understand it does not really exist ... Of course, this is nothing new to Mystics, Occultists and Spiritualists, but it is encouraging to see that science is slowly catching up. (Foresight, No.51, Dec/Jan 1979, "The Non-Reality of Reality")

> ... science is improving to meta-science, to parapsychology, to extra-sensory perception, to psychokinetics as reluctant laggards are dragged into the light of New Era Vision.
>
> (Viewpoint Aquarius, No. 119, Nov.1982, p.2)

Not only is scientific activity seen as basically in harmony with spiritual thought, but also many groups within the Spiritual Teaching category claim to be uniting science and religion. The Aetherius Society, for instance, states that it is a "religious, charitable and scientific organisation" and its literature advertises a "College of Spiritual Sciences".

Despite the similarities across publications, there was some evidence to suggest that the category was bounded by two extremes which corresponded to the concepts of 'world rejection' and 'world affirmation' in religious movements (Wallis, 1978). Some groups issued publications which were of a decidedly millennial nature where the accent was on revolution and the great changes which were to come: on outer rather than inner change. Thus they ask:

> Are we mentally and spiritually ready for this GREAT CHANGE IN LIVING CONDITIONS? There will be NO ivory towers, NO exclusiveness, NO separativeness due to wealth or power, class barriers or religions! ALL OF THESE WILL DISAPPEAR OVERNIGHT!
>
> (Axminster Light Centre Newsletter, No. 19, May/June 1981, emphasis in original)

At the other extreme were publications in which inner or personal change was more important and articles frequently contained information

about various techniques, such as meditation. Their main concern seemed to be with evolution rather than revolution, sometimes expressed quite explicitly, as in:

> Evolution, not Revolution, will be the motto of these New Age workers, and they will seek to promote spiritual truths to the peoples (sic) of the world. These spiritual truths are not new, they have always been and will always be so, but they have usually been the privilege of a minority of worthy seekers. This privilege is now extended to the whole of mankind, and if he accepts the offer he will truly advance himself and the whole planet.
>
> (Foresight, No. 39, Dec, 1976/Jan.1977, "The Evolutionaries")

In the millennial publications, extra-terrestrials were seen as saviours and rescuers and there seemed to be more use of Christian terminology, such as "the host coming in the clouds" and "the mercy of our creator".[m] In other publications, by contrast, extra-terrestrials appeared more as guides who could help each individual in his gradual progression on the path of spiritual evolution.

In sum, publications within the Spiritual Teaching category mainly contained esoteric knowledge and spiritual instruction. In these publications UFOs were not an unexplained phenomenon and the messages or information of those who claimed to be in contact with the extra-terrestrials were of primary importance. Indeed, UFOs were but a small part of a larger mystical world-view, although there was some indication of a split between groups which were 'world rejecting' and those which were 'world affirming'. These issues will be returned to in Part Three when contactee cults are examined in detail.

## Comparison of the Two Categories

The analysis of publications produced by UFO groups showed that they could be divided into two distinct categories: UFO Reporting and Spiritual Teaching. The main differences between these two categories can be summarised in the following way:

| | Spiritual Teaching | UFO Reporting |
|---|---|---|
| Format | Pamphlets, news-sheets, cassette tapes, news-letters, magazines | Magazines and newsletters |
| Style of Writing | Instructive | Investigative: ranged along a popular-academic axis |
| Content | Messages from contactees; articles about esoteric lore and occult techniques | Reports of UFO experiences; articles about hypotheses and research on UFOs |

In addition to differences in the publications, there were also differences in the stated aims of the groups (where these were available). For instance, the two oldest and largest groups which produce publications within the UFO Reporting category state their function as:

> To encourage, promote and conduct unbiased scientific research of unidentified flying objects (UFO) phenomena throughout the United Kingdom. To collect and disseminate evidence and data relating to UFOs. To co-ordinate UFO research throughout the United Kingdom and to co-operate with others engaged in such research throughout the world.
>
> (The British UFO Research Association, from the cover of Bufora Journal)

> ... for investigating and disseminating information pertaining to UFOs and associated phenomena.
>
> (CONTACT (UK) from membership card)

The two apparently oldest and largest groups which produce publications within the Spiritual Teaching category, on the other hand, state their function as:

> ...to propogate vital Transmissions from the Master Aetherius, the Master Jesus, Mars Sector 6 and other highly evolved Cosmic Intelligences.
>
> (The Aetherius Society, from news-sheet "A Brief Introduction")

> ... seeking an understanding of life benefitting not only those who participate in the search but all mankind and other forms of existence, too. The society offers a basic teaching that encourages the individual to expand his consciousness and grow in awareness of all life.
>
> (The Atlanteans, from news-sheet, section "Who are The Atlanteans?")

In sum, the publications indicate that there are two main types of groups in the UFO movement in Britain and these are fundamentally different. Not only are their basic beliefs about UFOs different, in that most UFOs are spiritually advanced extra-terrestrials for one type of group, whereas they would appear to be an unexplained phenomenon for the other, but also the one type is mainly interested in experiential knowledge, while the other is oriented towards investigation and research. However, although the analysis of publications has highlighted the differences between these two types of group, it may have failed to reveal any similarities and so it is necessary to examine these two types of groups in greater detail.

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Footnotes

a) For instance, in The Aetherius Society Newsletter, Vol.19, Jan/Feb 1980, their UFO campaign for 1979 is described (p.12, emphasis in original):

> We gave advice to the Earl of Kimberley and prepared the outlines of his address to the House of Lords. After the debate in the House of Lords, most of the Lords present voted in favour of the release of all information to the public regarding UFO sightings. We backed this up with a petition containing 20,000 signatures which was handed in to the Prime Minister of England at No. 10 Downing Street by the Secretary and Organizer of the European Headquarters. During this campaign they held 48 public meetings and 77 radio and television shows in different parts of England. In the USA we had approximately 42 radio and television shows in 1979.

On the other hand, The Aetherius Society may be one of the exceptions, and the small number of publications produced by this type of group which were discovered during the analysis described in this chapter may be due to a lack of publicity rather than any shortage of this type of group. Schutz (1980), for instance, remarks that the meetings of religious cults in the UFO movement in the USA were semi-secret, although these groups did produce pamphlets.

b) The 'UFO Directory' was supplied by the UFO Network, 39 Birkbeck Road, London NW7.

c) In order to overcome postage problems and to limit the material, only publications produced by British organisations which were interested in UFOs were used. Multiple copies were obtained where these were available.

d) The term 'UFO experience' is used to describe an experience which is said to involve interaction with a UFO. It is taken from Hynek (1974).

e) Flying Saucer Review, vol. 25, No.6, Nov/Dec.1979, and Vol. 26, No.1, Spring 1980, "Physical Assault by Unidentified Flying Objects at Livingston" by Martin Keatman and Andrew Collins.

f) Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena, Vol.1, No.2, March 1980, "Close Encounter in Scotland" by Stuart Campbell.

g) UFOs. A serious study, Vol. 2, 1979, p.16.

h) Northern Ufology, No.56, Jan.1979, p.2.

i) Categorisation generally followed that devised by Hynek (1974), or a modified version of it. Hynek's scheme divides reports into 'nocturnal lights', 'daylight discs', 'radar-visual reports', 'close encounters of the first kind', 'close encounters of the second kind' and 'close encounters of the third kind'. The practice of adding an assessment seems to be increasing and recently the inclusion of reports which have been found after investigation to be of misperceived ordinary objects has become quite common, with one magazine, Probe, having an extensive 'Case Closed' section in each issue.

j) Only eight publications came into this category and so generalisations must of necessity be tentative.

k) Esoteric is used here in the sense in which it has been defined by Tiryakian (1974) which is described in detail later in this chapter.

l) Occasionally publications also mentioned 'negative beings' which are attracted to Earth's 'low vibrations' but these are in addition to the higher beings.

m) Of course, this does not mean that these publications are typical of the Christian approach to UFOs. Many Christians in fact consider UFOs to be evil. See, for instance, Weldon and Levitt (1976); and a paper entitled "The Christian Answer to the UFO Menace" obtainable from Arthur and Rosalind Eadle, Glencoe Guest House, Warminster, Wiltshire, BA12 9JP. Also a Christian UFO organisation which advertises in UFO publications: CHRISTORA of Spring Cottage, West End Gardens, Fairford, Glos., exists to help those who get into trouble from 'possessing spirits' during their interest in UFOs, according to a letter sent in response to an inquiry.

# PART TWO: UFO RESEARCH GROUPS

## CHAPTER 1

## WHAT ARE THEY ?

UFO research groups are those which are organised with the main aim of conducting investigation and research into UFOs. The first of these groups was the US Air Force UFO study group named Project Sign which was officially established in 1948 and formed the first of a series of US Air Force UFO projects which officially terminated in 1969. The first civilian UFO groups were formed in the early 1950s, with the Aerial Phenomena Research organisation, founded in the USA in 1952, being the first documented group. The first British group was the British Flying Saucer Bureau (BFSB) which was formed by Capt. E.L. Plunkett in 1953[a].

The BFSB is still in existence and is affiliated to the North Bristol Institute of Adult Education. Its membership is now in the region of twenty-five, although it reached 1,500 in the mid-1950s. The aims of the group are typical of UFO research groups in general:

> ... to promote, sustain and stimulate interest in and to collect and disseminate information concerning the phenomena known as Flying Saucers and to endeavour to determine their nature, origin and purpose.[b]

As can be seen from the above quotation (and those given at the end of the last chapter), although the main aim is the investigation and research of UFOs, the dissemination of this information to the general public is also important to these groups. The possibility that this additional aim may conflict with the primary aim will be examined in Part Four.

There are UFO research groups in most countries of the world, although the USA probably harbours the largest number. In the UK, dozens of small local groups have been formed and disbanded since the 1950s and every city probably has at least one group. Some of the larger cities may have more: Manchester, for instance, has three - the Direct Investigation Group on Aerial Phenomena, formed in 1956; the Manchester UFO Research Association, formed in 1963; and the Manchester Aerial

Phenomena Investigation Team, formed in 1973. Since the early 1970s, local groups have begun to band together into networks. The first of these was the Northern UFO Network which joined eighteen groups in 1973 and since then networks have been formed in Southern England, the Midlands, and Scotland. It is difficult to estimate the overall current membership of these groups because each can vary between three or four to thirty or forty members but it seems likely that a few hundred people are involved.

In addition to these local groups there are three major national UFO organisations. The oldest, the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA), formed in 1962, had a membership of 550 in August 1981; Contact (UK), formed in 1967, was reported as having a membership of 1,000 in 1978, and the British UFO Society, formed in the mid-1970s, recently claimed a membership of about 600.[c]

It is clear that probably a few thousand people in the UK are members of UFO research groups, but it is not immediately obvious into which sociological category these groups fall. Are they hobby clubs and so fall into a leisure or voluntary association category? Are they cults? Are they organisations within a social movement? Are they pseudo-scientific organisations? Obviously these categories are not mutually exclusive, but before we can decide which are the most appropriate, it seems advisable to examine UFO research groups in more detail. For example

what is it that these groups actually do ?

During interviews, members of research groups mentioned a number of activities connected with their interest in UFOs. In order to find out which were the most frequently engaged in, these were listed under a question asking about the principal activities of members in the survey of BUFORA. These activities will be described in the order of popularity which emerged from the survey.

Reading UFO literature : The most frequently-mentioned activity was that of reading literature about UFOs, with 49% of respondents choosing this activity first and another 31% placing it in second or third position. Obviously this is not surprising given the large number of books which members admit to reading.

Skywatching : This was the second most popular activity, with 20% choosing it first and another 16% choosing it for second or third place. Skywatching is an occupation which can be engaged in alone, with a few friends, or at a large public event such as that organised by the British UFO Society at Warminster in 1981, and this versatility gives it the potential to satisfy a variety of needs. Perhaps this is why, although it is an activity which most people would associate with an interest in UFOs, it is a controversial subject among ufologists: some see it as a good way of increasing their chances of having a UFO experience, others as training in the recognition of man-made and rare meteorological phenomena, yet others as an enjoyable social occasion, and some as a completely worthless activity.

A good illustration of this controversy occurred in the magazine Probe. From its beginning in June 1980, this magazine included a section called "Terry's Skywatch Page", but in the second issue (August 1980), the author of this feature commented on a criticism of skywatching that two ufologists had made in a book on UFOs. The criticism was contained in UFOs: A British Viewpoint (Randles and Warrington, 1979) and went:

> Groups also meander into less respectable areas of the subject such as 'skywatching'. This peculiar past-time involves sitting on a hilltop hoping to see something that can be termed a UFO. It can be shown fairly easily that since there is such a small percentage of true UFO observations every year then skywatching is at best a waste of time, and at worst a decided thorn in respectable researchers' sides because of the adverse publicity it invariably brings.

In his comment, the author of "Terry's Skywatch Page" wrote:

> I fail to see why it is less respectable to start with... skywatching in my point of view is a perfect opportunity to meet people of the same interests ... You have discussions on the various aspects of ufology and its allied topics. You meet people you have been corresponding with and you have a good time as you break out the coffee and sandwiches ... the people skywatch because they like to; it is their hobby - not a profession. (Emphasis in original)

These comments spilled over into the next issue and "Terry's Skywatch Page" continued until issue 7 (December 1981) when it was decided to drop it, because:

> ... change in editorial policy has resulted in its purpose and value being 'out of touch' with the aims of the magazine... skywatching is also no longer a prime group activity, so material would eventually become limited.

However, in the following issue of Probe, the feature re-appeared briefly with a final comment:

> Every now and again, maybe once a year, when something interesting or funny happens, the skywatch page will be brought back... Skywatching (despite my earlier optimistic days) is really no longer seen as essential or beneficial to us...

These extracts have been quoted at some length because they illustrate two interesting and highly relevant points. Firstly, they show that there is a tension between the serious and leisure aspects of ufology; that is, between the desire for enjoyment and the demands of professionalism. They illustrate a conflict between those who wish ufology to be 'just a hobby' and those for whom it is a serious pursuit. This clash between the fun and serious aspects of the subject is perhaps partly responsible for the ambiguous way in which the media treat UFOs: as semi-serious or jocular-yet-concerned. Secondly, they show that ufology is not static, but is a developing subject. At least some of those involved change their opinions and practices over time. There can be many reasons for these changes - it is easy to see how skywatching, for instance, would appeal more to the young who enjoy braving the elements, exploration and excitement - but besides life-cycle changes, there are also those brought about by interpersonal constraints, such as pressure from colleagues who

have a different attitude towards the subject. When this occurs, development may take the form of compromise, as in the use of sky-watching as a training ground for inexperienced ufologists where an enjoyable activity is harnessed to a serious purpose.

Research : This basically consists of reading which is directed towards a project, but other activities, such as the investigation of UFO reports may also be involved. Research was chosen first by 17% of BUFORA respondents and another 16% placed it in second or third position. Most research is carried out individually but it can also be done as part of a study group. For instance, BUFORA list a number of projects which they have carried out, or are in the process of completing. These include, the development of investigation field kits, an investigator's handbook, a study of UFO detection devices, environmental effects testing, and research on motor vehicle interference effects.[5]

Interviewing UFO Witnesses : This activity was selected by 11% of BUFORA respondents as their first choice and another 16% in second or third position. What exactly does it consist of? Basically it involves obtaining the addresses of those who report UFO experiences and investigation of these reports, but this can be a complicated procedure. The addresses of those who report experiences are obtained from a number of sources: from UFO organisations, from newspapers, from the local police, or directly, if the investigator is known in the area. The process of investigation can involve any amount of work, from simply taking or sending the person/s concerned a form on which to report the sighting, to hours of interviewing, followed by checking for the possible cause of the report. The follow-up may involve contacting local meteorological stations, airports, RAF bases, etc.,[6] and for some it can also involve research into any psychic events which might have occurred in the locality, or the possible existence of ley lines and sacred sites.

Anyone can become an independent UFO investigator, but UFO research groups usually have some selection process involving the training of inexperienced members. The larger groups have training courses and investigation manuals. For instance, BUFORA journal advertised a one-day 'Investigator Training Course' during December 1981, which was :

> ... intended to provide a basis for developing a personal technique for interviewing witnesses whilst using uniform and standard methods of recording data.
>
> (Bufora Journal, Vol.9, No.3)

BUFORA also advertises an 'Investigator's handbook' and a booklet entitled 'Investigation Guidelines' is published by UFOIN. A code of practice for UFO investigators was approved at a meeting which was attended by a number of UFO groups in February 1982.

Attending Local Meetings : Only 6% of BUFORA respondents chose this first and another 18% placed it in second or third position, yet BUFORA has regular meetings in London which are attended by a variety of speakers. Of course, many members live outside London and the meetings are only once a month which may make them less important than activities engaged in more frequently.

Meetings can be local, regional or national. Very few BUFORA respondents said they also belonged to a local group (11%) although many local groups exist. This suggests that ufologists either belong to a local group or a national one like BUFORA, but rarely both. The comments of ufologists support this observation: some said they wanted the backing of a large and prestigious organisation whilst others preferred a friendly informal group and so it may well be that different kinds of group cater to different needs.

What exactly goes on at meetings? Local group meetings are usually informal affairs held in someone's home, a public house, or a room in a community building of some kind. There is much discussion about local UFO reports, important reports from elsewhere, letters received, UFO magazines, books and ideas. In addition, local publicity events are sometimes arranged, such as exhibitions in libraries and fetes. Occasionally, speakers are invited to these meetings. Regional meetings are organised by either one or a number of UFO groups jointly, and usually consist of a day-long seminar on a particular topic to which selected UFO groups and ufologists are invited. For instance, BUFORA and MUFORA organised a seminar in Manchester in October 1982, on the theme of "The UFO Investigator and the Witness" which included a lecture by a psychologist, a workshop on interviewing and a discussion about the rights of UFO witnesses, and which about thirty selected ufologists attended. National (or international) meeting are much larger affairs, generally

organised by national UFO groups such as Contact (UK), the British UFO Society and BUFORA. For example, in May 1981, BUFORA organised its second International UFO Congress which took place in London. About two hundred people attended over the two-day event and speakers included ufologists from the USA, France and Sweden. They gave lectures on topics such as 'The link between the investigator and the scientist", "Psychic phenomena and UFOs", 'The possible influence of black holes on space travel" and 'The Livingston close encounter".

Writing Articles for UFO Magazines : A small percentage of ufologists write articles for magazines (10% placed it as one of their first three activities), or produce UFO magazines, and a few write books on the subject. These ufologists are the most visible and consequently there is a tendency to consider them as representative of members of UFO groups in general. In my experience, however, many are most untypical, being generally at the extremes in terms of attitudes and beliefs about UFOs. This is useful for obtaining an outline of the subject of ufology, but it would be a mistake to make generalisations from this literature about the vast majority of 'invisible' ufologists.

Other : This category was chosen by 13% of BUFORA respondents in their first three choices. Among the activities mentioned were; giving lectures, discussions, building a UFO, explaining UFOs to others, corresponding with other skywatchers, taking photographs of UFOs, and thinking about the problem.

The above activities are those which are carried out by individual members of UFO groups, but what about those activities which are seen as the purpose of UFO organisations and of ufology as a subject? What do members of research groups consider to be the most important aspects of ufology? During interviews and from the literature produced by UFO groups, a number of suggestions emerged, and these were included in the questionnaire sent to BUFORA members.

From this survey, three aspects emerged as the most important: firstly 'collecting data and formulating hypotheses' which was chosen by 58% of respondents as one of their first three choices; secondly, 'getting the research procedure correct' (53%), and, thirdly, 'working out the right theory of what UFOs might be from the existing data' (50%). Less popular were 'making the government release information about its knowledge of

UFOs' (39%), 'making contact with any extra-terrestrials who might be visiting us' (27%), and 'transmitting the messages obtained by contactees' (9%). A few (11%) made other suggestions such as 'making the importance of UFOs widely understood', 'being aware of the public', 'getting world-wide co-operation', 'altering consciousness' and 'noticing how the phenomena reflects social change'.

So far the activities of members of UFO research groups have been considered without any reference to the type of involvement of those concerned. Finally, then, the question of whether there are different levels of involvement will be examined.

Ufologists themselves frequently make a distinction between 'armchair' and 'active' ufologists. By this they seem to mean that there is a distinction between those who read about UFOs and those who become involved in the investigation of UFO reports. This way of distinguishing between types of involvement appears similar to that used in amateur science. Stebbins (1980), in his study of avocational scientists draws a distinction between 'observers' and 'armchair participants'. The observers "directly experience their objects of scientific inquiry" while the armchair participants "pursue their avocation largely, if not wholly, through reading". The latter approach is followed either through preference or because participants lack the equipment, time, opportunities or physical stamina to observe.

This categorisation seems appropriate to ufologists, although many seem to move between the two categories during their interest in the subject. Often they start with an 'armchair' interest in their early teens and this is maintained for a few years as they develop the knowledge, confidence and facilities (transport and money), to move into the 'active' category. Frequently, however, family, employment, and other commitments take over causing them to return to an 'armchair' interest. Only a few are able, or wish, to stay in the 'active' category for any length of time: just 27% of BUFORA respondents chose 'interviewing UFO witnesses' as one of their first three activities, although, if 'skywatching' is included (and many ufologists would not consider this legitimate since it does not involve the same amount of organisation and skill as investigation), the numbers are much greater.

Stebbins (1980) also subdivides 'observers' into three types based upon level of experience: apprentices, journeymen and masters. This typology, although usually associated with tradespeople, is more generally

applied to any field where extensive knowledge and ability must be developed before independent practice is possible. It refers to learners, reliable practitioners and those who make original contributions to the science. The typology can equally be applied to 'active' ufologists, even though ufology is not considered to be a science. All the same, there is training for the inexperienced, there are 'accredited' investigators and there are those who are seen as making an original contribution to an understanding of UFOs. Unlike the amateur sciences, though, there is conflict between the scientific community and ufologists over who falls into these three categories, particularly the latter. For instance, although a number of sceptics,such as Klass, Menzel, Ridpath and Oberg, are thought by scientists to have contributed to an understanding of UFOs, ufologists would not agree with this choice and their own nominations (Hynek, Vallee, Keel, Randles, etc.) would probably be disputed by scientists.[g]

In sum, the two most popular activities engaged in by members of UFO research groups are reading about UFOs and skywatching. A conflict between the fun and serious aspects of the subjects emerged during the examination of skywatching and this suggests that reading too may involve a similar tension. However, reading is a solitary activity these days, unlike skywatching which can be a social event, and so this tension may not be identical. Nevertheless, it is probably a mistake to see interest in UFOs as a serious pursuit for all members of UFO research groups.

A distinction can also be made between 'active' and 'armchair' ufologists, although this division is not necessarily related to the level of seriousness with which those concerned view the subject. It is more closely connected to the amount of time and facilities which are available and can therefore change during a person's involvement in the subject.

Ufology is not generally considered to be a science, but there is evidence to show that it is not a static subject and at least some of those involved change their views.[h] Also, as in amateur science, those actively involved can be divided into different levels of expertise, although, unlike amateur science, there is controversy over who falls into the different categories.

It is clear,then, that members of UFO research groups are a heterogenous collection with regard to their involvement in ufology. They

differ to the extent to which they consider the subject to be a serious or fun pursuit, whether they are actively involved or an armchair participant, whether they prefer a local groups to a national one, whether they are beginners or experts, and whether they are highly visible spokespersons for the subject, or 'invisible' participants. These differences and their implications for ufology will be discussed later in the section and also in Part Four. In the next chapter we will examine the membership of these groups in more detail.

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Footnotes

a) See Chapter 1, Part One, for further historical details.

b) This quotation is from a personal letter sent to me by the British Flying Saucer Bureau.

c) Sources of these figures are: A personal communication with the Director of Publications of BUFORA at the time of the survey; The Yorkshire Post, October 30, 1978, for Contact (UK), and an interview with the President of the British UFO Society, during 1981.

d) "Research and Investigation" leaflet published by BUFORA

e) For information on these procedures see "UFO/IFO; A Process of Elimination" published by the groups SCUFORI and PROBE.

f) The survey of BUFORA members was carried out specifically in order to contact these 'invisible' ufologists.

g) See, for instance, the controversy over James Oberg who won the New Scientist/Cutty Sark Whisky prize for the best essay on UFOs. The essay appeared in New Scientist, 11.10. 1979, and letters from ufologists in the issue of 25.10.1979.

h) Many writers argue that a fundamental feature of modern science is its openness to change (see Karl Popper, for instance). More discussion of the 'scientific' status of ufology will take place in Part Four.

## CHAPTER 2

## WHO JOINS THEM ?

Information about those in UFO research groups was obtained from a survey of BUFORA members, open-ended questionnaires administered to a local UFO group, and interviews with members of other UFO groups.[a] The data will be described under five headings: social details, UFO and associated experiences and opinions, religious beliefs, attitudes towards science, and political opinions.

Social details : Most of the respondents to the questionnaire survey of BUFORA were men (80%) and just over half (54%) were aged between 21 and 40 years. There were almost equal numbers of married and single people with 48% married, 43% single and 6% separated or divorced.

The formal education level was higher than the population average with 12% of BUFORA respondents having a degree and 28% indicating that

they had a professional qualification[b]. The informal education level was also high as the majority (66%) had engaged in some kind of further education whilst many of those who had not, made such comments on the questionnaire as:

"Self-taught education - continuous"

"Have consistently studied a variety of subjects all my life"

"Most education obtained in later life"

"Had to teach myself"

This seems to suggest that members consider it important to continue their education after full-time study has ceased and further support for this inference would seem to come from the significance which they attach to reading. Most of them admit to reading one or more books a week (77%) and quite a few of these read three or more (13%).

A majority of respondents were in full-time employment (66%). While many different types of employment were represented, the most frequent was engineering (12%) with those in the civil service or local government second (9%) and journalists/writers, technicians and managers equal third in frequency with 5% each. Thirty percent of respondents were either self-employed or employers. Classifying occupations in accordance with categories used by the National Census, results in most being placed in socio-economic classes two, three and four; that is, what are generally known as the lower-middle and middle classes, as Table One shows.

Table One

The Socio-Economic Class Composition of SUPERA Members

| Socio-economic class (from occupation) | Descriptive definition | % Members |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Professional | 5 |
| 2 | Employers and managers | 11 |
| 3 | Intermediate and junior non-manual | 34 |
| 4 | Skilled manual (with own account non-professional) | 17 |
| 5 | Semi-skilled manual with personal service | 4 |
| 6 | Unskilled manual | 2 |

The above scale is a collapsed version of that used by the Registrar General and is used in the General Household Survey. It is taken from Reid (1977, p.38-39).

It is clear from this that BUFORA members are very different from the social drop-outs associated with some UFO groups, such as the contactee cult studied by Balch and Taylor (1977), who write:

> Other things being equal, a man with a good job, a family, and a respectable position in the community is less likely to join a flying saucer cult than a single man living alone or in a commune, with few material possessions and a strong penchant for change and excitement. (p.849)

This is probably not surprising, given the high subscription rate of BUFORA (£7.50 at the time of the survey and increased to £10 in 1982), coupled with the need for a fixed addressed in order to receive the publications produced by the society (Bufora Journal/Bulletin and The Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena).

The large gender difference is probably due to the emphasis found in this type of group on the scientific nature of UFO research, given that the sex stereotypes in our society categorise science as a masculine activity (Weinreich-Haste, 1979). This bias towards male membership is also found in other fringe science subjects: Loch Ness Monster enthusiasts (Grimshaw and Lester, 1981) and science fiction fans (Berger, 1977), for example, although it should be noted that more men join voluntary organisations anyway, with the exception of religious groups (Reid, 1977, p.220). Studies of contactee cults suggest that there may be a higher proportion of women involved in this type of group. Buckner (1965) states that the members of the group he studied were mainly elderly women, whilst Stupple and McNeece (1979), found most well-established members of the Institute for Cosmic Research to be women, although the new members were predominantly young men and there were mainly men involved in building the flying saucer.

A similar age distribution to BUFORA respondents is also apparent in fringe science subjects. Loch Ness Monster enthusiasts are mainly 21-35 years old (Grimshaw and Lester, 1981), and science fiction fans 18-35 years (Berger, 1977), although the reasons for this are not clear. In the case of science fiction fans it is certainly not because support has been drawn from one generation because the age distribution has

remained fairly constant since the first surveys were carried out in the 1950s; it is a little more difficult to judge whether generational factors are involved in BUFORA membership because of a lack of comparable data. However, a survey of another UFO group (Contact(UK)), carried out in the early 1970s, showed that 75% of members were aged between 21 and 40 years.[c] This could indicate that a generational factor was significant at that time and that the effect is declining as those concerned get older, but, if this is the case, then two generations are involved (those born in the 1930s and 1940s approximately). However, if those born in the 1930s are involved, then there should be a substantial number of people in the 41-50 age range by now, but in fact only 13% of BUFORA respondents were of this age, only slightly more than those under 20 years (10%). There should also be less in the 21-30 range but actually there are more (29% compared with 25% aged between 31 and 40). It does seem, therefore, that , although the picture is confused, generational factors are probably not involved.

Research on the typical age distribution of members of voluntary associations is rather contradictory, with some pointing to 25-44, others seeing a peak at 40-50 and some studies seeing a generally high age distribution between 25 and 65 (Smith and Freedman, 1972; Hausknecht, 1962). Given such a wide age range, the most notable point about fringe science associations is that there would appear to be a drop in membership after about 40 years. It seems, therefore, that these subjects are of particular interest to young men. The age distribution of contactee cults, on the other hand, seems to vary considerably from group to group. Those in Buckner's (1965) study, for instance, were mainly elderly, unlike those in the group studied by Balch and Taylor (1977), who were predominantly young.

There would seem to be a high proportion of single people among BUFORA respondents. The survey showed that 43% of respondents were single, whilst the 1971 census for Great Britain indicated that 83% of males and 88% of females over 19 years were married, widowed or divorced. Qualifying the census figures is the fact that the manual/working classes tend to marry earlier whilst the majority of BUFORA respondents were both in the middle classes and in the young adult age range and so the 43% figure is probably not all that unusual. Nevertheless, the study of Loch Ness Monster enthusiasts also showed a high proportion of single people (50%) as did the one of science fiction fans (55%), although neither was considered

unusual by the researchers due to the largely youthful membership. However, given the fact that research on voluntary associations indicates that more married people join than do single (Smith and Freeman, 1972), these figures might suggest that fringe science groups are not typical. One factor contributing to the slightly higher proportion of single peoplemay be the largely male membership of this type of group, for if young males are not meeting members of the opposite sex in their principal leisure activity, then their chances of meeting suitable partners are necessarily decreased.

In view of the high proportion of respondents with professional qualifications and considerable number who had engaged in further education, it appears that BUFORA members consider it important to continue their education beyond the normal school leaving age and this conclusion seems to be supported by their extensive reading, but this of course would depend on the nature and level of the books being read. Some indication of this can be gathered from the subjects which they consider of special interest. Many respondents chose space research (60%) and astronomy (43%), which would indicate factual books. A considerable number also chose psychic research (49%) and science fiction (32%) whilst Fortean phenomena[d] (31%) was also popular. Although many books on psychic research and Fortean phenomena are not intended to be fiction in the same way that science fiction is, their status as fact is usually questioned. Often these books, and also many books on UFOs, are regarded as 'faction' or 'speculative fact'. The type of book being read, therefore, is probably largely speculative and imaginative science, along with popular science, particularly what might be called 'frontier science' - subjects such as space research which deal with the exploration of new frontiers.

Research on cults has shown that members tend to have distinctive reading habits. Wallis (1974), for instance, remarked that members of the Aetherius Society needed:

> ... sufficient education to cope with the extensive occult literature and its abstruse terminology, but insufficient to penetrate its tortured logic and thin veneer of 'science'. (p.38)

Balch and Taylor (1977) refer to the fact that most studies show members of the cultic milieu to be avid readers, continually exploring through literature different metaphysical movements and philosophies and they

comment:

> A significant part of their lives is devoted to the pursuit of intellectual growth, however undisciplined that may be in conventional academic terms. (p.850)

Unlike those in contactee cults, however, members of UFO research groups do not seem particularly interested in occult philosophy. Only 24% of BUFORA respondents indicated that this was one of their special interests. thus, although there is a similar pattern of reading to these other groups, the content is not identical.

In sum, whilst further education would seem to be important to members of BUFORA, they would appear to be particularly interested in subjects which appeal to the imagination.

Finally, most respondents were of lower-middle or middle class status and this is probably not too unexpected a finding given the predominantly middle class composition of voluntary associations in general (Smith and Freedman, 1972; Reid, 1977). But it is not clear whether the class composition is typical of other similar organisations. Unfortunately, many studies of UFO groups do not give details of social class, or give only impressionistic data. Buckner (1965) judged those involved in the group he studied to be "upper-working to lower-middle class" and Balch and Taylor considered many members of the nomadic cult they studied to be "remnants of the counter culture" (which was largely middle class). In the survey of subscribers to the Saucerian Press carried out by Stupple and Dashti (1979), the majority of respondents were lower-middle class but there were slight differences between those who read contactee books and those who read UFO research books by scientists such as Hynek: there was a tendency for the readers of UFO research books to be higher up the social scale than those interested in contactees[e]. Science fiction fans would also appear to be more middle class, as the professional class (also students) were over-represented in surveys carried out in Britain in 1954 and the USA in 1973; so also are Loch Ness Monster enthusiasts who are mainly in professional employment (Grimshaw and Lester, 1981).

No precise conclusions can be drawn from these studies, particularly as there are problems of comparability with social class data from Britain and the USA, but there would appear to be a tendency for those in contactee cults to be slightly lower down the social scale (upper-manual/lower-middle)

than those in UFO research groups (lower-middle/middle) and those seriously interested in science fiction (middle).

UFO and associated experiences and opinions : Those who join BUFORA have been interested in UFOs for a long time. The survey showed that 39% had been interested in UFOs from between five and fifteen years and 44% for over fifteen years. Studies show that belief in UFOs is more common among teenagers than adults (Martin and Pluck, 1977; Buzz Magazine, 1978) and the survey suggested that most BUFORA members had been interested in UFOs since their teens. This is shown in Table Two.

Table Two

The Length of Time BUFORA Members Have Been Interested In UFOs Compared With Their Age (in Percentages)

| Age | Length of time interested in UFOs | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Less than 1 year | 1 - 5 years | 5 - 15 years | 15 plus years |
| Under 20 | 9 | 46 | 41 | 4 |
| 21 - 30 | 2 | 25 | 55 | 18 |
| 31 - 40 | 0 | 9 | 43 | 48 |
| 41 - 50 | 0 | 3 | 28 | 69 |
| 51 - 60 | 0 | 4 | 14 | 82 |
| Over 61 | 0 | 0 | 29 | 71 |

When asked how they became interested in UFOs, a large proportion of the respondents indicated that a particular book had sparked their interest (35%)[f]; others said that it had been a news event such as a report of a UFO sighting (21%); whilst 19% said that personal experience of a UFO had been the trigger. There was a tendency for those who had been interested in UFOs the longest to be the least likely to say that their interest started through reading a book (only 28% for those interested over 15 years, compared with 67% for those interested less than a year; 38% for those interested 1-5 years; and 41% for those interested 5-15 years). This could indicate that popular books on UFOs are playing an increasing role in arousing interest in UFOs and that the process of recruitment into the UFO research community has changed slightly

since the 1950s.

Most members (61%) claimed to have seen something which they considered to be a UFO, but the majority involved nothing more than lights in the sky (48%) whilst 6% indicated that they had experienced a close encounter and less than one per cent a contact with aliens. A few (5%) claimed more than one type of experience.[g]

Although a large proportion of members reported having had a psychic experience of some kind (57%),[h] the two types of experiences do not appear to be strongly correlated, as those who reported seeing a UFO were only slightly more likely to report having had a psychic experience, than those who did not. Even though comparable figures for the general population are difficult to find, the incidence of these experiences among BUFORA members seems high. For instance, a poll in the USA in 1973 found that 11% of the population claimed to have seen a UFO.[i] The high figure for psychic research may be less unusual in that it is similar to that found in a survey of the San Franciso Bay Area in 1973.[j]

The view of UFO group members commonly held by the general public is that they believe UFOs to be extra-terrestrial spacecraft. In fact, although a large proportion of respondents gave this as their first answer when asked what UFOs might be (44%) and another 11% chose it for second or third place, many did not select this possibility at all.[k] Actually two other ideas about what UFOs might be featured quite prominently; these were that they could be an unknown kind of natural phenomena (19% put it first and another 29% placed it second or third) and that they could be psychic events (12% chose this first and another 23% put it second or third place). Also, in contradiction to popular expectations, the idea that they were only misperceptions drew support from a sizeable minority of members (23% placed it as one of their first three choices). The least popular suggestions were that UFOs were spiritual beings, secret weapons, or evil entities. Among the other possibilities suggested were holograms and time travellers, whilst 8% said they had no idea what UFOs might be,

There was some suggestion that the extra-terrestrial hypothesis had become less popular over the years, because those who had been interested in UFOs the longest were the most likely to choose this explanation first, as Table Three shows:

Table Three

The Length of Time BUFORA Members have been Interested In UFOs Compared with their First Choice as to what UFOs Might Be (in percentages)

| Explanation for UFOs (first choice) | Length of time interested in UFOs | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Less than 1 year | 1 - 5 years | 5 - 15 years | 15 plus years |
| Physical extra-terrestrials in vehicles | 33 | 38 | 39 | 51 |
| Unknown natural phenomena | 33 | 24 | 19 | 51 |
| Misperceptions | 0 | 12 | 9 | 7 |
| Psychic events | 0 | 12 | 12 | 13 |

Note that the figures shown are percentages of those for the total number of choices offered as explanations for UFOs, but only the main (ie. most popular) choices are shown here because of the small numbers involved in the other cases.

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It is clear from the survey that BUFORA members do not uncritically accept all that is contained in the UFO literature. Most agreed[1] that 'when man finally solves the UFO mystery, it will cause a revolution in his current understanding of the world' (71%), but, although popular books and films often suggest that 'the governments of the world are in contact with aliens and are withholding information from the general public', only 23% of respondents agreed with this statement.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents thought UFOs were likely to be extra-terrestrial vehicles, they were divided over whether 'aliens are living on the Earth and mixing with human beings' with 38% in agreement, 38% unsure, and 24% in disagreement. However, a majority (55%) considered that some ufologists have been visited by 'Men in Black' but then they are frequently considered to be government agents or psychic manifestations rather than alien beings. The idea that 'cattle mutilations are associated with UFOs' has been expressed in a number of popular books and article but BUFORA respondents were uncertain about this connection, with nearly half choosing the 'unsure' category.

Erich von Daniken's idea that 'man was created by the genetic engineering of extra-terrestrials who visited Earth millions of years ago'

helps to sell a large number of books but respondents were divided over this suggestion with 31% in agreement, 39% unsure, and 27% in disagreement. Also popular with the general public is the idea that 'man once inhabited a lost continent called Atlantis, where he had knowledge and powers that he does not now possess', but this also failed to gain widespread support from respondents with 39% in agreement, 31% unsure, and 30% in disagreement.

Given the lack of support (but familiarity with) the last two themes expressed in books associated with UFOs, it seems possible that the popularity of these books could be due less to the central 'theory' than to the additional material they contain. In the case of von Daniken, this consists of evidence which is supposedly unexplained by science and thus is still a mystery, whereas books on Atlantis present a supposedly lost knowledge or occult philosophy. The reverse is suggested by Ashworth (1980) and Carroll (1977) who consider the themes to be of central importance. Ashworth (1980) views 'Danikenism' and 'Atlanticism' as two distinct modern myths which are structurally related to Judaeo-Christian millenarianism and Greek Materialism on the one hand (Danikenism) and to Platonic Eleaticism on the other (Atlanticism). He suggests that books written by writers on Atlantis, such as John Mitchell:

> ...have the same status with Atlanticists as Daniken's Chariot of the Gods (sic) has with flying saucer buffs, or Danikenists. (p.363)

From the survey it would seem that neither myth has much status with members of BUFORA. As for the Daniken myth being more popular among 'flying saucer buffs', more BUFORA respondents agreed with the Atlantis myth! These two new myths may be structurally distinct as Ashworth suggests, but this does not mean that individuals must of necessity believe either one or the other. In fact, 50% of those who strongly agreed with the Daniken myth also strongly agreed with the Atlantis myth.

What seems to be important, at least to BUFORA members, is not the new myth but the fact that they consider the evidence to be anomalous; that is unexplained by science or religion. Ashworth acknowledges the concern with anomalies in these books, but considers the new explanation of the anomalies to be more important than the anomalies themselves. An additional explanation for an interest in these new myths might be the existence of a world view in which mysteries are the central element.

This idea gains some support from the BUFORA survey results which indicate that, although those in UFO research groups are interested in UFOs and other similar subjects, they are often in disagreement over opinions and beliefs - but most of them agree that UFOs are a mystery. What they have in common then is a similar interest in the mysterious nature of UFOs.

Religious beliefs : The popularly-expressed view that UFO groups are largely religious phenomena caused respondents to be particularly sensitive about the topic of their religious beliefs. This was because one of the stated aims of the organisation is "to encourage, promote and conduct unbiased scientific research of unidentified flying objects (UFO) phenomena throughout the United Kingdom" and thus they consider their interest to be scientific rather than religious. Athough most answered the relevant survey questions, a few added comments expressing their failure to see the connection between the questions and their interest in UFOs. The extent to which this may have affected responses to these questions is not known but it needs to be taken into consideration during the interpretation of the results.[m]

The survey showed that those in BUFORA were more likely than the general population to break with traditional religion. Although slightly more members considered that they belonged to a religion than did not, 40% indicated that they were not affiliated to a church whereas only 8% of the general population fall into this category.[n] Also the percentage of members who never attended church (58%) was higher than that for the general public (27%). However, they are not more likely to join unorthodox religious groups; few indicated categories such as 'Eastern' or 'Witchcraft/Pagan'. What might be the reasons for this low incidence of church membership? It may possibly be due to a dislike of orthodoxy and its apparent connection with dogmatism and bureaucracy, as comments made in response to questions on the 'open-ended' questionnaire indicate:

"I don't like dogmatic religion"

"I'm fighting against religion and bureaucracy"

"It was intended as a moral code for man to live by, but the churches have altered it to suit their own convenience."

It might be thought that the low percentage of those affiliated to

a church could reflect a concern to underplay any possible connection between UFO research and religion, for reasons mentioned above, but this seems unlikely because the low church membership is not matched by a low incidence of belief in God. The majority (61%) said they believed in God and this figure is similar to that for belief in God among the general population (68% for men), as is the figure for members of BUFORA who are non-believers (17%) when compared with the general population (20% for men).[8]

A particularly interesting finding is that most respondents indicated that they believed in life after death (68%) and just under half believed in reincarnation (45%) and these percentages are much higher than those for the general population where they are 35% for life after death and 28% for reincarnation.[9] One reason for this higher percentage might be that members subscribe to mystical rather than traditional religious beliefs. About 45% believed in an impersonal spirit or life-force, which is not dissimilar to the figure for the general population (41%),[9] but another element of mysticism (besides the tendency to believe in reincarnation) is the notion that each human being is travelling a path of spiritual evolution which will end in union with God (Troeltsch, 1931, p.735-736) and 41% of members agreed with this statement. Also in response to questions about God on the 'open-ended' questionnaire, some ufologists expressed opinions of a mystical nature:

> My own personal concept of God is that there is a supreme intelligence who is omnipresence, omnipotent... I believe in life after death... there being seven planes of existence... each spirit depending on its spiritual evolution is to go on to its evolved state of spiritual awareness on the psychic plane of thought.
>
> ... the more enduring parts of ME go into a higher vibrational environment where substance is finer, but identical with the form comprising this script. In this rarified form we await our next incarnation...

Studies of contactee cults have referred to the mystical beliefs of their members so this could be seen as support for the view that UFO research groups are essentially similar to religious cults, but this would be an over-simplification for two main reasons: firstly, although a large proportion of BUFORA respondents appeared to have mystical rather than orthodox religious beliefs, the majority did not and, secondly, it is not known how common mystical beliefs are among the general population, although

it has been suggested that mystical religion is prevalent among educated people, (Campbell, 1978; Troeltsch, 1931).

Attitudes towards Science : Like the majority of the general public, most BUFORA respondents (71%) believe that science will never be able to explain all of life's mysteries.[r] However, it is difficult to interpret this response because the question itself is rather ambiguous. Nevertheless, ufologists would appear to have a rather ambivalent attitude towards science. On the one hand, they are critical of current science and of scientists, while, on the other, they aim to study UFOs in a scientific manner. Of course, the reason for this ambivalence could be simply because scientists do not consider UFOs worthy of study. A certain amount of support for this suggestion can be gathered from responses during interviews and to the 'open-ended' questionnaires where the 'narrowness' of science was frequently mentioned:

> The subject is really too complex to be studied by science alone... It needs an open approach because science is too narrow...

> Scientists are too narrow and only interested in what they can touch. They are afraid to study other areas for fear of ridicule. They are too concerned with facts and not enough with theory, or with the imagination.

> ...and much of it is beyond the scope of present-day science, because of its self-imposed limits of applicability.

Yet the above quotes imply that their views on science are not simple and the notion of 'narrowness' is not easily interpreted. Being "too concerned with facts" and not enough with the imagination, is a criticism which suggests rather more than just a disagreement over which subjects are of interest to study. So, too, is the notion that the UFO phenomena is "beyond the scope of present-day science". Yet ironically, it was the achievements of science which were often mentioned as evidence to show that current science was 'dragging its heels'. That is, since television or space travel would have been miraculous two hundred years ago, miracles should be expected and events that looked like magic were probably 'future science' and deserved special attention.

An ambivalent attitude towards science has also been mentioned by those studying contactee cults. Wallis (1974) comments on the presence

of both scientism and anti-science in the Aetherius Society publications and Schutz (1973) writes of the religious UFO cult he examined that "their metaphysics is definitely a technological one".

Although contactee cults and UFO research groups clearly differ in the extent to which their practices can be termed 'scientific', they would appear to have rather similar general attitudes towards science. What seems to be involved are two conflicting images of science: as dull, unimaginative and limited, or as the producer of exciting technology.

Political Opinions : Ten per cent more members of BUFORA than the general population indicate that they do not support a political party (49%) and those who do are more likely than average to support liberal and also minority parties.[5] This could indicate that ufologists are more dissatisfied than most with traditional politics and during interviews and in answer to 'open-ended' questionnaires, they certainly expressed dissatisfaction:

> It's not worth voting, we can't change anything. They're all in it together ...

> I'm not interested in politics. I've never voted since I came of age.

> I've never really bothered in regard to politics ... I prefer to let the politicians sort out the politics.

These views may illustrate a similar "political alienation" to that which members of the Aetherius Society show, according to Wallis (1974). However, it is difficult to tell whether these views differ significantly from those of many of the general public. The only thing that can be said with any certainty is that the majority of ufologists do not appear to have extreme views about politics.

In sum, those who join UFO research groups would appear to be mainly employed young men in the lower-middle/middle classes who enjoy reading and consider the furthering of their education to be important. Their interest in UFOs seems to be part of this concern for education and most have been interested since their teenage years. For many, the interest is part of a more general concern with what they consider to be

'frontier science'; subjects such as space research, astronomy and psychic research. This gives the impression that it is subjects which stimulate the imagination which are of particular interest to them.

Whilst only a few actually became interested in UFOs because of personal experience of them, a large proportion consider that they have had either a UFO or psychic experience. A considerable number said they became interested in UFOs through reading a book on the subject, but there was a tendency for those who had been interested the longest to be the least likely to say that they started in this way.

They do not uncritically accept everything which is contained in popular books about UFOs and similar subjects. Although the majority considered that UFOs were most likely to be extra-terrestrial vehicles, particularly those who had been interested in UFOs for more than 15 years, this was not the only suggestion; the ideas that they could be an unknown kind of natural phenomena, or psychic events, were also popular. Given the fact that many members disagreed over the various opinions about UFOs and similar subjects, except for the opinion that UFOs were a mystery, the solution to which would cause a revolution in our current thinking, it seems that it might be the mysterious nature of UFOs which attracts them. This suggestion, and its implications for an understanding of popular belief in UFOs and similar subjects, will be explored more fully in Parts Four and Five.

Belief in God among ufologists seems little different from that in the general population, although they may be more antagonistic to orthodox religion and there may be a slightly higher percentage of mystical beliefs among them, than in the general population.

They appear to have an ambivalent attitude towards science, although this does not necessarily mean that it is in any way unusual when compared with that of the general public. It appears to be made up of conflicting images of science and the origins of these images and their implications for ufology will be discussed in detail in Part Four.

Finally, as far as politics are concerned, many ufologists seem disenchanted with traditional parties, but this is probably not all that unusual among British people.

Footnotes

a) Copies of the questionnaire went out with the September 1981 issue of BUFORA's bi-monthly magazine, originally called Bufora Journal, but subsequently altered in format due to financial problems and re-named BUFORA Bulletin. Postage on the questionnaire was pre-paid. Comparison with the complete membership on the one variable for which figures are available (gender), shows that 20% of respondents were female and 19% of the total membership were female, indicating that at least as far as this variable is concerned, those who answered the questionnaire were a representative sample. Interviews were carried out with ten members of UFO research groups during 1981. In-depth questionnaires were sent to all seventeen members of a local group during 1982 and nine completed questionnaires were received. See Appendix A for further details about research methods.

b) It seems likely, though, that those with qualifications were over-represented among respondents because of the requirements of completing forms and questionnaires.

c) This information was given by letter from the Senior Research Officer of Contact (UK), Data Research Division, who said that the survey report had been mislaid. The information was obtained before my own survey was carried out.

d) The term 'Fortean phenomena' refers to supposedly unexplained natural events such as spontaneous human combustion, falls of fish, frogs, and the like, coincidences, psychic phenomena and other 'strange phenomena'. The term derives from Charles Fort (1874-1932), who collected accounts of these types of events which he claimed were 'excluded by science'. See Fort (1973) and the magazine Fortean Times, BM-Fortean Times, London, WC1N 3XX.

e) They statistically separated those who recommended books written by contactees from those who recommended books written by UFO researchers. 13% of those who recommended contactee books were in the upper middle class, whereas 22% of those who recommended research books were. Conversely, 28% of those who recommended contactees were in the upper lower class and only 17% of those who recommended scientific researchers.

f) George Adamski was the author most frequently mentioned.

g) When those who have seen a UFO are separated from those who have not, a few differences emerge. UFO sighters do more skywatching than non-sighters (73% of nonsighters never did any skywatching whereas only 44% of sighters did none). They are more likely to choose the extra-terrestrial hypothesis (sighters = 53%; nonsighters = 31%) and they are more likely to agree with all of the statements referring to themes present in popular literature except for two: that the solution to the UFO mystery will cause a revolution in current understanding which virtually everyone agreed with, and the statement about mysticism.

h) More women respondents reported a psychic experience than did men (females 79%, males 54%); also slightly more women reported a UFO experience (females 67%, males 58%).

i) Gallup Poll news release, November 29, 1973, cited in Westrum (1977).

j) The survey, conducted in 1973, found that 50% of those under 30 years old and 45% of those over 30 years, reported having had ESP experiences (Glock and Wuthnow, 1979).

k) It should also be noted that due to the emphasis placed upon the tentative nature of explanations by interviewees, the question was worded in the following way: It is often suggested that although many reports of UFOs can be explained as misidentifications of known objects a few cannot. Which theory do you think best accounts for most cases in this unexplained category?

l) For the purpose of this analysis of popular themes in UFO literature, the survey categories of ' strongly agree' and 'agree' have been collapsed to indicate agreement, and those of 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' to form disagreement.

m) For example, one respondent to the open-ended questionnaire survey of a local group wrote in answer to a question about religion:

> This question seems rather irrelevant since the answer to it would not have influenced my research...

and, at the end, he added:

> I trust your study will be conducted with some degree of impartiality.. your BUFORA questionnaire was ignored because I suspected your motives, the questions seeming often irrelevant. The UFO subject and those of us trying seriously to investigate it do not require any further maligning. Some of us have staked our professional reputations on the outcome.

n) Gallup Poll, 21-26 March, 1979.

o) Ibid. The slightly lower percentages among my respondents on both belief and non-belief in God may be due to an additional category of 'sometimes' included in the choices on my questionaire. This drew 14% of respondents. Of course, some may have chosen this category in preference to 'don't know', which drew only 6% compared with 9% of the general population who chose it.

p) Percentages for life after death are taken from the Gallup Poll conducted in June 1975, and for reincarnation from the Gallup Poll which took place in March 1979.

q) Gallup Poll of March 1979.

r) This question was taken from a survey of European values being conducted from the Survey Research Unit, North London Polytechnic. 84% of the general population chose 'will never be able to explain it all' in the pilot study (the question was omitted from the main study).

s) This is probably due to events concerning the liberal/SDP Alliance which were occurring at the time of the survey, although it does not necessarily detract from the suggestion that they are disenchanted with traditional political parties.

## CHAPTER 3

## WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN THEM ?

Until recently the dominant theoretical framework adopted in explanations of why people join social movements has been that involving the concept of deprivation. Originating in such theories as alienation (Marx) and anomie (Durkheim), the concept has been elaborated by theorists like Merton (1949) to produce a more complicated analysis involving relative deprivation. Here, estrangement from social institutions is seen as resulting not from absolute factors (such as hunger or social turmoil), but from relative ones: that is, by comparison with others. It is perceived deprivation which is important. In brief, individual achievements do not conform to individual expectations and, in order to try and overcome this discrepancy, people join social movements.

A relevant example is that of Jackson and Jobling (1968). They make a distinction between 'mystic religious cults' which are primarily religious and world-rejecting; and 'quasi-religious cults' which are primarily non-religious and world-affirming. Using part of Merton's theory, they then explain why people join these cults. In terms of Merton's typology of modes of adaptation to anomie, mystic religious cults are 'retreatist' and quasi-religious ones are 'innovatory'. This makes the quasi-religious cult a deviant route to success for those who see the normal channels as blocked and so frustrating their aspirations.

> By virtue of the fact that the cult offers a possibility of cure or satisfaction, wealth or success, beauty or wisdom, salvation or strength, which cannot be gained through 'the normal channels' it threatens those normal channels and their authority. (Jackson and Jobling, 1968, p.103)

A further type of elaboration upon the concept of deprivation is one which distinguishes between different types of deprivation. Glock and Stark (1973), for example, describe five types of deprivation and five types of organisation which constitute ways of overcoming these deprivations. These are: Economic (sect), Social (church), Organismic (healing movement), Ethical (reform movement), and Psychic (cult). Psychic deprivation is responsible for the majority of new religious and semi-religious groups and movements which emerged during the late 1960s. They write:

> The entire occult milieu... is made up of persons afflicted with psychic deprivation. Movements born in this setting, such as Theosophy, Vedanta, the I AM, or the various Flying Saucer Groups, are essentially religious innovations that reject dominant American religious traditions, and are classified as cults. (Glock and Stark, 1973. p.254)

Using a similar type of analysis, Nelson (1969) sees the majority of members of the Spiritualist Movement as attracted to it because they are in a state of ethical or psychic deprivation.

Although relative deprivation is a frequently used concept in explanations of why people join social movements, is it a useful one? There have been a number of criticisms of this approach to the study of recruitment (e.g. Heirich, 1977; McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Snow and Phillips, 1980; Zygmunt, 1972) and these have been summarised by Gurney and Tierney (1982) in an assessment of relative deprivation. They focus on three levels: conceptual, theoretical and empirical.

At the conceptual level, Gurney and Tierney argue that virtually all conceptualisations of relative deprivation fail to make clear the nature of the relationship between objective conditions and individual perceptions. The distinction between structural conditions which may give rise to relative deprivation and the perception of relative deprivation itself, is usually blurred and this confusion of the structural and psychological levels has led to misguided attempts to infer individual attitudes from macroeconomic indices, such as GNP.

At the theoretical level, they trace the origin of the link between relative deprivation and social movements to social psychological principles - either frustration-aggression theory or cognitive balance approaches - where underlying psychological tension is relieved by participation in social movements. These theories can be challenged, however : In the first place, such social psychological research has shown that the strength of association between psychological tension and social movement activities is weak. Little consideration is given to the suggestion that deprivation induced frustration or cognitive imbalance may lead to responses other than a collective one. In the second place, there is a problem in accepting an individual's attitude as an indicator of future action since much empirical work fails to demonstrate congruence between attitudes and behaviour. In the third place, relative deprivation theorists adopt a position of nominalism and additivity in that they assume collective actions result from the joining together of frustrated individuals. They assume uniformity of actions and thoughts among participants whereas they may have different backgrounds, beliefs and motivations. In the fourth place, the nature of the causal link is a problem, not only because relative deprivation is often seen as a necessary but not sufficient cause of social movement activity, but also, because this type of research occurs after the event, it cannot show whether perceptions of relative deprivation were the cause or consequence of collective action.

As far as the empirical work is concerned, Gurney and Tierney find problems at the level of consistency and coherence of research, the use of indicators of relative deprivation, and the design of research and adequacy of findings. They write:

> ... viewed critically, research on RD and SMs fares no better than theory: it assumes too much, demonstrates too little. (p.43)

In sum, as an explanatory theoretical construct in the study of social movement recruitment, relative deprivation is highly problematic, although, as Gurney and Tierney point out, it was a distinct improvement on earlier approaches which emphasised the irrationality or the pathological needs of participants, in social movements and other forms of collective activity (e.g. Hoffer, 1951).

The recent decline of popularity in the relative deprivation approach seems to have been associated with a decline in the use of theories of motivation in general in favour of other types of explanations for why people join social movements. There would appear to be two main types of alternative explanations; a micro-structural explanation which focuses on inter-personal relationships and the process of joining a social movement or group, and a macro-structural approach drawing upon theories from political sociology and economics and usually termed the resource mobilisation perspective. Let me describe these in more detail.

The micro-structural approach to human behaviour is best known through the work of the Chicago school of sociologists. Where recruitment is concerned, it has traditionally been used in the area of deviance. Analysis has been concerned with how individuals become members of deviant subcultures, both in terms of group socialisation and through societal labelling (e.g. Becker, 1963). More recently it has been adopted by those studying social movements, particularly new religious movements. For instance, James Richardson (1980), in arguing for a "new paradigm for conversion research" criticises the conventional model of religious conversion with its emphasis on psychological disturbance followed by group coercion, and encourages the use of an alternative approach, drawn from the work of deviancy theorists, which concentrates on the rational strategies of individuals who 'convert themselves'. In essence, he argues for a shift in perspective from a 'passive' model of man to an 'active' model in which the individual acts rather than is pushed.

In Richardson's opinion, one of the most widely used models of conversion to religious groups, that of Lofland and Stark (1965), comprises a bridge between the old and new approaches. It includes the predispositional perspective of factors which might push a person into joining a particular group, but also allows for self-definition as a religious seeker and interaction with selected people as a deliberate act to enable affective new bonds to develop. Instead of taking the different elements of the Lofland-Stark model in the additive way intended by the creators, Richardson, along with others (e.g. Snow and Phillips, 1980), argues for the importance of some factors over others. In Richardson's case, these are factors which are concerned with the active seeking attitude of the

individual rather than psychological predispositions, or intensive interaction with group members, which are emphasised by others (as will be described shortly).

An important study in support of this 'new paradigm' is that of Balch and Taylor (1977) who describe the role of the cultic milieu in joining a UFO cult. In recruitment to the group, interaction between members and potential members was minimal. The lack of close affective bonds led Balch and Taylor to question the status of intense interaction which is a feature of traditional models of recruitment. They argue that the over-emphasison prior affective bonds is due to a dominant conception of the cult as a deviant religious organisation, but, if potential recruits inhabit a social milieu where the movement's assumptions are not deviant, then prior social ties are not necessary:

> Before they joined, members of the UFO cult shared a metaphysical world-view in which reincarnation, disincarnate (sic) spirits, psychic powers, lost continents, flying saucers, and ascended masters, are taken for granted... It is perpetuated by a cultic milieu that exists in virtually every large community in the country. This milieu consists of a loosely integrated network of seekers who drift from one philosophy to another in search of metaphysical truth. (p.850)

Members of the cultic milieu are actively seeking for religious experience, so, rather than being disoriented and disturbed as in the traditional view of those who join cults, they are oriented to seeking.

Data from Balch and Taylor's study, then, is seen to challenge the conventional model of conversion and encourage an alternative one in which individuals choose to become involved in groups as part of an exploratory lifestyle. Roger Straus (1976) has elaborated this alternative model, describing in detail the strategies that people use during their search for transcendental experience and self-transformation. He describes, for instance, how individuals pass through phases of 'creative bumbling', being 'closet seekers' and 'overt seekers', before engaging in strategies of 'creative exploitation' when they try out a new experience. The study is based upon a series of fifteen two-hour 'guided conversations' with people selected for their availability and their involvement in transcendental groups and practices. However, he found that, when first asked about 'turning points' in their lives, interviewees explained them passively and more active tactics only emerged when they were probed. This raises questions about the status of the information obtained,

in that it may mean that interviewees learnt how to interpret their experiences in this way from cues given by the interviewer. Unfortunately, there appears to have been no check for consistency between accounts and behaviour in this study. Straus does not seem to have observed people engaged in the various tactics and asked them what they were doing or overheard them explaining their actions to others. There is no explanation of why the active tactics which emerged under probing should be given greater status than the passive explanations which emerged first. Although this criticism does not invalidate the suggestion that some people actively search out and try transcendental experiences as part of a 'seeking lifestyle', it does highlight some of the methodological problems associated with obtaining information about motives and explanations for behaviour (see Mills, 1940).

A more important problem with the 'active paradigm' is that it is assumed to be generally applicable and yet this may not be the case. Whilst it is obvious that individuals must be regarded as actors, purposively engaged in making sense of their lives, it is less obvious why the 'seeking lifestyle' should be taken as typical. In other studies, a prior religious seeking attitude did not seem an important factor in recruitment (Snow and Phillips, 1980).

Not all of those encouraging the adoption of a micro-structural approach to recruitment, rather than one emphasising psychological predispositions, would argue for a model in which actors 'convert themselves'. Others, focusing on more traditional aspects of recruitment and conversion, have looked closely at the important role played by social networks. For example, Snow and Phillips (1980), compare recruitment to the Nichiren Soshu organisation with the conversion model proposed by Lofland and Stark. They found that, of the factors mentioned in this model, only two were both unproblematic and important in recruitment to the movement. These were the existence of affective bonds - 82% of members were recruited by others within the organisation with whom they had pre-existing, extra-movement ties - and intensive interaction. Thus Snow and Phillips "... would even argue that conversion in general is highly improbable in the absence of affective and intensive interaction", and they suggest that "...the interactive process holds the key to understanding conversion."

The above findings would appear to be widely applicable, although not totally. For example, in a study using two other data sources besides

the Nichiren Soshu study, Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen (1980) conclude that the probability of being recruited into a particular movement is largely a function of two conditions: (1) links to one or more movement members through pre-existing or emergent inter-personal ties and (2) the absence of countervailing networks. Using information from ten social movement case studies with quantitative data pertaining to the recruitment process, and a questionnaire survey of university students on movement recruitment and participation, as well as the Nichiren Soshu study, they found that, in all but one of the ten studies (that of the Hare Krishna movement), extra-movement social networks constituted the primary source of recruits. Amongst the students, 80% of those who participated in religious movements joined through social networks and 63% of those in political groups did so. The other main avenue in the sample was the mass media, with 30% of those in political organisations and 20% of those in religious groups being recruited in this way (26%) in total.

However, not all relatives and friends join social movements and so why are some recruited rather than others? Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen suggest that this is largely due to their structural availability. Among the sample of university students, of those who were only movement sympathisers (i.e. indicated support for the movement, but who did not devote time and energy to advancing the movement's objectives), nearly two-thirds indicated that the reason they did not participate was because they did not have enough time.

In answer to the argument that a social bond with one or more movement members plus structural availability increases the probability of movement participation, but are not sufficient conditions, Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen emphasise that people rarely join movements outright. Rather, they are typically asked to participate in movement activity and, during the course of this participation, they are provided with 'reasons' and 'justifications' for what they have already done and for their continuing participation.

> We would thus argue that the 'motives' for joining and continuing participation are generally emergent and interactional rather than prestructured. (Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen, 1980, p.795)

Finally, to answer the question of whether all movements depend on social networks for recruitment, they examine the Hare Krishna study where most

recruitment occurred off the street in public places. The relevant fact about the Hare Krishna movement is that they demand an austere communal lifestyle and the severance of extra-movement social ties. This means that they cannot recruit through pre-existing social networks, which leads Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen to the conclusion that groups which constitute closed networks of social relations and which require exclusive participation, will recruit primarily through strangers.

Unlike the first micro-structural approach, however, this one has been criticised for assuming a too passive model of man. Wallis and Bruce (1982) argue that availability is not a fixed quality, but one which depends on factors such as the aims, legitimacy, personnel and methods of the movement. They conclude:

> In short, network ties and commitments are strong or weak only in retrospect when we see whether they have been countervailing factors or not. That is, their strengths and our availability can only be determined by whether or not we join the movement, and this cannot in any absolute sense be a factor in our recruitment, but only insofar as we see the movement and its appeal to us as more or less compelling. Consequently, recruitment to social movements cannot be understood without exploration of the meaning-endowing activity of the pre-recruit, his active construction of the movement, its aims and importance and his reconstruction of his biography, commitments and relationships in this light.
>
> (Wallis and Bruce, 1980, p.106, emphasis in origina

Another criticism is that the authors do not pay enough attention to the alternative routes that can be taken and which in some types of groups may be more important. Two other types of recruitment were mentioned in their paper: (1) promotion via the mass media and (2) door to door canvassing. Like recruitment in public places, these other two types were found to be not as successful as recruitment among acquaintances, friends and kin. Nevertheless, there are probably many groups which use one of these methods almost exclusively. In fact, Shupe (1976) did a study of twenty-seven religious groups which advertised in magazines such as Fate, Beyond, Occult and the like, and whose members communicated almost exclusively by mail. What factors might be important in recruitment to this type of group where social networks seem not to be involved? It may well be that friendship networks are not important where certain types of beliefs are concerned. Stark and Bainbridge (1980), for instance, found that, although social networks were important in recruitment to cults, sects and conventional religion, they were not important in the acceptance

of occult beliefs, such as belief in tarot cards or seances, which seem to spread via the mass media. This finding was reinforced by a study of the salience of religion for personal relationships (Bainbridge and Stark, 1981). The authors found that objective ideological positions tended only to be salient in friendships when backed by vigorous formal organisations: attraction to cult movements such as Yoga, Zen or Transcendental Meditation, is more important in college friendships than the private enjoyment of occult literature or belief in ESP.

In sum, the micro-structural approach to movement recruitment and religious conversion points to the importance of other factors besides relative deprivation and similar psychological predispositions. In the case of many organisations, affective bonds between members and prospective members are important, as is intense interaction with group members. These bonds are a function of prior social networks in some cases, but, in others, they are developed after contact with group members, during the social isolation of a closed community. Where other groups are concerned, these factors seem unnecessary because potential recruits have already accepted a world-view similar to that offered by the group concerned. Indeed, some prospective members may be actively seeking involvement in groups as part of a desire for transcendental or numinous experience and spiritual growth. An important conclusion to be made from this examination of micro-structural studies of movement recruitment, then, is that no one model can adequately account for recruitment to all types of groups. The important factors will vary with the type of organisation under consideration. Also, the thorny problem of 'active' versus 'passive' models of the human being was raised and this will be considered shortly.

The second alternative to an approach which concentrates on psychological predispositions is one directed at a macro-structural level: this is the resource mobilisation perspective (McCarthy and Zald, 1973; 1977; Tilly, 1978; Traugott, 1978; Zald and McCarthy, 1979; Oberschall, 1973). Instead of the motivations, beliefs and attitudes of participants, this approach is concerned with organisational structure and strategies. McCarthy and Zald (1977), for instance, propose to explain movement activity by reference to a number of structural levels: that of the social movement organisation, which is a complex or formal organisation within a social movement; that of the social movement industry, which constitutes all the social movement organisations having similar goals within a social movement;

and that of the social movement sector, which consists of all the social movement industries in a society.

Questions about recruitment are directed at the strategies of organisations rather than at those of potential recruits, and at the effects of external forces such as social control authorities and the media, rather than internal forces such as beliefs and intentions. The locus of explanation lies at the level of social movement organisation rather than the potential member. That is, according to McCarthy and Zald (1977), "...grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organisations."

Whilst it is obvious that such factors as the amount of time and money possessed by members of a society, the attitude of the majority of society to the organisation, and the sales techniques of those seeking new members, are important in recruitment, it is questionable whether these are sufficient factors to account for why some people join one social movement organisation rather than another. Although some organisations may be highly sophisticated and capable of exploiting general grievances, others seem to lack strong leadership, control or direction. As Zurcher and Snow (1981) comment, the resource mobilisation approach provides an important corrective to the psychological motivation approach, but it may well be too sociological in that so little attention is given to the role of ideology, symbolisation and passion. They also point out that some variations of the approach are rooted in problematic psychological assumptions in that they work from a rationalistic incentive model of human behaviour.

> The most obvious shortcoming of incentive models is the tautological character of the rationality assumptions. People are supposed to participate in or devote personal resources to movement organisations because it is rewarding to them. Defining participation, rewards and rationality in terms of each other precludes finding negative cases.
>
> (Zurcher and Snow, 1981, p.468)

In sum, the macro-structural approach draws attention to the activities of organisations in encouraging membership, to the importance of the media and social control authorities, and to the amount of time and money generally available to those in the society concerned. However, it concentrates on the instrumental elements of behaviour at the expense of those concerned with emotion and meaning-creation.

Finally, a few writers have tried to construct accounts of the process of recruitment which unite predisposing social psychological factors like relative deprivation and situational factors such as the development of affective bonds. One of the most well-known is that of Lofland and Stark (1965) which, as mentioned, Richardson regards as a bridge between the old and new models of conversion. Rather than this it can be seen as a more complete theory which tries to include a number of levels of behaviour. They propose that, for conversion to a particular deviant religious group to take place, the following must occur; firstly, individuals must be in a state of tension. That is, although they may have problems which are qualitatively the same as others, these are felt to be acute and troubling over long periods of time - they are quantitatively different. Secondly, they must have defined their problems as needing a religious rather than a psychiatric or political solution. That is, they have "a general propensity to impose religious meaning on events", although they have found that conventional religion does not meet their requirements; so they, thirdly, espouse a religious seeker viewpoint which incorporates an active supernatural realm that interacts with the natural and a theological conception of the universe. Fourthly, they have reached a turning point in their lives. Fifthly, they form cult affective bonds and, sixthly, there is a lack of extra-cult bonds. Finally, for total conversion to occur, they must be exposed to intensive interaction with the group.

This model has been extensively applied and criticised and has been shown to have limited applicability (e.g. Snow and Phillips, 1980). With regard to the specific question of how social psychological predispositions interact with other features, the existence of tension has been found in a number of other studies, but, as some writers have pointed out, control groups were rarely used (Heirich, 1977; Snow and Phillips, 1980). Also, since individuals describe their lives prior to conversion as being full of problems, after conversion has occurred, they could well be interpreting past events in the framework adopted during conversion. In other words, increased prior tension could be an artifact of the conversion experience.

Lofland himself has re-appraised his model, recognising many of the problems mentioned by others (Lofland, 1977). However, he argues that it was intended as much as an analytical description of a sequence of experiences as it was a 'causal theory' and also that it was never meant

to be a universal model, but rather an example of a particular type of conversion and he had hoped that other qualitative process models of conversion would be constructed for different kinds of recruitment.

In sum, the Lofland-Stark conversion model is an attempt at a more complex and comprehensive theory of recruitment, but some of its stages, particularly the existence of prior tension, are rather problematic. Nonetheless, it is an interesting model because it embodies both 'active' and 'passive' models of behaviour and, contrary to Richardson, I would argue that this seems closer to our experience of the world than either used alone. We <u>are</u> at the mercy of external forces (can we ignore Marx and Freud?) and yet we strive to make sense of what is happening and endeavour to gain what control we can.

How then, can these theories help us to explain why people join UFO research groups? No one theory seems to cope adequately with all levels of explanation (structural, cultural, and social psychological). As far as the concept of relative deprivation is concerned, the problems connected with its operationalisation make it rather difficult to apply. This does not necessarily mean that a motivational perspective should be completely discarded, however. Some psychological, social psychological or cultural characteristics may predispose an individual to the membership of a particular type of group. The micro-structural approach raises some important questions: what relevance do affective bonds have in the recruitment process? Are recruits already members of the cultic milieu? Are they seeking numinous experience? Do they convert themselves? In contrast, the macro-structural approach draws attention to organisational factors such as strong leaders, and to the necessity for certain resources such as money and time. Some combination of these different theoretical approaches would seem to be necessary. Zurcher and Snow (1981) have argued for a merging of symbolic interactionism with resource mobilisation so that symbolic resources such as ideology can be included in the analysis and this would obviously be a step in the right direction. But would it be possible to include predisposing factors as well? The Lofland-Stark conversion model attempts to combine these factors with interactional ones, but the result is not wholly satisfactory. The best solution would seem to be to try and construct a model which describes the process of joining a UFO research group, on similar lines to that of Lofland and Stark, but taking into account the problematic features of the model and

and the important aspects of the other theories discussed. Clearly such a task is a little (!) ambitious but this will be the general theoretical programme which informs the use of the data.

How do people become interested in UFOs? : The first question which can be asked of those who participate in UFO research is: How did they become interested in UFOs? A typical answer to this question was that they had always been interested in "that kind of thing". When asked to expand, they usually mentioned space subjects such as space research, astronomy or science fiction, and sometimes the paranormal or psychic research. For instance:

> I've always been interested in science fiction and space probes. My bedroom walls were covered with posters of space rockets and the like when I was a teenager...

> Well, I was always that way inclined. I was always interested in space, astronomy and that kind of thing. I'm that kind of person.

> I've always been mad on science fiction - since I was a little kid ... and astronomy. I spent hours staring at the sky, looking at the constellations.

> I've always been interested in strange things - the blokes in the rugby team I was in used to talk about strange happenings, ghosts and the like, and I was fascinated.

When asked to be more specific during a questionnaire survey, some members of BUFORA responded in a similar fashion, but the majority seemed to have little trouble in being more concise about the origin of their interest and locating it in a book, person or event. The most common was the reading of a book on the subject (35%): George Adamski was the author most frequently mentioned and a long way behind was Erich von Daniken who was second in popularity, with Arthur Shuttlewood in third place. The second most popular instigator was a news event, such as a newspaper report or television programme, and reports of UFO experiences were the most common:

> When I first saw a newspaper photograph of UFO in late 50s or early 60s. (emphasis in original)

Reports in the daily press on the 1966-67 U.F.O. flap over Warminster.

In the 1950s lots of sightings were brought to the publics (sic) attention and from these my curiosity grew.

The third most frequently mentioned incident was a personal UFO experience (19%) and these usually involved sightings of lights in the sky, and occasionally strange objects:

My sighting of seven stationary lights over Dartmoor at night.

By sighting 4 metal spinning and propelled discs (totally silent), following same course at same height and same speed, flying low over Warwickshire fields, mid-afternoon in clear, sunny skies on Whit-Monday 1959.

1952/3 clear blue sky, midday, saw disc shaped object over Lewisham, mother worked on radar which it was picked up on, over 1,000 people saw it that day yet it is hardly mentioned.

Only 8% said they became interested in UFOs through contact with another person who was keen on the subject. Unlike recruitment to other sub-cultures and many groups, then, personal contact does not seem to be important, although there may be a difference between joining UFO organisations and becoming interested in UFOs and this will be examined shortly.

Why do they remain interested in UFOs after this initial sparking of their interest? When asked this question, the most common reply was that UFOs were still an unexplained phenomena and this held their attention. UFOs were still being reported despite the fact that scientists said they were only misidentifications of known objects and this encouraged them to try and solve what they considered to be the 'UFO mystery':

... despite the scientific explanations, the air ministry, the Condon report, NASA and the CIA, UFOs are still a mystery.

I think it is because the whole subject of UFOs is so big, the subject matter so vast, that I had to find the answer to it whatever the answer is!.

> My interest in the subject is maintained by the complete mystery of what UFOs really are. From where do they originate? Why are they here at this moment in time? Also my interest is maintained by the reoccurance (sic) of unexplainable sightings in spite of the constant assertions that there is no substance of scientific worth in any of these sightings.

In addition to specific comments about the existence of the 'UFO mystery' and hopes of solving it, were more amorphous allusions to the vastness of the UFO subject, as indicated in one of the above quotes. Participants referred to the world-wide nature of UFOs, to their links with the future and possibly the past, and to the far reaching implications of the subject: it involved the possibility of life on other planets, of future technology, of other intelligences and of radically different ideas about life. The impression given was that ufology was 'open-ended' and so it was difficult to get bored with the subject. This may partly be due to linkage with other areas of the cultic milieu such as parapsychology, occult philosophy and alternative technologies, but also perhaps because it is connected to legitimate sciences like astronomy.

Even more nebulous than allusions to the large and mysterious features of the subject, were comments about feelings of growth and progress. During interviews and conversations, they referred to increased understanding of different aspects of the phenomena. The mysterious nature of UFOs, then, was a relative one. Sometimes the feeling of growth seemed to involve a more subjective feeling of being 'educated' by outside forces. Although this was not mentioned in a confident fashion, it was a commonly expressed idea in the more tentative form that they were part of some larger pattern of events. Many would talk about the large number of meaningful coincidences that seemed to have occurred since they became involved in the subject, while a few actually said they had a feeling of being manipulated by the intelligence behind the UFO phenomena.

It almost seemed as though some participants were 'trying on' or 'toying' with the idea of being in contact with an alien intelligence. It seemed less a belief to them, than a fascinating possibility which they enjoyed speculating about. Some indication of this rather impressionistic suggestion can perhaps be gathered from this extract from a letter sent to provide information about a local group:

> Going out on a limb here now - and only to emphasise the remarkability of events ... if there were such a thing as 'assistance by the very intelligence comprising the UFO enigma', then the rise of (group name) could have passed as a classic example. I won't enlarge upon that, for it is purely speculative, if not over-imaginative thought. (Or is it??) Its much too complex to enter into here, but I've come across many strange events which, at face value, have appeared to be too much of a coincidence. Of course its subjective, but tie-in such 'coincidences' with the belief (by some) that the UFO intelligence does intervene (sic) with our lives, then you have a whole little theory of its own. However, theories are 'ten-a-penny'!

The semi-serious, slightly flippant tone of the above quote was typical of that used by UFO researchers when mentioning such apparently unusual experiences. Of course, the recognition of 'meaningful coincidences' is not unusual (see Koestler, 1972), but the feeling of being 'chosen' by outside forces is usually associated with religious groups. In fact the feeling of being singled out by forces associated with UFOs is a feature of contactee groups and those few researchers who become involved with contactees describe their 'meaningful coincidences' and other apparently strange experiences in a more serious manner.[a]

In order to try and recognise the critical factors in those who remain interested in UFO research, it is useful to compare them with three other populations: those who have never become interested in UFOs although they are interested in space subjects, those who were once interested in UFOs but have since lost interest, and those who are interested in UFOs but from a perspective other than UFO research.

Firstly, those who never become interested in the subject: Amateur astronomers share many of the interests of ufologists, yet the majority do not seem to be interested in UFOs or consider them to be a mystery.[b] Why is this? Interviews with six members of a local amateur astronomical association produced some hints. Half of those interviewed actually expressed a curiosity about UFOs and said they did not rule out the possibility that they were extra-terrestrial spacecraft, but whether this is typical is not known. Interested or not, the fact remains that they had not pursued the interest by collecting books on the subject, subscribing to magazines or joining UFO research groups. What reasons do they give for not doing so? The main factor which had stopped a serious interest from developing was the lack of personal experience:

> I can go and look out at the stars at any time but I can't go out and look at a UFO. I haven't seen one yet. I might see one but I'm becoming a bit more sceptical as time goes by.

> Although I don't necessarily believe that UFOs are spacemen from outer-space, I'm interested in it; but with books you have to either believe the evidence or not - you really need to have a personal experience to know for sure.

> I wouldn't say I'm really deep into it. I haven't seen one myself but I'm intrigued. You really need some kind of personal experience.

Another factor was a negative attitude towards ufology and UFO groups. They considered there was too much speculation in the subject and that UFO groups were somewhat disreputable.

Although this was a very small sample, it highlights the fact that many ufologists are prepared to be interested in UFOs even though they have never had a personal experience. Also despite the rather cranky public image attached to the subject, they still become involved.

Secondly, those who were once interested in UFOs and have since lost their interest: information was obtained by writing to lapsed subscribers to the Northern UFO News.[c] Very few had actually completely lost interest in ufology. In only two cases had this happened and the reasons they gave were as follows:

> I stopped sending for N.U.F.O.N. News because I felt the UFO investigation to be the field for Psychiatrists and Psychic Researchers and to be a subject remote from human life on the practical level.

> I let my subscription to 'NUFON' lapse for basically the same reasons I let all my subs to other UFO mags/groups lapse ... 1) I realised there was little to be achieved or learnt by further reading or talk on the UFO subject. 'They', 'it' exist(s) or does not exist irrespective of what you read or hear on the matter. Until one has first hand experience (i.e. seen something) all the talk in the world is not proving or discovering anything that you know is true. I have not seen anything I would call a UFO. 2) Financial (also linked to above). 3) Actual living in the real world is more important than devoting great attention to what is doubtful. UFOs could be compared to religion in this respect. There are millions of people starving in the world and being blown to pieces whilst 'ufologists' ponder the inexplicable. Why don't they try and find solutions to real problems in the world?! (Emphasis in original)

Again a lack of personal experience was mentioned, then. Also a feeling that the subject is too intangible and lacking any foundation in the 'real' world.

Finally, those who are interested in UFOs but not in UFO research: A few interviews were conducted with those involved in the contactee aspect of UFOs.[d] These appeared to be disinterested in UFO research because they thought information could best be obtained by individual experience. They were primarily concerned with developing themselves to the level of the extra-terrestrial entities:

> We are interested in spiritual development ... Nothing is impossible to the developed mind.
>
> We believe that each individual should develop their own powers.
>
> The Psychics have the key because they can raise us to another level of consciousness.

Again, then, the need for personal experience was emphasised, only here it was deliberately cultivated.

The first point which can be made in the light of the above data is that personal experience seems to be an important factor, but this term can mean a variety of different things. Amateur astronomers want easy and regular access to their object of interest. Contactee followers on the other hand, want to work to experience the subtle and nebulous energies which are of interest to them. Not only that, but the one type of experience is 'exoteric' and the other 'esoteric'; that is, an experience which is demonstrably real in the case of astronomers, while that of contactee followers is verified experientially and inter-subjectively. UFO researchers are distinctive in that they fit into neither of these categories. They seem to want exoteric rather than esoteric experience of their object of interest, but in many cases the experience is not necessary for their interest to continue: whilst about 19% of BUFORA respondents had experienced a UFO event before becoming interested and another 40% had undergone a UFO experience after they had become interested, nearly 39% had never had a UFO experience at all. The suggestion is that vicarious experience is enough to sustain their interest until they have an 'objective' (i.e. hopefully demonstrably real) experience of their own. Perhaps this need for vicarious experience is one of the reasons

why most UFO research publications feature a high proportion of UFO reports.

The second point to be made is that UFO researchers are interested in their subject even though it is speculative and 'divorced from everyday life' to a certain extent. Again, this seems to emphasise the importance of the imagination to those involved. Finally, they are willing to be interested in the subject of UFO research despite the rather 'cranky' image it possesses. In other words, they have a certain facility for resisting social pressures towards conformity.

Why do people join UFO research groups? : The second question which can be asked of those who are now involved in ufology is: How did they come to join a UFO group? In more general terms, what place do UFO organisations have in their lives? Respondents and interviewees seemed to find it easier to describe how they joined than why, but two main reasons emerged: the first was in order to meet and talk to other people about the subject so that they could clarify their ideas and contribute information. The second was to learn about becoming more actively involved in ufology. Prospective members have often been interested in UFOs for some time before they decide to join a group - reading books, collecting newspaper clippings of UFO reports, perhaps even subscribing to UFO magazines - and so joining a group is an extension of the desire to find out more about UFOs.

The actual process of joining seems to differ depending on whether a local group or a national group is being joined. These two types of groups seem to cater to different types of needs. For instance, in the BUFORA survey only 33% belonged to other groups and only 11% of these were members of local groups. Those I talked to in local groups frequently said they had left a national group to start or join a local one because they wanted more personal contact with others interested in the subject and the opportunity to do something active, such as investigation. Being a member of a national group need not entail more than paying a subscription and reading the magazine (as the BUFORA survey showed, most members did little except read UFO literature). As far as becoming a member of a local group is concerned, a typical beginning is to answer an advert. in the local media, or to place one there oneself. For example:[6]

> Four of us got together, three males and one female, we wrote off to the local Radio stations telling them about a (name of region) UFO group that was going to be formed and that if anyone was interested they should ring me. We had about 30 calls enquiring about the group ...

> The group was originally founded in 1968 by myself and a group of young lads who eventually had to leave due to the natural progression of events, i.e. girl friends, university, etc. I carried on single handed until 1977 when there was a UFO flap and I advertised in the local press and radio station for any like minded persons to attend a meeting. I was agreeably surprised when 40 persons turned up and from that day the Group has progressed amazingly well.

Contact with national groups occurred generally via adverts in the back of UFO books or UFO magazines.

Why do people leave UFO groups? : What about leaving a UFO group? As the study of lapsed subscribers to Northern UFO News showed,[f] very few leave because they have lost interest in the subject. Reasons for leaving could be grouped under two headings: a dislike of UFO organisations, and changed circumstances.

A dislike of UFO organisations could be focused on a particular group, or could be more general. For instance:

> a) Research funds were being misused, b) Sighting reports were being mislaid, c) lack of organisation.

> ... the group having expanded membership wise we began to find that we were, for reasons unknown to us, attracting the wrong kind of people... Hence our studieswere getting nowhere and it became impossible to hold sensible open-minded meetings, so I resigned from the group - which I believe has now folded completely.

> I have never been overly keen on UFO groups and such basically because of the tendency for such groups to become political in their attitude towards the subject and to those involved there in.

The second set of reasons for leaving were concerned with changed circumstances: that is, lack of time due to the demand of other activities, or financial constraints. For instance:

> The reason that I do not now subscribe to 'Nufon' or any other ufology group is purely a matter of expense, as I have recently purchased a 'V' registered car...
>
> The reason my interest, or rather active interest, has lapsed is simple. Just over a yearago, I started my own business and this, of course, takes up all my time.
>
> On my retirement (from work) it was not just the cost of subscriptions alone, but this work involves one in considerable postage and stationery costs ...

The fact that fluctuations in personal resources can play a part in leaving a group means that these considerations are probably also important in joining as well, at least in some cases. Once UFOs are seen as a mystery which is in need of exploration, time and money are probably one of the main arbiters of increased or decreased group activity.

What seems to be at the root of complaints about UFO organisations is disagreement over what their aims and activities should be. Members leave because they disagree with the way money is being spent, or with the way topics are being discussed or the subject is being approached. In other words, it is a conflict of motives. One way to examine this conflict is to find out about the personal aims of those involved in UFO research groups. When asked about personal aims, three main types emerged: The first was concerned with contributing to the subject of ufology, either through investigation and research or through the dissemination of information to the public through lectures, exhibitions, letters to MPs etc. For instance:

> I would like to see UFOs made known to the general public. The public have the right to have all the facts..
>
> To collate and sift information.
>
> To make some small contribution to solving the seemingly incomprehensible mystery,in my particular case by giving the public more information by means of talks to make them realise that there is a much deeper problem existing than is apparent from the very few, inconsistent, and in most cases badly reported incidents from the news media.

The second type of aim was mentioned by fewer individuals and was more self-directed. It concerned a desire for a personal experience of a UFO. Thus:

> To meet one of these EBO's from the Planets...
>
> If there are people on other planets I would like to make contact with them.
>
> To get a UFO, preferably a landed one, on film.

These two types of aims, then, could be in conflict within a group in that one might encourage activities directed at contacting UFOs (such as skywatching, seances, meeting contactees, etc.) whilst the other would encourage investigation and research. The one being more concerned with experience would tend towards the contactee side of the UFO movement, whilst the other would move towards the scientific side, although there is no necessity for them to end at these two extremes. As long as discussion or superficial contact is all that is involved these differences could probably be tolerated, but when the aims are put into practice, they are likely to result in conflict.

The third type of aim was concerned less with <u>what</u> they intended to do, than the amount of time and commitment they intended to give to the subject. There seemed to be a clear split between those who wanted ufology to be just a hobby and those who wanted it to take up a major part of their life. For some UFOs were a major concern:

> I'd like to be able to do ufology all the time ... I take the cases I am investigating to work with me and think about them there.
>
> To put my energy into the society ... ufology takes up all my spare time. My wife says that's what I was destined for ... Its give my life a purpose.

Others wanted to keep ufology as a hobby which fitted in with the rest of their life rather than dominated it:

> I don't want to make a career of it. My involvement will remain at this level: an interesting hobby.

> For me ufology is a personal thing, something that must be viewed in a way that does not disturb, distort or interrupt my everyday way of life. Far too many people become obsessed....

The extent to which group members are willing to commit their time and other resources is also a source of conflict, it would appear.

These examples of personal aims are taken from only a small number of ufologists[8] and may not be generalisable, but there is some support for their importance from group meetings where arguments often seemed to be crystallised around these sorts of issues. That is, there were those who wanted to talk about personal experiences and those who wanted to develop research techniques and discuss ways of influencing the public or the authorities. Also there was frequent conflict over the amount of commitment necessary, with talk of a distinction between those who were merely curious and those who were seriously interested.

Finally, since being interested in UFO research does not necessarily involve membership of a UFO group, ex-members are unlikely to lose interest in UFOs. They may carry on their interest alone, join another group, or start their own organisation.

What do we know now about recruitment to UFO research groups? Let me summarise the stages that potential members go through:

1) From an early age they are interested in space subjects such as space research, astronomy, science fiction and sometimes psychic research.

2) A specific interest in UFOs emerges after one of three events: they read a book on the subject and find it convincing, or they come into contact with media coverage of UFOs and find it puzzling, or they have a personal UFO experience and feel that it is significant.

3) They disagree with the official explanation of what UFOs are. From this point onwards, UFOs have been defined as 'a mystery' although the mystery may be in either what UFOs are, or if they are taken to be extra-terrestrial entities, where they are coming from and why they are here.

4) They actively start looking for information in order to solve the problem that now exists. They collect newspaper clippings about UFOs, buy books and magazines, attend lectures on the subject,etc.

5) While gathering information they come into contact with various groups and may decide to join one or start one of their own, in order to find out more about the UFO mystery.

6) They may decide to leave the group they have joined, or it may disband due to various factors such as the conflicting motives of those in the group or a decrease in personal resources like time and money.

7) They may rejoin another group, start another group, become a solo investigator, or limit their interest to reading, depending on the amount of time and other resources they have or want to expend on the subject.

These stages can be formed into a model following the example of Lofland and Stark (1965):

1) A prior and early interest in space subjects.
2) An introduction to the subject of UFOs which is experienced as significant.
3) The labelling of UFOs as a mystery.
4) Seeking for more information about UFOs.
5) Joining a group.

Quite clearly, the process by which people join a UFO group is different from that of recruits to the 'Divine Precepts'. In order to discuss these differences let me examine each of the stages in more detail. It should be noted that these stages are cumulative as Lofland and Stark intended.[h]

A prior and early interest in space subjects : Quite obviously, this is not in the least unusual. An interest in these subjects is encouraged in our society for various reasons, such as to gain popular support for the space programme. What kind of image of science is conveyed in such programmes? Popular images of science are frequently misconceptions. Holton (1960) has described seven basic positions upon which public images of science are based, all of which are inaccurate. The image which is conveyed in space programmes is that of science as conqueror of the universe and this is close to that which Holton describes as the image of science as magic. He writes:

> Few nonscientists would suspect a hoax if it were suddenly announced that a stable chemical element lighter than hydrogen had been synthesized, or that a manned observation platform had been established at the surface of the sun. To most people it appears that science knows no inherent limitations.
> (p.1191)

As was shown earlier, ufologists seem to have this view of science as the harbinger of unlimited possibility, although they also held a contradictory view of science as unimaginative and boring, and this will be discussed in a moment.

It is not only space research propaganda which encourages this view of science as exciting and magical: there is also science fiction. This literary form, first produced by the Nineteenth Century Romantics, but not recognised as a genre until the 'scientific romances' of H.G. Wells, is directly concerned with the imagination. The invitation to explore new possibilities, to partake in a 'willing suspension of disbelief' is a central feature of the literature. Also, as Bainbridge (1976) shows, it played a vital role in disseminating ideas and values in harmony with space research in the early days of the spaceflight revolution, but has become increasingly concerned with 'magic' rather than science, perhaps illustrating some kind of tendencies within this type of 'frontier science' to be portrayed as providing an answer to all our problems.[i] Although less than half of the BUFORA respondents indicated a special interest in science fiction, it is obviously closely associated with the subject of UFOs. Many SF films have been concerned with aliens and themes within the UFO movement, such as the existence of a government conspiracy, are frequently expressed in science fiction, as ufologists themselves have noted.[j]

Also it is interesting to note the 'conversion experience' or 'gestalt shift' described by those first introduced to SF in their teens in the 1930s and 1940s which Stableford (1978) mentions. This was mainly associated with the largeness of scale in the literature. The opening up of vistas within which the earth was a small part of a larger scheme was experienced as 'mind expanding'. Other aspects described by fans were the demand for a pretence of realism which could sustain a particular attitude to the real world which enabled science fiction to become a way of life, and also a constant demand for innovation: without continual change fans became bored and complained that SF had lost its essential

vitality. Stableford remarks that the conversion experience is less likely these days because fans are introduced to SF earlier on in their life, but many of those in the UFO movement mentioned this 'enthraldom' with the immensity of the universe.

If those interested in space subjects had converted to a particular view of the world in which there was an emphasis on the immensity of the universe and its unlimited possibilities, a highly developed imagination and a desire for continual innovation, it is not hard to see how frustrating they would find 'everyday science' and the negative and limiting potential of nuclear weapons. This could give rise to a simultaneous view of science as unimaginative and limited, or to tension caused by unfulfilled desires and thwarted expectations as suggested earlier in the analysis using Smelser's theory.

Cultural factors may not be the only ones involved, of course,[k] but, as discussed earlier, the limited nature of explanations in terms of psychological and social psychological predispositions, makes their use questionable. An explanation of recruitment to UFO research groups in terms of an interest in space subjects, is also only partial. Clearly not everyone with such an interest becomes interested in UFOs. For this to happen, the next stage is necessary.

An introduction to the subject of UFOs which is experienced as significant : This is brought about in the main by one of three events: reading a book, a media event, or a personal UFO experience.

Reading a book - The question which presents itself is, why do some people read a book about UFOs and find it convincing enough to generate a sustained interest in the subject, while others do not? Firstly, the "willing suspension of disbelief" necessary for science fiction and other types of imaginative fiction could be carried over into the everyday world, encouraged by a view of science as magical: if 'anything is possible' as far as space technology is concerned, there is no reason why the encounters described in UFO books should be implausible.

Secondly, many UFO books are written in a way in which it is difficult to separate fact from fantasy unless the reader has been trained to be concerned about references. Even then the material largely consists of single person accounts of experiences, which are difficult to check. those who read this type of book are largely nonacademics. They read

a great deal, following their own interests and without reference to any outside structure as occurs in courses of higher education. In the inital stage of contact with the topic of UFOs, readers are unlikely to have met many others interested in the subject, and so their reading would take place in isolation. This situation, as Riesman (1965) has indicated, is conducive to the development of views at odds with the immediate milieu. As he writes:

> ...the book, like the invisible moniter, helps liberate the reader from his group and its emotions, and allows the contemplation of alternative responses and the trying on of new emotions. (p.403)

In other words, the type of reading engaged in by some people makes the 'trying on' of the 'UFO mystery' fairly easy.

A media event : Although many people realise that news reports can be distorted, once something is in print, it is difficult not to believe 'there is no smoke without fire', a phrase heard continually in this context. This type of story is rarely followed up in the media and so is usually left a mystery, but even if it was and the mystery solved, the public statement of a problem is enough to suggest its existence. In fact, it does not matter whether the story is based on fact or not, as Hackett (1948) points out in his discussion of the creation of the flying saucer concept, it is repetition which brings a concept to life. Denial often only serves to instill the picture more firmly in the mind of the reader and ridicule makes familiar the unusual.

Also, as Snow and Machalek (1981) argue, belief is more natural than disbelief. In everyday life the rule is to "... assume that things are in fact what they appear to be unless we have reasons to do otherwise." The doubting practised in science has to be learned and so there is no reason why media reports of UFOs should not be taken seriously by those who come into contact with them. When this is added to a prior interest in space subjects it is easy to see how the reports can take on significance.

A personal UFO experience : Even though participants generally agree that most UFO reports are misperceptions of everyday objects, their own initial UFO experience is rarely put into this category. There are at least two reasons for this. Firstly, lack of experience makes it difficult to appreciate how strange an ordinary object can sometimes appear (Haines,19

and in any case there are a range of unusual natural objects and phenomena which can be difficult to recognise (Hendry, 1980; Shaeffer, 1981) Secondly, once the event has been put into a 'UFO framework' it can reconstruct the memory of the event and so later recollections will be of a UFO rather than anything else.

Yet these explanations are still partial. They show how it is possible for an interest in UFOs to occur, but an interest in space subjects plus an introduction to the subject of UFOs is not enough. One more factor is vital, although it need not be separated from the second stage by any length of time as is implied here.

The labelling of UFOs as a mystery : Why do some people doubt the official explanation for what UFOs are? Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the private consumption of books is conducive to the development of views at odds with the surrounding milieu (Riesman, 1965). The book "tends to be a solvent of authority" and thus those accustomed to reading a great deal will not find it difficult to hold controversial views.

Secondly, most UFO books themselves ridicule the official explanation for UFO experiences and so the stance towards the official position is created in the literature. Also science fiction films and books frequently portray a central character type which is that of a lone individual who is 'open-minded' enough to accept an event such as the landing of aliens, which is ridiculed by the authorities, and turns out to be correct.[1] There is thus a readily available social role for them to adopt. This role is itself built upon common cultural elements such as American individualism and the frontier ethic. In fact, the acceptance of a view which is at odds with the official position is almost a necessary feature of 'frontier science'.

Lastly, explanations of UFO events, those given in media reports especially, are frequently totally inadequate. This is partly due to a deliberate debunking policy to prevent the possibility of public hysteria (Jacobs, 1975).

Once UFOs have been defined as a mystery, a particular perspective has been adopted which encourages the search for information about the topic.

Seeking for more information about UFOs : At this stage, individuals have adopted an 'information seeking' or 'research' perspective on UFOs, a state which is clearly similar to that described by Balch and Taylor (1977) and others with regard to religious or metaphysical seekers. In this case, rather than seeking for transcendental experience and self-transformation they are researching into the UFO mystery. Although there are obvious differences between researchers and seekers, there are some interesting parallels.

Firstly, like the seeker, the UFO researcher has already accepted an alternative world-view to that of the majority of people in the surrounding society. For the seeker, this is a metaphysical world-view replete, as Balch and Taylor put it, with "... reincarnation, disincarnate (sic) spirits, psychic powers, lost continents, flying saucers and ascended masters." For the ufologists, the world-view regards as plausible, extra-terrestrial entities, Men in Black, government conspiracies, cattle mutilations, psychic phenomena and a whole range of mysteries that are 'unexplained by science', such as the Bermuda Triangle and Nazca Lines. This does not mean that everyone who is a UFO researcher takes these things for granted. The point is that every ufologist has come into contact with this world-view through reading books, is familiar with the perspective and accepts its plausibility.

Secondly, for both UFO researchers and metaphysical seekers, familiarity with the world-view is more important than joining a group. Unlike those who join many religious groups, they do not need close social ties with a group member before they join, nor do they need them in order to find the world-view plausible. Groups are merely an extension of an already-existing orientation to the world and are not necessary for that view to continue. For example, Stupple and Dashti (1977), in their study of subscribers to the Saucerian Press, a small mail order firm that publishes and sells books to those interested in flying saucers, found that the majority did not belong to groups sharing their interest. Readers formed a community with no personal ties. They were "... a mass, bound not together, but by a common source of information". Similarly, Campbell (1978) has argued that religious cults are examples of Troeltsch's category of mystical religion which has a social form that is

> ... simply a parallelism of spontaneous religious personalities whose only bond of union is their common Divine origin, their common spirit of love, and their union in God, which is the free and invisible work of the Divine Spirit. (Troeltsch, 1931, p.744)

What could be the reason for this similarity of social form? Why is it that social bonds seem a secondary consideration where belief is concerned? Possibly it is due to the similar reading habits of those involved. Books have been found to be a fundamental feature of most areas of the cultic milieu (Balch and Taylor, 1977; Mann, 1955; O'Keefe, 1982) and it seems to be this common source of information which unites those with similar interests. But is it possible for books to act as agents of socialisation? Riesman (1965) has argued that modern reading habits are conducive to the emergence of the type of collectivities described above. Where culture is consumed in private, as it is through the medium of books, the reader is joined to an invisible community of similar readers, rather than, as in oral culture, to an immediately present audience. Thus:

> At the same time, while the printed book helped people break away from their family circle and parish, it helped link them into noncontiguous associations of true believers. (p.404)

For those growing up in small towns, the library, as he quotes Arthur Morgan as saying,"was like foster parents".

Depending on the type of book being read, then, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions which are at odds with the immediate cultural environment can be developed. The common ground between metaphysical seekers and UFO researchers lies in a similar private appropriation of certain types of books. These are books presenting an alternative to orthodox views of various fundamental aspects of life, such as the nature of reality, the history of the Earth, and the capabilities of human beings. Participants in different areas of the cultic milieu can be socialised into it by these books and so physical social networks are unnecessary. Resistance to social pressure is reinforced by continued reading.

Thirdly, UFO researchers and metaphysical seekers overlap in their world-view. Many share, for instance, an acceptance of visiting extra-terrestrials and the reality of psychic phenomena. This overlap occurs partly because popular books integrate the various different areas, but also because there is an overlapping communication network. Once the

UFO researcher starts collecting information about UFOs by subscribing to magazines, buying books, attending lectures and the like, they are likely to come into contact with other areas of the cultic milieu. As Campbell (1972) has pointed out in his description of the cultic milieu, an individual entering at one point can move rapidly through the whole range of subjects. This facilitates the creation of syncretic perspectives such as 'New Ufology' (psychic research and ufology). Within the boundaries and general orientation of the milieu, individuals are free to create their own 'world-view'.

The fourth consideration is that both the metaphysical seeker and the UFO researcher are concerned with mysteries. It is extremely difficult to untangle what is meant by such commonly expressed statements as "that's the beauty of UFOs - they're a mystery", but, in the light of the preceding discussion about space subjects, it is probable that one of the meanings is that of 'possibility': that is, the events which happen in science fiction stories and films may actually be happening and if this were so then life would be more meaningful (and exciting). Like the sacred mystery, UFOs exude a charisma which is pregnant with potential meaning. Holzner (1972) describes this rather well:

> Mysteries always promise 'revelation' in the sense that when the mystery is unearthed, it would yield new perspectives that would resolve apparent paradoxes; it then would make the riddles of life transparent. (p.99)

In sum, similarity of social form, overlapping topics and beliefs, and a common concern with 'mysteries' are features which unite metaphysical seekers and UFO researchers. Also, like the metaphysical seekers described by Balch and Taylor (1977), ufologists are not disoriented before they join a group, rather they join in order to pursue their interest further.

Joining a group : If joining a group is merely an extension of an interest in UFOS, why do people bother? Obviously it is because a group offers something and, as mentioned, what it provides depends on whether the group is a national or local one. BUFORA and the other national UFO research organisations can be as non-demanding as an individual wishes. For the subscription fee they receive the publications giving up to date information on UFOs and for many people that is enough. If they wish

to take their interest further, they can receive training and become a UFO investigator with the official backing of the organisation. A local group, on the other hand, offers far more social contact. As we saw, many start as discussion groups and become more seriously involved in investigation once social ties have been formed.

The availability of resources such as time, money and facilities, would seem to play an important part in the extent to which people become committed to UFO organisations, but this does not rule out the role of friendship and ideological commitment. The reasons given for leaving groups showed that time and money were not the only factors involved: conflicting motives, complaints about organisational efficiency, restrictions on individual freedom and the lack of satisfactory results, were also mentioned. The picture is obviously a complicated one. Kanter(1972) has distinguished between three types of commitment: instrumental, affective, and moral. She argues that groups which enable members to form all three kinds are the most successful in maintaining membership. In these, members become invested in the group and find it rewarding (instrumental), they develop strong social ties and a sense of belonging (affective) and gain purpose, direction and meaning to their lives (moral).

The high turnover of membership to national groups like BUFORA and the rapid rise and fall of many local groups, would imply that total commitment of this kind is rarely achieved. This may be because the beliefs encourage an "epistemological individualism" (Wallis, 1974), which hinders the development of groups and makes the "collectivity" or "noncontiguous association of true believers" the most typical social form. However, this is not conducive to the development of co-ordinated and rationalised UFO research and so, of necessity, there are a number of people who are strongly committed to UFO organisations. The recruitment process for this minority may differ in some significant way from the majority but this is unlikely. Both highly committed group members and those that did little except read the literature were included in the research and no differences were noted. How, then, can we account for differences in level of commitment? As mentioned, this is likely to be due to a number of factors: the availability of time and money, the extent to which social ties have been formed, the degree to which ufology has become a significant part of an individual's life, and the rewards which have accrued to them from their investment. Given the above comments about the nature of the beliefs,

an additional factor is likely to be a concern for the development of UFO research.

In conclusion, it was possible to construct a similar model of the process of recruitment to UFO research groups as that devised by Lofland and Stark (1965). Although individuals did not mention any acute tension, they did claim a prior interest in space subjects which may have caused an ambivalent attitude towards science due to the image of science frequently conveyed in popular information about space research. They did not have a religious problem-solving perspective or a religious seeker world-view and they had not reached a turning point in their lives. However, they were able to identify a significant introduction to the topic of UFOs, and they had adopted a research perspective which bore a number of similarities to that of the metaphysical or religious seeker: they were not seeking numinous experience, but they had a common interest in mysteries and an overlapping world-view based upon similar reading habits. Cult affective bonds and a lack of extra-cult bonds were not important in recruitment - potential recruits already espoused the relevant world-view and thus 'converted themselves' in the sense that they chose to increase their commitment to the subject by joining a group. Finally intensive interaction was not necessary for total conversion to occur because conversion to the world-view had already taken place, but friendship bonds were important in maintaining and increasing commitment to a group, as were other factors such as the availability of time and money.

The extent to which UFO researchers resemble metaphysical seekers and the implications this may have for the 'science' of ufology is clearly an important topic and will be further discussed in Part Four. Before then it is necessary to try and explain the existence of the research 'wing' of the UFO movement.

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Footnotes

a) See, for instance, Randles and Warrington "The Gary Case", published by the Manchester UFO Research Association, March 1977.

b) For instance, when asked if members of The British Astronomical Association could be interviewed to compare them with ufologists, they replied: "This line of research is outside the field of our studies."

c) Thirty seven lapsed subscribers were written to during 1980 and 1981, and twenty five replies were received.

d) Seven members of different contactee groups were interviewed during 1981.

e) These details are from personal letters received from groups in response to a request for information about how they began.

f) Subscribers to Northern UFO News are members of the Northern UFO Network, a federation of local groups in the North of England.

g) They emerged during the ten interviews and in response to the open-ended questionnaires.

h) The stages of the Lofland-Stark model seem to operate in a similar way to Smelser's value added process.

i) Cf. the song "After the Goldrush" by Neil Young.

j) The connection between ufology and science fiction have been particularly explored by French writers. See, for example, the work of Bertrand Meheust, and Michel Carrouges.

k) Vetter (1930) found birth order to be an important factor in his analysis of early life experiences of those with atypical social and political opinions. However, although a question about birth order was included in the survey of BUFORA, no significant differences from average were found. Another interesting possibility is that ufologists may have a 'diverger' type of personality (Hudson, 1974).

l) For example, the film "It Came From Outer Space", 1953.

## CHAPTER 4

## HOW CAN THEIR EXISTENCE BE EXPLAINED ?

The data on UFO research groups has shown them to be not a full-time occupation, but, rather, a serious leisure time activity for many of their members. In this way the pursuit of ufology bears many similarities to amateur science which also involves people who are "leisure-time entrepreneurs" (Stebbins, 1980), in that they systematically carry out a complicated and difficult project involving initiative in their leisure time, in contrast to popular leisure which is primarily nonserious.

All the same, ufologists are not pursuing a recognised amateur science; in fact, in some ways they are similar to members of cults in that they have distinctive reading habits, an ambiguous attitude towards science, and many seem to hold mystical beliefs. More importantly, however, their activities are directed towards changing science and also popular opinion. Their aim is to change the status of UFOs from a slightly ludicrous subject, to one deserving serious scientific study and public attention. It is this desire to bring about change which makes it appropriate to view UFO research groups as a social movement, as this is one of the major identifying features:

> A social movement is a conscious collective, organised attempt to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order by non-institutionalized means. (Wilson, 1973 )

There are a number of different ways of classifying social movements ( eg. Aberle, 1966; Turner and Killian, 1957; Wilkinson,1971), but,as one of the main reasons for constructing typologies is in order that comparisons between different movements can be made, it is important to choose a system which will enable the most relevant comparisons to be made, as well as to facilitate an understanding of how the movement arose. In this case, the similarities and differences between aspects of the UFO movement,are of particular interest. Neil Smelser's (1962) typology, which divides social movements according to the kind of belief which motivates them into either norm- oriented or value-oriented, would seem to be useful because these concepts seem to encapsulate the differences between UFO research groups and contactee cults; that is, whereas research groups are primarily concerned to promote investigation into what they see as the neglected topic of UFOs, contactee cults offer moral and spiritual instruction apparently obtained from extra-terrestrials.

However, although Smelser is recognised as a major figure in social movement theory, both his method of categorisation and his theory of the development of episodes of collective behaviour have been subject to criticism and so his concepts must be applied with this in mind.

In his book Theory of Collective Behaviour (1962), Smelser writes that many agitations commonly referred to as social movements or reform movements are undertaken in the name of a norm-oriented belief: that is, one which seeks to restore, protect, modify or create social norms. More particularly it is one which demands a rule, law or a regulatory agency to control the inadequate, ineffective or irresponsible behaviour of individuals.

According to his theory a number of social conditions are necessary for a norm-oriented movement to arise. There must be conducive social structural conditions, social strain, a generalised belief, a precipitating factor, mobilisation and reaction from agencies of social control and these factors have a cumulative effect with each one being necessary for the next to operate as a determinant.[a]

As far as structural conduciveness is concerned, this means that social conditions must be such that demands for modification of norms can take place without simultaneously appearing to demand a more fundamental modification of values.[b] Since social differentiation is typical in our society and political, economic and ethnic cleavages do not coincide on the issue of UFOs, researchers are not forced to generalise their grievances to the value level.

A more specific condition of conduciveness, Smelser writes, is that avenues for agitation must be open and participants must perceive a precarious balance between their own power and the power of the opposition. Many norm-oriented movements are driven into activity when ambiguity is present between proponents and opponents. This ambiguity can be created by an event or series of events which signifies a new chance for success in overcoming the opposition or a new danger of being defeated by the opposition. Did such a state of ambiguity exist prior to the emergence of UFO research groups ?

The answer is Yes: In 1948 and 1949 the US Air Force was officially investigating UFOs, and there was serious discussion of UFOs in the media. For instance, a 'memorandum to the press' of a twenty-two page report on UFOs issued on April 27, 1949, concluded that UFOs "are not a joke" and that questions remain. Then, on December 27, 1949, USAF issued a press release titled 'Project Saucer Discontinued' in which all reports were explained and the Air Force project (Project Grudge) was disbanded. Finally, in January 1950, Major Donald Keyhoe's article 'Flying Saucers are Real' was published in the magazine True , causing a sensation. Keyhoe was a very credible writer, a graduate of the US Naval Academy and Marine Corps Officers' School, who had

been a pilot during World War Two, until retired to become Chief of Information at the Civil Aeronautics, Department of Commerce. In other words, he was seen as an important and influential figure with access to inside information, and he was putting forward evidence to support the fact that UFOs were extra-terrestrial craft and that there was a government cover-up about them.

Those who had come to believe that UFOs were important and that they might be extra-terrestrial, following the serious discussion of such possibilities in the media, were faced with a situation of potential defeat to these views because the US Air Force project had been abandoned and UFOs had been dismissed as unimportant. Yet, almost immediately afterwards, they were given new hope because Keyhoe showed that there was evidence that UFOs were real and that he had penetrated a government conspiracy of silence. The conspiracy theme was reinforced by Keyhoe's book UFOs are Real which was published later in the year, and also by Frank Scully's book Behind the Flying Saucers. This confusing state of affairs was not resolved during 1951, and, in January 1952, the first UFO research group, APRO, was formed.

The second factor in Smelser's theory is structural strain in the social system. For instance, he considers that many social movements stem from the complex and multiple strains resulting from industrialisation, urbanisation commercialisation of agriculture and colonial domination. Also said to be frequently involved in social movement recruitment is real or apparent loss of wealth, power or prestige among sections of society and strain caused by discrepency between expectations and material conditions - that is, 'rising expectations' or 'relative deprivation'.

It is possible to point to factors which might be classed as strain of this kind. For example, from the data it appears that UFO research groups are largely composed of those in the lower-middle and middle classes and a number of writers have argued that some sections of the middle classes are likely to feel particularly insecure because they feel threatened by the forces of big business on the one hand and powerful trade unions on the other (Parkin, 1974). Studies have shown that there has been a marked increase in middle class militancy and extra-parliamentary activism over the last twenty years (King and Nugent, 1979) and so it is possible that the UFO research movement is another manifestation of middle class anxiety.

Also, it could be that the technological wizardry of the spaceflight revolution created expectations for a miraculous end to social problems, particularly among those who were keenly interested in space exploration, a promise which turned rather sour at the end of World War Two. Apart from expectations about changing material conditions, the spaceflight revolution

also popularised the notion of the existence of intelligent life on other planets, through science fiction ( Beinbridge, 1976). The appearance of new knowledge is also mentioned by Smelser as likely to cause strains and the possibility of extra-terrestrial life has many social implications, not only in terms of how they might regard the human race, but also their legal rights should they land on Earth - themes which were clearly present in the science fiction film "The Day the Earth Stood Still" which appeared in 1951, and also in contactee literature.

The obvious objection to explanations in terms of structural strain is the lack of specificity in connecting such general processes as those described, with individual experiences and motivation. Indeed, many criticisms of Smelser's theory are directed at the concept of structural strain and the accompanying notion of relative deprivation ( see Marx and Wood, 1975, for a summary ).

In Chapter 3 , the use of relative deprivation as an explanation for social movement recruitment was examined in some detail and an alternative model was constructed; one linking broad cultural trends such as an interest in space exploration, to more specific factors such as the emergence of an interest in UFOs, disagreement over the official explanation of what UFOs are, and a decision to try and solve what is perceived as the 'UFO mystery'.

As the notion of structural strain was found to be unnecessary in explaining why individuals join UFO research groups, its use in accounting for the origin of the UFO research movement must also be questioned, although as Smelser himself comments, factors promoting the initial generation of a movement may differ from those involved in subsequent recruitment to it. Given the problems associated with historical research, it would seem unwise to place too much emphasis on the concept of structural strain in the origin of the UFO research movement, although it is difficult to reject the concept completely when the proximity to the end of World War Two and the cold war situation are taken into account.

The third element in the growth of a norm-oriented social movement in Smelser's theory, is the growth of a generalised belief.[c] Do those in UFO research groups share a belief which diagnoses forces and agents making a failure of some normative regulation and including some sort of programme, such as passing a law or creating a regulatory agency which will control, damage or punish the responsible agent ?

In describing the aims of UFO research groups it became clear that they work upon the following assumptions: that UFOs are 'real' - that is,

unexplained and possibly of extra-terrestrial origin; that scientists have not investigated them properly and therefore they must be encouraged to do so; and that governments are covering up information about UFOs and this must be made public. In other words, the forces and agents which are making a failure of normative regulation are twofold: the government which is not keeping the public properly informed and scientists who are not carrying out the investigation of UFOs in a scientific manner.

It would seem that ufologists do share a norm-oriented generalised belief. However, the concept of the generalised belief has received considerable criticism. For example, Stallings (1973) mentions that in his study of the environmental movement, he found there was a great deal more diversity among environmentalists as to the agents responsible for environmental degradation, than Smelser's conceptualisation would have predicted. He considered the findings to imply that assumptions of consensus among like-minded individuals as the basis for order and organisation were unwarranted. In fact, he suggests that there were two contrasting hypotheses on this issue in social science: the once described how initially heterogenous interests coalesce into a specific movement organisation; and the other, how initial homogeneity gives way to an institutionalised apparatus more tolerant of differences.

Stallings's conclusion is that homogeneity of belief is not a necessary element in episodes of collective behaviour although it may occur in some cases. In the environmental movement the degree of homogeneity of belief in a local groups was found to decrease from the centre to the periphery He interpreted this as an indication that collective action by social movement organisations resulted from emergent internal processes and structures rather than initial consensus among movement participants.

In the UFO research movement too, there appears to be more than one agency considered responsible; the governments and scientists. An examination of Smelser's examples shows that many of these also see more than one agent responsible. For example, supporters of the Townsend Plan found generalised economic threats in a system which left the aged isolated, and poor; and generalised moral threats in tobacco, liquor, betting and the laziness of the young. They also singled out political authorities (especially Roosevelt and the Supreme Court) as obstacles to the realisation of their design to eradicate these evils.

In fact nowhere does Smelser say that the belief must single out only one agent. Nor does he say that everyone in a movement has to believe the same thing. The 'generalised' nature of the belief refers to its generalising elements rather than to its acceptance by everyone. That is, the beliefs are so general that they cannot be disconfirmed. In the UFO

movement, for instance, when classified files on UFOs are released and found to contain nothing of interest, they are said to be not the most important ones, and when classic UFO cases are investigated scientifically and found to be hoaxes or misperceptions, they are said to be 'not the really difficult ones'. Also there is the exaggerated potency of normative beliefs: it is thought that a solution to the UFO mystery will cause 'a revolution in current understanding of the world'. Beliefs of the 'anything is possible'kind verge on the magical.

The problems identified by Stallings, though, are important ones. How many people must believe the same thing for a movement to exist ? How much diversity can be tolerated ? Does consensus bring the movement into being or does consensus emerge after a movement has been formed ? As far as the last question is concerned, it seems from the UFO movement that both models of consensus are necessary. Without some unifying belief it is difficult to see where the motivation for organisation would come from. Why would anyone band together into a UFO research group if they accepted the conclusions of Project Blue Book ? Clearly all of them had to believe that the government investigation was inadequate and implicit in that belief is the notion that UFOs are more than misperceptions, hysteria or hoaxes. However, the concept of the generalised belief seems to be intended as an ideal type abstract of the ideas which are present when a movement emerges, in which case it is not meant to be an empirical generalisation or average. The extent to which people accept all elements of the belief will vary. Also, once the movement has come into existence, adherence to the generalised belief seems less necessary. Smelser himself mentions that: "...many participants capitalize on the momentum of the episode itself."

Not only that, but it seems to me that some consensus must emerge after the movement has been formed as well. The original belief is too general to be useful in the implementation of organisational aims. For instance, a UFO research group which wishes to 'scientifically investigate UFOs' must come to some agreement on what that scientific investigation entails. Such agreements arise out of the development of the movement and do not exist prior to it. Also if two or more goals are involved, some groups within the movement may place greater emphasis on one rather than the other; that is, specialisation might occur. In addition, the importance of different elements of the belief may change over time - perhaps the investigatic of UFOs will become more important that the government cover-up of information.

The fourth factor which is necessary for a social movement to occur is one which creates a sense of urgency and hastens mobilisation for action. According to Smelser, the precipitating factor marks the sudden establishment of symbolisation of one of the conditions of conduciveness or strain, thus focusing the belief on a particular person, event or situation. Looking at

the UFO research movement, the event which seems to have crystallised the conducive conditions, was the publication of Donald Keyhoe's article accusing the government of a conspiracy to cover up information about the reality of UFOs. Unfortunately,in retrospect,it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what role the article played,because the first UFO research group (APRO) was not officially formed until some months afterwards (although mobilisation may have begun earlier).

Mobilisation itself is usually a long and complicated procedure, although in certain respects the pattern may be standardised. Smelser illustrates this by quoting Schlesinger who, in describing the activities of the humanitarians in the first half of the nineteenth century, points to a number of steps: the first was to choose an "imposing" name for the organisati the second to obtain "a list of respectable names" as "members and patrons", the third to hire "a secretary and an adequate corps of assistants", then "a band of popular lecturers" to act as agents to the general public. Finally, "subsidiary societies" must be "multiplied over the length and breadth of the land". Apart from the hiring of a secretary and a band of assistants, the UFO research movement appears to have followed the same pattern, relying on volunteers to further its cause rather than hired staff. Also its growth seems to have proceeded by accident rather than design; that is, as a series of largely disconnected groups rather than a coherent set of subsidiary societies organised around a central body.

The main difference seems to lie in the question of leadership. With so many small groups in existence, each carrying out research in its own way, no clear leaders exist. Inter-group competition and in some cases open hostility have been quite common, at least in Britain. In 1978, for instance, BUFORA and the Northern UFO Network were not on speaking terms, although they have since resolved their conflict. Co-ordination, particularly in areas such as the standardisation of UFO reports proved difficult because each group wanted to collect information and control its activities in its own way. But the biggest headache of all seems to have been the lack of agreement over suitable spokesmen for the movement and the control of publicity in general. Frequently, those who appear on TV, radio and in the press, do not represent the views of many of their fellow members and they are also often inexperienced at presenting the views they wish to convey, rather than those the media wishes to impose upon them.

UFO research groups are in no way illegal, in fact, as mentioned earlier, they have in some instances been affiliated to institutes of higher education, but they have been subject to a certain amount of pressure from agencies of social control. This was particularly the case during the 1950s, when the US government viewed interest in UFOs with some alarm, due to certain indirect

national security dangers arising from UFO reports. The dangers were outlined in the CIA sponsored Robertson Panel report which appeared in 1953. They were due to the "clogging of military channels of communication by irrelevant reports", to the "difficulty in distinguishing phenomena from possible enemy aircraft", and to "the possible susceptibility of the public to mass hysteria by skilful hostile propaganda." On this last point, the panel went so far as to warn of:

> ...The cultivation of a morbid national psychology in which skilful hostile propaganda could induce hysterical behaviour and harmful distrust of duly constituted authority. (Story, 1980, p.92

In the light of these conclusions, they recommend that not only should UFOs be stripped of the "aura of mystery" which they had acquired, but also that the two major private UFO research organisations should be watched because of their "potentially great influence on mass thinking" if widespread sightings occurred and the possibility that such groups could be used for subversive purposes (Jacobs, 1975).

The discrediting of ufology implicit in this suggestion is probably partly responsible for the subsequent Air Force attempts to provide explanation for all UFO sightings, no matter how ludicrous the explanation involved, and also for the 'cranky' image which the subject quickly acquired. The CIA response seems to have helped to provide ufologists with a deviant status with which they could identify, a position which probably encouraged the growth of conspiracy theories ( and added fuel to the idea of a government cover-up), in order to explain their deviant status.

In conclusion, the emergence of the UFO research movement in the early 1950s, makes it difficult to avoid seeing its origin in social anxiety created by the disturbing end to World War Two and the cold war situation which followed. More directly, however, it seems as though the initial widespread publicity given to the possibility that UFOs were something strange, followed by the US government's dismissal of UFOs as a subject demanding investigation, heightened anxiety in some people and encouraged the formation of civilian research groups. Mobilisation was probably encouraged by Donald Keyhoe's article on the government conspiracy to cover up information about the reality of UFOs, and by his book UFOs are Real. Those who joined initially could well have been from among those in the middle classes who had taken a particular interest in space exploration and other areas of technological development, but were beginning to have misgivings about the direction developments were taking, both in terms of threats to individual freedom from growing bureaucracy and the uses made of new technology.

The individualistic orientation of those involved encouraged the growth of a large number of independent organisations which failed to co-operate to any great extent, resulting in, among other things, a lack of control over media representations of ufology. Their 'crank' image was further encouraged by US government fears about the possible security risk attendant upon a widespread interest in UFO reports and their determination to strip the subject of its 'aura of mystery' . The operation to discredit ufology also seems to have helped ufologists develop a slightly deviant self-image, so making them more susceptible to conspiracy theories and the notion of a government cover up,[d] in order to explain their low status in the public eye.

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Footnotes

a) Thus the necessary conditions are linked together in this process, which Smelser refers to as a 'value added' one, because each is necessary for the next to operate as a determinant and together the necessary conditions constitute the sufficient conditions for the episode of collective behaviour. The accumulation of necessary conditions are viewed as an analytic, not a temporal process.

b) The concepts 'values' and 'norms' are taken from Talcott Parsons's components of social action. These are: values, norms, mobilisation of motivation,and facilities. These components are seen as occupying an hierarchical order with values occupying the most fundamental position.

c) The generalised beliefs are said to reduce the ambiguity created by conditions of structural strain. The simplest general belief is that of hysteria which marks a focusing of the generalised powers and forces inherent in anxiety - a focusing towards concrete negative outcomes. Hysteria reduces the ambiguity inherent in a situation by positing completely omnipotent forces and explaining, reporting, and predicting events as manifestations of the operation of these forces.

d) Herbert Strentz in his survey of press coverage of UFOs between 1947 and 1966 found no evidence that there was a conspiracy to hide from the public the fact that UFOs were real. He writes:

> '...restrictions on information about UFOs were more likely to result from Air Force belief that news coverage created flying saucer reports than from any desire to mislead or trick the public.' (p.237)

# PART THREE: CONTACTED CULTS

# CHAPTER 1

## WHAT ARE THEY ?

Contactee cults are those UFO groups which are organised around an individual or individuals who claim to be in contact with extra-terrestrial entities. The first person to gain any great publicity from an alleged contact with space beings was the American, George Adamski. His book, which was co-authored with the English writer, Desmond Leslie, was entitled Flying Saucers Have Landed and appeared in 1953. Following publication, Adamski became a celebrity and toured the world, speaking to millions of people and reportedly being granted private audiences with Queen Juliana of the Netherlands and Pope John XXIII. Although he died of a heart attack in 1965, the George Adamski Foundation, based in California, continues to cater to his disciples who describe their mentor as a former "author-lecturer on Unidentified Flying Objects, space travel, Cosmic Philosophy, and Universal Laws of Life" (Story, 1980).

Adamski may have been the first to gain international recognition but he was not actually the first to publish an account of a meeting with spacemen. The year before, George Van Tassel had published a pamphlet describing his contact with aliens called I Rode a Flying Saucer. Van Tassel organised the first gathering for those interested in contactees in the spring of 1953 and this event, known as the Giant Rock Space Convention, attracted large crowds between 1954 and 1970. He also founded the Ministry of Universal Wisdom, incorporated in 1958, and the related College of Universal Wisdom, organisations concerned with the advancement of "science and scientific philosophy", (Story, 1980).

Other contactees followed in swift succession: Truman Bethurum's book Aboard a Flying Saucer appeared in 1954, as did Daniel Fry's The White Sands Incident. Fry is generally considered to be the most technically oriented of the famous contactees and is described on the dust jacket of the 1966 publication of his book as "an internationally known scientist, researcher and electronics engineer who is recognised by many as the best-informed scientist in the world on the subject of space and space travel." Far less concerned with technology was Orfeo Angelucci, whose book The Secret of the Saucers, published in 1955, attracted the attention of the

psychologist, Carl Jung, because of the great deal of religious and spiritual symbolism it contained. Jung, who devoted most of the Epilogue of his book Flying Saucers (1977) to Angelucci's account, concluded:

> ...Orfeo's book is an essentially naive production which for that very reason reveals all the more clearly the unconscious background of the UFO phenomenon ... The individuation process, the central problem of modern psychology, is plainly depicted in it in an unconscious, symbolic form ... (p.166)

The major contactees, such as those mentioned above, were all American, although Britain did produce one minor figure. This was Cedric Allingham whose account of a meeting in North Scotland with space beings from Mars was published in 1954. The dust jacket of his book Flying Saucer From Mars describes him as "... no mystic but a trained scientific observer with considerable astronomical knowledge".

What were the main elements of the accounts given by most of the major contactee figures? Firstly, the aliens were beautiful beings from a utopian planet; secondly, they took the contactee for a ride in their spacecraft and provided him with information about their civilisation, its technology, cultural achievements and the like; thirdly, they warned that the human race was headed for destruction because of materialism and the use of atomic weapons; fourthly, they told the contactee that he had a mission to tell of his experience with the aliens and the information and advanced knowledge which they gave him, so that the calamity, which would also endanger other planets, might be averted.

From this outline of the leading contactees, it is clear that they embraced both religion and science. That is, their accounts had scientific pretentions and yet also contained religious symbols and themes, and this will be examined in greater detail later in the chapter. Before then, it is important to bring the contactee phenomenon up to date: have any contactees emerged since that first batch in the 1950s and what kind of contactee organisations exist today?

In the 1960s, accounts of contact with extra-terrestrials which received widespread publicity were of a different nature. Rather than 'technological angels' (Jung, 1959), the aliens were cold and detached scientists who abducted people in order to conduct tests on them. One of the first of these cases was that of Betty and Barney Hill who claimed to have had a frightening encounter with a UFO in 1961. The full account of the apparent abduction

and tests by aliens, which emerged subsequently, was described by John Fuller in his book The Interrupted Journey (1966).

Occasional accounts of contact with benevolent space beings still occur, however. In 1973, a Frenchman, Claude Vorilhon, was said to have met aliens from Elohim, a deep-space planet. They gave him the name 'Rael' and, after telling him how they had created the human race, gave him the mission of diffusing their messages throughout the Earth and building an embassy for the Elohim. As before, one of the messages of the aliens was that, if the human race cannot control its aggression, it will destroy itself, but, if science is used with wisdom, it will bring world peace with plenty of food for everyone.[a]

More numerous than those who claim actual physical contact with extra-terrestrials, are those who claim to be in telepathic communication with them. Although claims of telepathic contact with aliens had been made before,[b] that of George King who founded the Aetherius Society in 1956 seems to have been among the first to suggest that the aliens were technologically, as well as spiritually, advanced: his communicators convey their information using technical jargon and their activities involve all manner of complicated machinery, as well as spiritual forces.[c]

Since the 1950s, a number of organisations have originated with those who claim telepathic contact with aliens: World Creativity who publish Helios News,[d] and the Cosmic Circle of Fellowship studied by Schutz (1973; 1980), for instance. Also UFO researchers are sometimes asked to investigate individuals who claim this type of communication with aliens.[e]

What of contactee organisations? Many of the organisations formed in the 1950s by contactees and their followers still exist, but, if Buckner's (1965) account of one such organisation is typical, they are not thriving. Yet perhaps his verdict that there has been a loss of interest in contactees was a little premature. The Raelian Movement formed by Claude Vorilhon, a 1970s version of the 1950s organisations, still seems to be receiving media attention. Also, organisations formed around those who claim telepathic contact with aliens appear to be doing quite well. The Aetherius Society, for instance, seems very much alive, and The Atlanteans, a similar British-based group, still publish a regular magazine and advertise workshops in "The Art of Self-Healing" and the like. On the other hand,only six groups producing publications of the contactee type were discovered during my analysis of UFO publications[f] and so they would appear to be far less numerous than UFO research organisations, although the failure to obtain information about these groups may be due to their secrecy rather than their scarcity.

As I have mentioned, contactee groups are usually categorised as cults, but the actual definition of the term is rarely considered despite the fact that the cult category is by no means a clear one. Excluding the numerous anthropological studies of cults and referring only to those carried out in modern Western society, a number of defining characteristics have been suggested. Of course, the question of definition is not the only one to have been addressed by those interested in modern cults, but it has proved to be an important one. Some writers have concentrated on deviancy from orthodox religion as the essential feature of the cult (e.g. Lofland, 1966; Buckner, 1965). Others have singled out the presence of a radical individualism (e.g. Martin, 1965; Ellwood, 1973; Wallis, 1974a); and mystical religion has been said to be the important feature by others (e.g. Troeltsch, 1932; Campbell, 1977; 1978; Swatos, 1982).

The problem with the use of deviancy as a defining feature is that in modern society it is difficult to distinguish a 'conventional consensus' (Campbell, 1977; Wallis, 1974a). The presence of a radical individualism would seem to be a more useful defining feature, although Campbell (1977) has criticised this for being too vague a concept. Ellwood (1973), however, attempted to make the term more specific by suggesting that individualism in cults lies not in the fact that members are more strongly affirmative of religious freedom than groups such as the Unitarians, or that there is no close communion or participation mystique, rather it means that individual experience is the grounds for knowledge and so unity is based upon individual experience instead of the family, social factors or verbalised doctrinal conformity.

Wallis (1974a) has used the concept of individualism to define the cult in a structural rather than a content-oriented manner. That is, in where the source of authority lies, rather than in the beliefs of the group. The cult is "epistemologically individualistic" in that the individual member determines what components of the belief system offered will be accepted. Other features of the cult, such as its "undefined boundaries" and "fluctuating belief systems" follow from this aspect. In contrast, sects are "epistemologically authoritarian" in that they possess some ultimate source of authority beyond the individual member which determines what does, or does not, fall within the boundaries of the movement's ideology. Clearly this analysis is not at odds with that of Ellwood, although he places an additional emphasis on individual experience. Given the importance of individualism in our society, however, it is doubtful how useful this concept

can be when used alone: what is to separate cults from do-it-yourself clubs? A definition in terms of structure alone is probably not sufficient.

The use of mysticism as a defining feature is decidedly a content-based one, but one not incompatible with that described above, in that individualism is an important part of mysticism. Daniel O'Keefe (1982) considers the basic techniques of mysticism to be strongly related to patterns of magical training spread throughout the world. He suggests, therefore, that, like magic, mysticism involves the private use of religious symbolism:

> It is the cultivation of individual mystic experience, expropriated from collective experiences.
> (O'Keefe, 1982, p.218, emphasis in original)

Mystical religion, rather than just mysticism, however, involves more than just individual experience of the numinous, according to Troeltsch (1931). He separates the two and describes mystical religion as also possessing a distinctive set of beliefs, which include the doctrine of the Divine Seed or Spark which lies hidden within every soul, and the notion of evolution towards union with God.

Campbell (1978) has suggested that new religious movements represent an upsurge in this type of religion and that the cult corresponds to the 'mystical community' described by Troeltsch. However, Ellwood (1973) is less happy about the identification of modern cults with Troeltsch's category of mystical religion, because he considers this to refer primarily to Christianity, whereas many new religious movements draw upon other mystical traditions, such as those of India and the Orient. Instead, he finds the common denominators of the mysticism concerned in the new religious movements in the USA, to be those of the Shamanic tradition: the charismatic seer, the spirit band, learned and spontaneous ritual, anti-historicism, the bringing of wisdom from far away geographical or supernatural places, healing, and, above all, techniques of ecstasy. Ellwood refers to this as the "alternative reality tradition".

Are 'mystical religion' and the 'alternative reality tradition' two distinct phenomena? Given that Troeltsch could well have intended his category of mystical religion to be a general one (although it was drawn from Christianity) and the fact that he noted the syncretic nature of this type of religion, the distinction may be a negligible one.

In sum, there seems to be agreement over the importance of individual knowledge and experience as the defining feature of the cult, but, unless this is combined with something more, it would appear to be too vague a definition. The additional content required would seem to be some form of mysticism, although there is a certain amount of disagreement over what this involves. Are its important features the Divine Seed and spiritual evolution, or a charismatic seer, techniques of ecstasy and healing? Contactee cults need to be examined in more detail and from this it will be possible to see how they relate to the concept of the cult and its definition. For example, what exactly do those in this type of cult do ?

Although few quantitative details have been gathered about members of contactee cults, it was possible to identify a number of important activities from previous studies, analysis of publications, and interviews.

Reading : As has been mentioned a number of times before, reading is an important activity to those within the cultic milieu. The most popular books for those in contactee cults seem to be those which are termed by participants as "Aquarian Age". What kind of subjects come under this rubric? The magazine Foresight, a well-known and well-established British magazine, whose editors believe that governments have already made contact with the advanced extra-terrestrials which they consider to be visiting the Earth, reviewed eighty-four books in twenty-one of the issues published between April/May 1976 and Dec/Jan 1981.[g] A large number of these (20) were about the Western esoteric tradition (that is, Hermetic philosophy, the Kabbalah,[h] Theosophy, etc.), nine were on Eastern religions, eight on divination (such as astrology, the Tarot, dowsing), six on personal biographies of spiritual development, five on psychic research, four on 'strange mysteries', three on alternative healing methods and only two were on UFOs and both of these were about the messages of contactees.

The rest (13) were about a variety of subjects from fiction to directories of 'New Age' groups. This confirms the view that metaphysical topics are the chief concern of contactee cult members and that it is the messages of the contactees which are of most interest rather than the encounters themselves.

Spiritual development : The practice of techniques which were considered to develop the spiritual aspects of the self, or make them more sensitive to the spiritual side of life, was an activity which most felt they ought to engage in and, if they did not, they frequently expressed guilt. As one commented:

> I don't do any psychic development although I know I ought to... I'm fascinated by auras - I can see them sometimes at our meetings but I know I should really spend time developing it.

The messages of contactees often contain information about techniques and of course there are popular books, such as the 'Paths to Inner Power' series (Aquarian press), which include a variety of techniques for relaxation, health, the development of psychic abilities, the practice of magic, and the like. Also many groups have 'circles' or meetings where techniques are taught and practised: Wallis (1974), Balch and Taylor (1977) and Stupple and McNeece (1979) all mentioned the practice of spiritual techniques in the groups they studied.

Spiritual service : Closely associated with the above activity was that of helping others with the use of any psychic powers or abilities that had been developed. The most common expression of this was in healing and most of the groups I contacted ran a healing service. Some also offered advice and answers to questions by the use of divination, and these services were frequently advertised in the literature published by the groups. None of those I was in contact with offered their services on a professional basis, yet it is obvious from commercial magazines like Prediction and from local newspapers that this type of activity is widespread. Are professional occultists a completely separate population from cult members? Organisations such as the Aetherius Society certainly offer themselves as training centres but it would be interesting to find out just how many of those who pay large sums of money to take courses in the 'spiritual sciences' actually practise them professionally, because the metaphysical world-view includes ethical objections to the use of 'spiritual' abilities for profit.

This places would-be professionals in a difficult moral position.

The desire to be of service in society has also been noted by Barker (1983), who points out that Moonies often come from backgrounds where the values of duty and service have been instilled into them from an early age. She writes:

> They have learned to want to see themselves as conscientious doers, not worthless drifters or self-seeking opportunists. But they have no idea what to do or how to be of service. (p.46)

The Unification church helps people to feel that they are leading valuable lives. However, it is not only the social background which encourages this attitude; the whole notion of spiritual development and evolution incorporates it and so socialisation into the metaphysical world-view can produce the desire to be of service to others.

Meetings : Studies of contactee cults suggest that two different types of meeting are usual. The first involves a small group centred around an individual who transmits the messages of space beings (Festinger, Riecken and Schachter, 1964; Balch and Taylor, 1977; Stupple and McNeece, 1979) and the second involves a larger group which invites speakers, some of whom claim to be in contact with extra-terrestrials (Buckner, 1965; Schutz, 1973; 1980). These two types of meeting seem to be associated with different religious organisations. For example, in his study of UFO organisations in the USA, Schutz (1973; 1980) distinguishes between the religious cult, formed around leaders who claim to be direct 'trance channels' for extra-terrestrials and involving a select membership, and the platform society which invites many different outside speakers and has a more open membership. The religious subculture of the group studied by Stupple and McNeece (1979) were "united in a common mood of devotion and uncritical acceptance of Gordon as their charismatic leader" whereas the occult subculture not only studied their leader's newsletter but also followed George Adamski's course on telepathy.

If Wallis's (1974a) distinction between cults and sects is applied to these different types of contactee groups (or sections of a group[1]), it would appear that the religious group tends towards the sect-type, whilst the platform (or occult) group is more clearly cult-like. That is, the religious group is more "epistemologically authoritarian"; the leader(s)

is in a better position to state that his/her teachings are 'the Truth', rather than 'one aspect of the Truth', and is therefore superior to others.

This division into cults and sects seems to be supported by material gathered from the analysis of publications produced by contactee groups, which showed two extremes corresponding to the concepts of 'world rejection' and 'world affirmation' (see Chapter 3, Part One). Some groups issued publications containing material of a millennial nature with an accent on revolution, whereas others emphasised a gradual spiritual evolution through techniques of self-development. Sect-like groups are more likely to show a tension between themselves and the rest of society because their claim to 'absolute Truth' challenges sources of authority within the wider society, whereas cults are more tolerant because of their relativistic concept of truth (Wallis, 1974a).

Instead of using the terms 'religious' and 'occult', or 'platform society' and 'religious cult', then, it would seem more useful to place different contactee cults (or sections of a cult) on a dimension which has the sect at one end and the cultic milieu at the other. At one extreme the cult is on the brink of re-absorption into the cultic milieu where it is difficult to choose among the bewildering array of 'truths', whereas, at the other, it is about to become the repository of 'Truth'.

Finally, in what way are there different levels of involvement for those in contactee cults? The usual method of division as far as religious groups are concerned, is between believers and non-believers, but a number of researchers have suggested that this is not appropriate in the case of cults because joining is part of a 'seeking lifestyle' (Balch and Taylor, 1977; Straus, 1976; Campbell, 1972; 1978). As I described in Chapter 3, Part One this lifestyle is the result of an emphasis on spiritual evolution and self-development which occurs in the metaphysical world-view, and on the mystical desire for inner experience of God. This means that cult members may not be believers in the usual sense of the word. For instance, Balch and Taylor (1977) remark that not many were completely convinced by Bo and Peep when they heard their message and many remained sceptical for as long as they belonged to the cult, but set aside their doubts in order to find out what would happen. Rather than being converts in the usual sense in which a whole new world is entered, then, they are engaging in what Travasino (1970) describes as 'alternations':

> Alternations are transitions to identities which are prescribed or at least permitted within the person's established universe of discourse. (p.601)

The role of seeker encourages the experiencing of different 'methods' or 'paths' in the pursuit of spiritual growth and development, and even disappointing experiences are accepted without loss of the seeking attitude.

Although it does not seem useful to distinguish between believers and non-believers within the cultic milieu, other categorisations are possible. Catton (1957) observed that, in the main, two types of people attended a series of lectures given by a man who claimed to be Christ: seekers who wanted to consider him seriously; and observers who came out of curiosity. Stupple and McNeece (1979) divided the types of people who were interested in the group they studied into three categories: hard core devotees; occult dilettantes; and curiosity seekers. What these divisions have in common is a gradual scale of commitment to a particular group, from the merely curious who are 'shopping around', to the highly committed who are, for the time being, channelling all their energies into one group.

There would appear to be only one major division and that is between those who have adopted the seeking lifestyle and those who have not, yet even this is probably a gradual process, rather than a sudden conversion. Can curiosity seekers be considered to have adopted a seeking lifestyle, for instance? This question will be returned to in the final section of the current chapter.

In sum, members of contactee cults engage in two main activities: learning about esoteric philosophies and techniques, from books and at meetings; and attempting to help others by the use of these techniques, such as through spiritual healing or divination. There would appear to be different types of contactee cult organisations, ranging from loose collectivities to sects, and involvement in these organisations is probably less of an 'all or nothing' process than a gradually increasing commitment to a seeking lifestyle, producing a willingness to 'suspend disbelief' in the teachings offered by cult leaders. In the next chapter we shall look more closely at those who join this type of cult.

Footnotes

a) See publicity pamphlets from the British Raelian Movement, BCM Minstrel, London, WC1.3XX.

b) For instance, the infamous magician, Aleister Crowley, claimed to have had 'astral contact' (i.e. non-physical) with an extra-terrestrial entity named Lam, in 1919. A drawing of this entity, made by Crowley, appeared in an exhibition held in Greenwich Village, New York, the same year, and a photograph of it appears in Grant (1972).

c) For instance, the object of 'Operation Space Magic', launched in 1980, according to their journal Cosmic Voice, was to launch a satellite which will:

> ... orbit the Earth for a minimum of 1,000 Earth years. This Satellite will be constructed so that it is undetectable by either present technology or the evolving scientific technology for the next 1,000 years!... When this satellite is in orbit, at any time during the day or night, the Masters from Gotha or The Adepts will be able to tune into radiations coming directly from the Logi of Saturn, Jupiter, Venus or Neptune, in order to use these powerful, uplifting Spiritual Energies for the betterment of all. (Aug/Sept. 1980)

d) The founders of World Creativity also have an organisation called 'The Institute for Wholelife and Extra-terrestrial Studies' founded "in order to promote the significance of extra-terrestrial experience, phenomena, and communication, through wholelife studies in the forms of symposiums, courses and postal tuition." It uses the teachings of Jamie, a Venusian who is said to be in contact with them.

e) I accompanied a UFO researcher who went to interview one such individual. An account of the case, written by the UFO researcher, was later published in Mufob (No. 14, Spring, 1979, 'A Stranger in the City'). See Appendix B, for details of this magazine.

f) See Chapter IV for the analysis, and Appendix B for details of the publications.

g) This is not a continuous run; there are gaps in my collection.

h) The Kabbalah, a system of Jewish mysticism, is frequently spelt in a variety of different way: Qabalah, Cabbala, Kabbala, etc.

i) In Britain a number of groups seem to include both types of meetings. For instance, World Creativity conducted small informal meetings during which 'Jamie' and other extra-terrestrials communicated, yet they also organised a "Symposium of Extra-terrestrial Experience and Related Subjects" at the Belgrave Hotel, Chester, in June 1981, during which a number of different speakers took the platform. In fact, it seemed quite common for contactee groups to have an 'inner' and 'outer' layer: a small circle for the receipt of messages from aliens and for the development of psychic abilities, and a larger gathering for entertainment, stimulation and potential recruits to the inner body. If this formation is as widespread as it seems to be, it implies that many contactee cults have both sect-like and cult-like sections and this may be a way of overcoming the institutional fragility characteristic of cults.

j) This type of 'conversion' seems to correspond to two of the five types of conversion motifs identified by Lofland and Skonovd (1981). They describe these as: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist, and coercive: and suggest that the intellectual and experimental (which appear to occur in recruitment from the cultic milieu) are on the increase.

## CHAPTER 2

## WHO JOINS THEM ?

There have been a number of studies of contactee cults although obviously these were not conducted specifically to obtain the kind of information of interest to this thesis. The information that can be gathered from them will be supplemented with material acquired during a small number of interviews with those in contactee organisations, and from participant observation.[a] In order to facilitate the comparison between UFO research groups and contactee cults, the material will be arranged as it was in the previous chapter, under five headings: social details, UFO and associated experiences and opinions, religious beliefs, attitudes towards science, and political opinions.

Social details : Only a few social details were given by those studying contactee cults and it is difficult to make generalisations from them. Buckner (1965) describes members of the flying saucer club he studied as mainly elderly women of the upper-working/lower-middle classes, who had a low formal education level. They were widowed or single and in low physical or mental health. It should be noted, however, that Buckner's details were mainly based upon observations and so we must accept his judgement of what constitutes 'mental health'.

Wallis (1974) in a footnote to his study of the Aetherius Society mentioned that those he studied appeared to be different from members of Buckner's group because most of them seemed "altogether normal but for some rather curious beliefs concerning flying saucers". Also one of the types of UFO groups studied by Schutz (1973; 1980) was similar to that of Buckner and this led him to comment:

> As for the characteristics of audiences and meetings outlined by Buckner, we would agree that female, older people, predominate. However, he does appear to exaggerate a bit. In the UFO public platform groups in my sample, men comprised about 30 per cent of the audience, not just 10 per cent as Buckner suggests.(Schutz, 1973)

Balch and Taylor (1977) note that those who joined the nomadic millennial UFO cult which was the object of their study, were ex-members of the counter-culture who were not tied to conventional American life. They write:

> Other things being equal, a man with a good job, a family, and a respectable position in the community is less likely to join a flying saucer cult than a single male living alone or in a commune, with few material possessions and a strong penchant for change and excitement. (p.849)

Finally, members of the Institute for Cosmic Research (Stupple and McNeece, 1979) formed three different subcultures around a man who claimed to be in contact with aliens instructing him to build a flying saucer. Those who formed the religious subculture were either middle class women who were well-established in the group, or new members who were mostly young males. Those in the technical subculture were machine shop owners, skilled craftsmen and semi-skilled technicians and labourers who were interested in the practical details of constructing a flying saucer. The occult subculture consisted of those interested in other areas of the occult, such as the course on telepathy devised by the contactee, George Adamski, but the authors do not mention their social background.

Slightly more ethnographic details are known about those who read books written by the contactees. Stupple and Dashti (1977) collected this type of information in their study of customers of The Saucerian Press, a small American mail order firm that publishes and sells books to those interested in flying saucers. Their survey showed that 28% were in white collar occupations, 16% skilled workers, 15% housewives, 13% students, 12% retired, 7% professional, 6% unskilled, and 3% unemployed; the largest proportion were in the lower-middle class; 41% were over 50 years old; 60% were males; and 47% were married with 41% single. However, only 22% of subscribers belonged to occult and religious groups that studied flying saucers and so readers of contactee literature may be a different population to members of these groups, although they share a common interest in reading about contact with flying saucers.

The few interviews with members of this type of group which I carried out make it no easier to generalise about the social details of those involved in contactee cults. The only observation it is possible to make is that there is support for a view that different populations join different groups: one group consisted mainly of elderly ladies, another was formed around a young couple and had a younger membership, a third consisted mainly of housewives, and a fourth had a core of young men.

Those involved in contactee cults, then, would seem to have a more diverse social background than members of UFO research groups, the majority of whom appeared to be employed men, aged between 21 and 40 years, and from the lower-middle and middle classes (see Chapter V). How do they compare with the membership of cults in general? There is a slight problem in attempting this type of comparison in that a number of different social phenomena have been subsumed under the cult category: many new religious movements are defined in this way and also the occult is often included in this category. Yet these involve a variety of organisational forms, from loose collectivities to highly organised groups. Stark and Bainbridge (1979) have attempted to clarify the various different types of organisation by distinguishing between "cult movements", which are the most organised; "client cults", which closely resemble therapist/patient relationships; and "audience cults", which are very diffuse and largely a consumer activity. Clearly these different types of cult could well involve different populations. Nevertheless, what does the data on the social background of cult members show?

Barker (1983) argues that many of the new religious movements are youth movements and form one aspect of social dissent among young people in Britain, of which the various youth groups (Punks, Skins, Mods, etc.[b]) are another. She presents data to show that those who commit themselves to full-time membership of these new religious movements tend to be young: the average age of British Moonies, for instance, is twenty-six. They are mainly male, are disproportionately drawn from the upper-middle and middle-middle classes, and are well-educated. However, cult membership is by no means solely a youth phenomenon. Truzzi (1972) offers data which indicate that many people outside the youth culture are interested in the occult; Harman (1976) discovered that the mean age of respondents to her survey of Gnostica magazine was 35 years: and Lynch (1978) found the median age of those in the occult group that he studied to be 37 years.

It seems, then, that generalisations about cult membership are difficult to make, probably due to the wide variety of different social phenomena that can be subsumed under the cult category, from popular interest in cultic topics such as UFOs and the occult, to highly organised new religious movements; the membership of contactee cults seems to reflect this diversity whereas the social composition of those involved in the UFO research movement appears more homogeneous.

UFO and associated experiences and opinions : Information about the extent to which members of contactee cults claim to have experienced psychic and UFO events is not often gathered. Stupple and McNeece (1979) found that the highest stratum in the religious subculture of the group that they studied were 'witnesses'; that is, those who testified to miracles, such as spiritual healing and UFO sightings. However, this type of experience was not mentioned as common among other members, in fact the second stratum in the religious subculture were those "unable to have psychic experiences but ready to contribute by asking Gordon the right questions." Among the population of subscribers to the Saucerian Press who read contactee literature, on the other hand, Stupple and Dashti (1977) found 79% who answered 'yes' to a question asking if they had undergone any unusual psychic experiences. When asked to indicate which kind, 24% claimed a UFO sighting and 7% contact with a UFO. The positive response rate dropped off sharply to only 55% for the respondents as a whole.

As far as members of cults in general are concerned, Lynch (1978) discovered that 40% of those in a Southern Californian cult had experienced an altered state of consciousness which was a major factor contributing to their interest in the cult. Nelson (1969) found, during a study of the Spiritualist Movement, that 49% of his respondents reported experiencing a psychic event before joining, and another 34% claimed to have developed psychic abilities afterwards.

Surveys of the general population do not often include questions about psychic and UFO experiences and so it is difficult to make any comparison between cults and the population in general. Greeley (1975) reports that a National Opinion Poll carried out in the USA found that 58% of the population claimed some kind of ESP experience, while Glock and Wuthnow (1979) describe another survey conducted in 1973, in the San Francisco Bay Area, in which 50% of those under 30 years of age and 45% of those over 30 years reported having had ESP experiences. As for UFO experiences, a

poll in the USA in 1973 found that 11% of the population claimed to have seen a UFO.[c] In Britain even fewer surveys have been carried out. A GallupPoll in 1973 found that 56% of the population answered 'yes' to the (clumsy) question:

> Have you ever been somewhere or has something ever happened to you, when you've thought that you've been there before or that it had happened before?

In the same poll, 5% said they had "seen a ghost" at some time.

It is difficult to make any clear comparisons from such sketchy data, but it looks rather as though familiarity with the cult world-view increases the likelihood that psychic and UFO experiences will be reported, although by no means all members claim such experiences. The impression gained during my own research was that psychic and UFO events were taken for granted by members of contactee cults, and they were also positively valued and sought after as evidence of spiritual development. Those who had these experiences were usually given the highest status and various techniques were directed at attaining the ability to have them.

UFO researchers also reported psychic, and particularly UFO, experiences, more frequently than members of the general population, but unlike those in contactee cults they did not appear to be deliberately working towards their attainment. It is in the cultivation of these experiences that members of contactee cults are distinctive.

What kind of beliefs about UFOs do those in contactee cults have? The analysis of publications produced by groups of this kind showed that UFOs were interpreted in a particular way in them. Basically, this was that UFOs were evidence of superior extra-terrestrials who were visiting the Earth in order to help the human race. These extra-terrestrials were usually seen as advanced beings who were aiding humanity in its spiritual development. This basic view was also mentioned in a number of studies of UFO cults (see Buckner, 1965; Stupple and McNeece, 1979; Wallis, 1974). Interviews tended to confirm the opinion that they held this view, although the existence of hostile extra-terrestrials was mentioned more frequently than was suggested by the occasional appearance of this idea in the publications. For instance:

> UFOs are extra-terrestrials - both intelligences working for the good of humanity and those encouraging ignorance are in contact.

> I think there are probably good and evil beings visiting us - I'm not about to drop on my knees before every extra-terrestrial, anyway.

The comments about hostile beings probably indicates the growth of beliefs to take account of the reports of more sinister encounters which have occurred since the original contactees (e.g. Fuller, 1966), but they may also show a greater degree of integration between contactee beliefs and the esoteric tradition, which contains a number of dualist philosophies (such as Anthroposophy) that feature a battle between good and evil forces (Troeltsch, 1931; Steiner, 1908).

Those in contactee cults also seem to believe that there has been a government cover-up of some kind. During interviews they made comments such as:

> Those with a great deal to lose are conspiring to keep information from us. There are organisations which have tremendous power to suppress information.

> There is much more going on than the governments realise ... but they do know that UFOs are intelligent entities which are visiting us and want to help us - in fact they have contacted the extra-terrestrials.

In this respect they are similar to members of UFO research groups[d] and also those who read UFO literature; Stupple and Dashti (1977) found that 92% of respondents in their survey of subscribers to the Saucerian Press believed in a government conspiracy.

As for other beliefs associated with the subject of UFOs, Schutz (1973) remarked that prospective members to one of the contactee cults which he examined were asked to fill in a questionnaire which asked whether they believed in God, reincarnation and flying saucers piloted by space brothers who were here to help us. Those that did were eligible for membership.

However, from my research, contactee cult members do not seem to have the same kind of interest in other 'strange mysteries' as those in UFO research groups. When asked about subjects such as the Bermuda Triangle, Sasquatch, and the work of von Daniken, for instance, there was frequently an attempt to qualify their interest. For example:

> They're interesting, but we don't believe in a continual spiritual dilettanteism; once you know, you must act. Mere intellectual curiosity is pointless.

> I've known about them for some time now and I no longer find them gripping.

The impression gained is that these 'strange mysteries' are no longer seen as very strange, perhaps because they are too familiar with them, or because these subjects have a popular appeal, whereas members of cults have been socialised into a metaphysical world-view which has explanations for most of them (in terms of good and evil forces, hidden masters and the like), and which emphasises practical activity and experience of the numinous; the existence of such a world-view will be examined in more detail in a moment.

Religious beliefs : Studies of contactee cults do not usually mention the attitude towards orthodox religion held by members, but those I interviewed seemed to be quite hostile to it. They made comments such as:

> I can remember challenging traditional church views when I was as young as four or five.

> I don't like Bible-thumping. I'm not religious... I should say I'm a pantheist. Lately I've come to believe that we all have a spark within us that can be ignited.

Yet descriptions of these cults frequently show that there is a Christian content. This was noted by Schutz (1973) and also both Mrs. Keech (Festinger, Riecken and Schachter, 1964) and George King (Wallis, 1974) claimed to be in contact with Jesus. The messages supposedly originating from Him are not orthodox, though. As Balch (1981) points out, the teachings involve a re-interpretation of Christian doctrine; an esoteric or "New Age Christianity", which portrays Jesus as an exemplar rather than a saviour; a fellow human being further along the path of spiritual evolution.

What, then, is the nature of their religious beliefs? A variety of different terms have been used to describe the beliefs of those in contactee cults and cults in general. Buckner (1965) refers to an "occult social world"; Marty (1970) uses the term "occult establishment"; Balch and

Taylor (1977) describe a "metaphysical world-view" and align this with the "alternative reality tradition" mentioned by Ellwood (1973); Tiryakian (1974) prefers the term "esoteric culture"; whereas Campbell (1978) considers Troeltsch's (1931) concept of "mystical and spiritual religion" to be the common denominator. Are all these terms equivalent?

According to Balch (1981), seekers use the term 'metaphysics' to refer to "the study of the ultimate nature of reality which lies beyond the reality of ordinary sensory experience", a description which seems to be identical to that of Tiryakian who writes that esoteric knowledge is a "secret knowledge of the reality of things, of hidden truths" and that it is "of the real but concealed nature of things, of ultimate reality". Thus esoteric and metaphysical would seem to be interchangeable terms. Balch (1981) also writes that this world-view has a long tradition in the West, through the early Gnostics, Neo-platonists, Hermetic philosophers of the Hellenistic period and Kabbalistic magicians and alchemists of the Middle Ages, and he identifies it with the "alternative reality tradition" described by Ellwood (1973), which has its roots in "Platonic wonder and amazement at being itself". This suggests that the "alternative reality tradition" is also an equatable term.

Earlier I argued that Tiryakian's term "esoteric culture" included phenomena which Troeltsch (1931) had described as mysticism (see Chapter IV), in that two of the main elements of esoteric knowledge, that it is a participatory knowledge of ultimate reality, are similar to the central features of mysticism as defined by Troeltsch, who writes that it is "the insistence upon a direct inward and present religious experience". Also Troeltsch writes that Neo-platonism "in principle is the underlying philosophy of all mysticism".

If these terms are as interchangeable as they appear to be then we might expect the beliefs described by Balch and Taylor (1977) as "metaphysical" to include those common to the "mystical and spiritual religion" described by Troeltsch. Is this the case? Balch (1981) describes the teachings of the leader of the group they studied before 'Bo and Peep' appeared on the scene, in some detail.[e] The leader clearly expresses one of the main elements of mystical religion as described by Troeltsch, that of the doctrine of the Divine Seed or Spark which is present in every human being. Balch quotes him as writing:

> Ye are Gods ... and esoteric science declares that the whole immense cycle of human evolution is but the means provided for the unfoldment of that Divine seed within man, bringing to actuality all the marvelous potentiality with which he is endowed. (p.11)

However, esoteric culture cannot be totally identified with mystical religion because it also includes the occult, which Tiryakian defines as:

> ... the intentional practices, techniques or procedures which (a) draw upon hidden or concealed forces in nature or the cosmos that cannot be measured or recognised by the instruments of modern science and (b) which have as their desired or intended consequence empirical results, such as either obtaining knowledge of the empirical course of events or altering them from what they would have been without this intervention. (p.265)

It is no wonder that Balch (1981) reports a dislike of the 'occult label' among those he studied. The term 'occult' has practical connotations and overtones of ritual magic, divination and astrology.[f] It is not equatable with the terms 'metaphysical' or 'esoteric' which include the occult, magic and mysticism. Those with a metaphysical world view are highly likely to express the beliefs of mystical religion but they may or may not practice magic or any of the various occult techniques.

Attitudes towards science : A common feature of contactee cults is the use of technological jargon. Schutz (1973), for instance, remarked that the metaphysics of the religious UFO cult was "definitely a technological one", while Wallis (1974) observed that the Aetherius Society, on the one hand denigrated science and scientists while, on the other, the leader, George King, produced a cosmic scheme which contained scientism and technology. He noted that King had a condescending attitude towards Einstein, claiming he had 'got it wrong'.

Organisations formed by the original contactees also frequently claimed scientific status; Van Tassel's, for instance, was concerned with the advancement of "science and scientific philosophy". Yet the teachings of contactees were often critical of science and scientists. This ambiguous attitude towards science emerged quite clearly during the analysis of publications produced by contactee cults. Their content suggested a view in which science was moving towards an idealist conception of the universe and so, rather than being rejected, was considered inferior to esoteric philosophy, making the condescension understandable.

Interviews reinforced this picture. Science was usually considered to be necesary but under-developed: it was too slow and was far behind the metaphysical view in its understanding of the world. In other words, they reversed the usual model in which science is seen as superior to ancient metaphysics and regarded science as the inferior study. The 'ancient wisdom' contained truly advanced knowledge and the growth of science was a fall into a 'dark age', but science would eventually re-discover that which was known before. For example:

> Science is limited ... a poor narrow shadow of the great wisdom we once possessed.

> It will eventually prove that many of the things we know about are true. It is already moving in that direction - acupuncture, radionics, homeopathy, etc.

> Science is very important but it's an evolving thing and it hasn't evolved to the point where it can understand UFOs yet.

Rather than rejecting science, then, they see it as limited knowledge in comparison with esoteric knowledge which includes science, but goes beyond it. This means that technology and spiritual development are not in opposition, giving rise to apparently incongruous unions between the ethereal and material, as in:

> Eventually, there will be instruments to communicate with the dead, just as we have telephones today. After all, we are only talking about other dimensions, the passage from one state of existence to another.[5]

As noted before, this tendency to unite science and religion was frequently quite overtly proclaimed in the aims of contactee organisations. It seems possible that this intention could explain the ambivalent views: if science is considered to be necessary but incomplete without some spiritual content, then it will be the object of both praise and criticism.

UFO researchers also had an ambivalent attitude towards science but in their case the ambivalence appeared to be due less to a desire to unite science and religion, or an acceptance of the superiority of esoteric knowledge, than to frustration caused by an overly optimistic view of what science was capable of. For them, current science appeared to be 'dragging

its heels', and phenomena such as UFOs, which looked magical, were probably 'future science' and so deserved special attention.

Political opinions : According to Wallis (1974), in the Aetherius Society "alienation from science is matched by alienation from politics. King has claimed that thirteen men have manipulated the world for 2,000 years." However, it does not necessarily follow that, because George King suggests this, cult members believe it. Nor is it clear that conspiracy theories about events represent political alienation.[h]

In the absence of any extensive data on the political opinions of cult members, it is difficult to generalise from the case of the Aetherius Society, but there is some evidence that conspiracy theories may be quite common. Balch (1981) writes that the leader of the group which was later taken over by 'Bo and Peep' believed that

> ... most significant events in the United States are controlled by a secret organisation of 12 men which he called a 'dodonarchy'. (p.13)

Also, those I interviewed tended to interpret events using conspiracy theories involving the existence of powerful men under the control of positive and negative forces. Yet at the same time there was frequently strong support for minority political parties and pressure groups, such as CND and the Ecology Party: one group tried to get me to take part in a scheme directed at setting up a government tax levy for overseas aid. Although there appeared to be a certain degree of alienation from orthodox politics, then, (if the existence of conspiracy theories can be interpreted in this way), this was not matched by a sense of helplessness, in that small scale and minority political action was supported. To some extent this also appeared true of UFO researchers, although they did not appear to be as involved in minority political (and semi-political) groups.

In sum, those in contactee cults seem to have very diverse social backgrounds and are of all age groups, although they are mainly from the middle classes and young people are probably over-represented.

Not all of them claim experiences of UFO and psychic phenomena, but these events are highly valued and familiarity with the cult world-view seems to increase the likelihood that they will occur.

UFOs are generally seen as highly advanced extra-terrestrials who are visiting the Earth to aid the human race and, like many who read UFO literature, members believe there has been a government conspiracy to cover up information about UFOs.

They do not find 'strange mysteries', such as the Bermuda Triangle, Sasquatch or subjects dealt with by von Daniken to be particularly gripping, although they seem to have been interested in them at one time. Their lack of excitement about such 'mysteries' is probably due to socialisation into a metaphysical world-view which includes the occult and mystical, and which has explanations for most of them in terms of good and evil forces and hidden masters.

Their attitude towards science is generally one of acceptance but they consider it to be inferior to esoteric knowledge which includes science but surpasses it because it unites science with religion. Little information is available about the political opinions of cult members, but there seems to be a tendency towards conspiracy theories although this does not stop support for minority political parties and pressure groups.

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Footnotes

a) Eight focused interviews were carried out altogether. See Appendix A for further details.

b) For research on these youth groups, see Hall and Jefferson (1976); Hebdige (1979); Musgrove (1974); Willis (1978).

c) Cited in Westrum (1977).

d) So many researchers believed that there was a government cover-up of some kind that I made the survey question much more specific than this and asked their reaction to the statement: 'The governments of the world are in contact with aliens and are withholding this information from the general public'. Only 23% of SUFORA respondents agreed with this extreme form of the cover-up notion, indicating that, for many, the idea of a government cover-up is a general one.

e) Apparently, an elderly spiritual teacher ran a 'Self-Initiation Class' where he had been teaching an esoteric interpretation of the book of Revelation for over a year, before he introduced Bo and Peep to his students. These had declined in numbers from about eighty to just under twenty prior to the introduction of the new leaders.

f) Yet this dislike of the term 'occult' was not shared by subscribers to the US magazine Gnostica, according to Hartman (1976), implying that Gnostica readers are more oriented towards magic, divination and astrology than members of the group Balch studied.

g) Someone now actually claims to have invented such a gadget, called a SPIRICOM! See Common Ground, No. 6, 1982, p.32.

h) The concept of alienation, like that of anomie, seems to be a difficult one to operationalise, and so it is not clear what would represent indicators of political alienation.

## CHAPTER 3

## WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN THEM ?

During the early years of the religious revival, at the beginning of the 1960s, those who joined cults were frequently seen as disoriented and maladjusted individuals who drifted from one cult to the next. As I described in detail in the last section, this view has recently been questioned and some writers have argued that this image of the religious seeker should be replaced by one which recognises the high value that this role is given by some sections of society. Balch and Taylor (1977), for instance, suggest that the seeker should be seen as someone who is "socially oriented to the quest for personal growth", and that seekership "constitutes a social identity that is positively valued by the individual and his significant others."

The role of the religious seeker, of someone who is searching for spiritual truth, is positively valued by those who have adopted a metaphysical world-view. Earlier in this section, the mystical and occult nature of this view was described, but the question that still remains unanswered is how do people become socialised into this world-view? Although previous studies have used the metaphysical subculture as an explanation for why people join cults, there seems to have been little attempt to explain their entry into that subculture in the first place.

Balch and Taylor (1977) refer to the fact that most members of the UFO cult they studied had experienced 'psychic deprivation' before they joined, but point out that this is generated by the role of the seeker because spiritual growth is expected, yet it is subjective and hard to define. Also metaphysical teachers frequently exploit the seeker's sense of insecurity and desire for spiritual development. As we would expect from the criticisms of this type of explanation in the previous section, then, the existence of psychic deprivation is not an adequate explanation. They also point out that some people are born into the subculture because they have parents who are metaphysical seekers, but it is doubtful whether this can account for the presence of many members.

What is really needed is an in-depth study of recruitment to the metaphysical subculture, but, in the meantime, can any tentative suggestions be made? Let me first examine the few contactee cult members with whom I had contact. Of the eight people interviewed, six of these had become interested in UFOs through a prior interest in either Spiritualism (4) or esoteric knowledge (2). Of the other two, one read George Adamski's first book and then:

> Within a month I realised that science could not explain what was going on and so I moved to meta-science.

He quickly became a vegetarian and became interested in esoteric philosophy, particularly Theosophy. The other moved from a UFO research group in the early 1970s, when

> ... telepathy suddenly became thething and we tried to develop it.

They held seances to contact extra-terrestrials and he became increasingly interested in esoteric philosophy. When asked about their prior interest in either Spiritualism or esoteric knowledge, five of the other six said they had become interested in the subject through contact with a Spiritualist.

Three routes are mentioned above: reading a book, paranormal experience during experiment with a popular fad, and personal contact with an existing member. Is there any support from other studies for the typicality of these routes?

Reading : The importance of reading to those in the cultic milieu has been mentioned repeatedly and is an essential element of the thesis. As far as recruitment is concerned, Lynch (1978) in his article on conversion and commitment to the occult, described the first phase of the process as reading a book. He found that nearly two thirds of those he interviewed had read a book on esoteric subjects and most of them had read it before they encountered the occult group he was studying; often long before, he adds. Retrospectively these individuals regarded the reading of the book(s) as an important turning point in their lives.

The reading of a book was also an important step on the road to recruitment to a UFO research group for many people (see Chapter V). However, the same type of question that was asked in their case can also be asked here: why do some people read a book on esoteric philosophy and find it convincing enough to encourage them to pursue the topic further, while others do not. This is a difficult question to answer in the absence of substantive data, but the following suggestions can be made:

Firstly, interest in esoteric philosophy may be aroused during childhood and adolescence when philosophical questions about the meaning and purpose of life are particularly pressing. It could be that these questions occupy the minds of some children more often and more insistently than they do for others, and this may need some kind of psychological explanation, but socio-cultural factors could also be involved. Parents may pass on their own existential concerns to their offspring, or they may be sensitised to these issues by the media.[2]

Yet, if this were all that were involved, there would be far more religious seekers and the metaphysical subculture would not be seen as 'deviant'. Besides an awareness of existential problems, then, the young person must also be proficient and interested in reading and must have parents who leave them to read what they would wish without comment. It is probable that, if parents guide their children's reading towards science and the classics, they are unlikely to explore rejected areas because they will develop alternative philosophical frameworks (such as Humanism) to cope with the questions which assail them. Presumably this is why belief in paranormal subjects is positively correlated with educational level until university level is reached, when the correlation declines (Sobal and Emmons, 1982).

Even more is involved: the metaphysical seeker role is not generally

a positively valued one, except in the metaphysical subculture. Those who are interested in the occult are often seen as weird by schoolmates and friends (except in some youth subcultures[b]). Those who adopt the role are also aligning themselves with a rejected and underground tradition, one which arouses fear and hostility in many sections of society. The astrology column may be a popular newspaper feature, but a serious interest in the subject is something else as Truzzi (1972) makes clear.

The young person who adopts the role of metaphysical seeker, then, also adopts a role which sets him apart. Any connection with the occult brings a certain charisma; it gives the person concerned a degree of mystery and power and so he is likely to find himself respected to a certain extent, and also rejected. Again, there could be psychological reasons why some find this an attractive role to adopt - perhaps some children are more rebellious and independent than others, for instance - but there could be cultural reasons too. Variants of the metaphysical seeker role have been popularised in fiction. Take the occult disciples and masters who appear in the novels of Dennis Wheatley,[c] or the magicians who appear in Tolkien-type fantasies, or even the television series "Kung Fu" with its wandering Buddhist monk, for example. A metaphysical seeker role may be extracted from much science fiction which, as a number of writers have pointed out (e.g. Bainbridge, 1976; Stableford, 1978), has occupied itself increasingly with mystical and magical themes. The popular television series,"Dr. Who", for instance, features a 'master of space and time', an objective which is the aim of a 'real-life' metaphysical organisation, called the Prosperos, who urge that:

> ... Man must drop off the old 'flesh and blood' identity to experience the astounding revelation of a new Transcendent Self that is master of space and time. (Bainbridge, 1976, p.190, emphasis in original).

Dr. Who occupies himself exploring and experiencing different worlds and historical periods, like some 'wanderer' from a Gothic tale. One of his main characteristics seems to be an insatiable curiosity and, although he does not explicitly seek after forbidden knowledge like many Romantic heroes, he usually has to undergo various ordeals in order to obtain the knowledge to rescue his companions or the poor victims of some malevolent alien megalomaniac. Add to this his ability to regenerate and he appears the ideal model for the metaphysical seeker role, with its continual

desire for hidden knowledge, transcendental experience, growth and change.

However, the role is also deeply rooted in more fundamental cultural elements because, like the rejected 'frontier scientist' who was mentioned in the last chapter, the metaphysical seeker is highly individualistic and independent and exploration is again an important feature, albeit mainly exploration of the 'self' through different esoteric philosophies and techniques.

A second suggestion for why some people are more likely to find a book on a metaphysical subject more interesting and convincing than others, is that they may have experienced an emotional crisis, such as the death of someone important to them or a serious illness. Nelson (1969) gives bereavement as a motive for membership of the Spiritualist Movement, along with curiosity about the afterlife and the need for many people for an assurance about their personal survival. Clearly these last two motives are tied up with the existential questions which were suggested above, but it seems to me that personal emotional experiences can be analytically distinguished from intellectual curiosity, even though in reality it may be impossible to separate emotion and intellect in this way. Nevertheless, for many people existential issues only become problematic in the face of personal crisis.

Thirdly, the reading of a book on a metaphysical subject may coincide with another 'doorway' into the seeking subculture and this may reinforce it. Lynch (1978) in fact argues that reading alone is not enough to stimulate an involvement other than intellectual curiosity, and that other avenues, which I will describe in a moment, are all phases of a recruitment process. However, he is describing recruitment to a particular cult, whereas I am describing entry into the metaphysical subculture (from which cult members are recruited), and so it is this sustained curiosity which I am trying to explain. When the reading of a book coincides with experience of the paranormal, or with contact with a significant person who is already a member of a subculture, then more attention may be given to the book.

Paranormal experiment and experience : Information on psychic experiences among the general population was rather sketchy, but showed that roughly 50% claimed to have had these types of experiences. Research on cults showed that about the same percentage claimed to have had these

experiences before joining. Thus not all those who have had these experiences join cults, and not all those who join cults have had these experiences. The picture may be different for members of the metaphysical subculture, however. Possibly this type of experience encourages a curiosity about paranormal subjects. Of the subscribers to the Saucerian Press who read contactee books (only 25% of whom belonged to groups), 79% claimed unusual psychic experiences and Stupple and Dashti (1977) state that this may be an under-representation because some said they had not had any unusual psychic experiences. This result implies that more of those who merely read the literature may claim these experiences, but, of course, it is difficult to tell without research whether this was the reason they turned to the literature.

Besides spontaneous mystical and paranormal experiences, there is also experimentation. The ouija board has become a popular fad: manufacturers reported over two million sold in 1967 (Truzzi, 1972). But can people become seriously interested in the subject through playful experimentation? O'Keefe (1982) and Ellul (1975) argue that this is the case, and Quarantelli and Wenger (1975) describe one such incident. However, this clearly does not happen for the majority of those who experiment, otherwise the metaphysical subculture would be far larger. For the experiments to become important and meaningful, something else is necessary: the experiments have got to 'work' and those concerned must react in a nonfrightened manner.

By 'work', I mean that something which is apparently inexplicable must occur. O'Keefe (1982) has provided a plausible sociological explanation for paranormal occurrences of this type. He argues that they occur when the normal social frame of orientation is relaxed and the resulting 'inexplicable' experiences are over-valued. That is, because reality is socially constructed and our typical representational and explanatory systems can only partially define and explain experiences, it is always possible for these to be suspended temporarily so that the inexplicable experiences become noticeable and these can then be defined and explained using alternative socially constructed explanatory systems.[d]

The experimenters must also be bold enough to find the experience interesting rather than disturbing. Truzzi (1972) writes that popular interest in the paranormal is the result of lack of fear; that it is "a kind of victory over the supernatural", and so is largely a demystification-process of what were once fearful and threatening cultural elements. He illustrates his point by the likely reaction to news of a haunted house:

where years ago people would have avoided it, they now rush to spend the night there. He adds:

> If we fully believed in demons, we certainly would not want to call them up. (p.29)

Whilst there is no doubt a considerable amount of truth in what he suggests, it is also the case that many people are still frightened by the supernatural and paranormal. Their interest in it seems to reveal the same kind of frightened fascination which is displayed towards suicides, murders, the mentally ill and the like, or which was shown towards the devil in earlier times. Fascination need not imply a lack of fear. The rush to spend a night in a haunted house is frequently a display of bravado, especially among young males and is probably motivated by a similar desire for excitement, adventure and masculine kudos which prompts motor cycle 'chicken runs' and the like. Why spend an often uncomfortable night in a haunted house unless one hoped something would happen? His suggestion that fear would prevent action may apply to many people, but it is still the case that some people who believed (or who believe) in demons, did (and do) call them up. While Truzzi is right in saying that ouija boards are just a 'bit of a lark' for many who expect nothing to happen (and nothing does), then, there are also those who feel that something significant has occurred, get scared out of their wits, and will have nothing more to do with the subject. Only those few who feel that something important has happened and yet are not afraid of this apparent contact with the 'spirits' will retain an interest in the subject.

Personal contact : According to much of the literature on recruitment to religious movements, personal contact with existing members is an important factor (e.g. Snow and Phillips, 1980; Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen, 1980; Lofland and Stark, 1965). Yet, as Snow, Zurcher and Ekland-Olsen (1980) point out, not all relatives and friends join social movements. They suggest that this is because not everyone is structurally available; only a minority have the time and energy to devote to a movement. However, Wallis and Bruce (1982) argue that availability is not a fixed quality, but one which depends upon how appealing the movement appears to be to the potential recruit.

Analternative explanation for why not every relative or friend joins a movement might be that not everyone may equally rate the views of the

person concerned. That is, the person must be highly significant in the life of the potential recruit: a favourite aunt or uncle, or a special friend, who the individual admires and respects.

However, the metaphysical subculture is not a cult or religious movement, but a milieu from which members are recruited, so how important is personal contact as a 'doorway' into it? Stark and Bainbridge (1980) found that, although social networks were important in recruitment to cults, sects and conventional religion, they were not important in the acceptance of occult beliefs, such as belief in tarot cards or seances, which were spread via the mass media. Also, as Shupe (1976) found, many metaphysical groups recruit via advertisements in occult magazines. It seems likely, then, that personal contact with a metaphysical seeker will only arouse a sustained interest in these subjects and will not convert anyone to the view of that person, as it does in religious movements, probably because of the individualistic and relativistic nature of the beliefs.

The description of these 'doorways' into the metaphysical subculture implies that entrance is a gradual process of increasing curiosity which gradually reinforces the seeking role, until full socialisation is achieved. Out of the large number of people who are merely temporarily curious about metaphysical subjects, a few become more seriously curious, and I have tried to give reasons why in some people an interest is sustained long enough for the seeker role to gain a foothold. As more topics are investigated, the person finds himself adopting the attitude suggested in the literature; that of someone searching for answers to 'strange mysteries' and unexplained phenomena. Eventually the underlying belief system is assimilated and the person becomes a fully socialised metaphysical seeker who is at home in the world of multiple realities, secret masters, hidden forces, and perpetual aspiration towards some unattainable Ideal.

In sum, in place of suggestions (such as Smelser, 1962) that those who join contactee cults do so because they are maladjusted, socialisation via the metaphysical subculture of the cultic milieu has been introduced. This subculture positively values the role of the seeker and, once individuals have accepted the metaphysical world-view, joining a cult is but an extension of their search for spiritual enlightenment.

There has been little research on recruitment to the metaphysical subculture, but what data there is, suggests that there are three main routes. The first is by reading one of the many readily available books on

the subject. This is most likely to take place in late childhood or in adolescence, when philosophical questions are most pressing, and answers to them are not at hand for those who have not engaged in higher education and those not highly committed to a religion. But it can also happen during a personal crisis in later life, or after meeting someone who is already a member of the subculture and who is significant to the individual, reinforcing their reading.

The second route is by personal experience of the paranormal, either spontaneously or after experimentation. Only those who are not afraid of their psychic experience are likely to develop the serious interest in the subject which the metaphysical seeker role demands, but much popular interest in the paranormal can be the result of either amusement or fearful fascination rather than that leading to the seeker role.

The third route is by personal contact with someone who is already a metaphysical seeker, although, for a serious interest to be aroused, the person must be highly significant. This person is most likely to stimulate a general curiosity about metaphysical topics, rather than an interest in any particular cult. This is because socialisation into the metaphysical world-view is a gradual and individual process whereby an initial curiosity is sustained until a variety of topics has been covered and the underlying belief system has been assimilated.

Now that motives for membership of contactee cults have been examined, it is time to look more closely at reasons for the existence of the contactee aspect of the UFO movement.

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Footnotes

a) There could be a number of ways in which the religious confusion of our time is conveyed to young people. For instance, in some households 'Sunday School' is seen as a good way of getting a little peace on a Sunday, while giving children a moral foundation in life, rather than as a necessary religious education. In other words, children may be sent for secular reasons by parents who are not themselves highly committed to Christianity. This could produce a conflict in children who would find that religious teaching they received was not reinforced at home. To be introduced to a religious world-view without being properly socialised into it would seem an ideal basis for the religious seeking perspective.

b) The hippies were a notable exception, and more recently some 'new wave' rock music bands, such as KillingJoke, have encouraged sections of the punks to become interested in occultism. See, for example, the article on the magician, Aleister Crowley, in the rock music paper Sounds , July 17, 1982.

c) Dennis Wheatley printed a warning about the dangers of occultism at the front of many of his 'black magic' novels, and of course this only encouraged people to investigate further. In my experience, a considerable number of those involved in occultism (particularly ritual magic), first became interested through reading Dennis Wheatley's novels.

d) This is not to say that some other 'Paranormal' type of explanation may not eventually be considered more plausible.

## CHAPTER 4

## HOW CAN THEIR EXISTENCE BE EXPLAINED ?

It is clear from the foregoing that contactee groups fit easily into the cult category and that, as far as they are concerned, mystical religion is an important element. But so too are many aspects of the Shamanic tradition mentioned by Ellwood (1973): the bringing of wisdom from far away geographical places, healing and techniques of ecstasy. This implies that, although these may have been separate traditions in the past, they have now merged. Thus mystical religion would appear to be the common denominator in cults, but its syncretic nature enables the absorption of diverse elements, including secular ones, such as psychology; this latter union producing a type of secular mysticism (or mystical psychology) in which God has dropped out of the picture and only the 'self' remains to be experienced, explored and developed. The limits of this secular mysticism will be examined in relation to UFO research groups in Part Four.

Given that contactee groups can be categorised as cults, how are we to explain their existence ? Should each cult be analysed separately or is it more useful to see them as part of a single movement, as in the case of cults within the Spiritualist Movement (Nelson, 1969) ? The material that has been examined so far suggests that all contactee cults have many features in common, the most important being that they interpret UFOs in the same way. For this reason, an explanation of the contactee movement as a whole would seem to be necessary.

At the centre of the movement are the contactees: people like George Adamski, who claim to have spoken with extra-terrestrials. Not only that, but the aliens are said to be benevolent and highly advanced beings, seeking to aid humanity. Since such a belief clearly offers a solution to many of the world's problems, we might ask why it did not become more popular. The belief could well have become the basis for a craze, such as the revivalism which surrounds evangelists. The reason it did not is probably because the teachings offered by the contectees drew mainly on esoteric rather than exoteric tradition (Tiryakian, 1974) : they were mystical and syncretic. This meant that they had a limited appeal, because, unlike Protestantism, following the saucers to be saved, did not leave one's social status unaffected. Also, unlike evangelical branches of Protestantism, contactees were not in 'the business of saving souls' only, but also concerned themselves with criticism of political, economic and social goals, even though they did not

in the main organise to change them.

Beliefs which challenge basic values are more conducive to the formation of value-oriented movements and the contactee groups which developed seem best described in this way: indeed, Smelser (1962) comments that the

> ... miscellaneous beliefs which gave rise to bizarre cults (such as the scattered millenarian cults which sprang up during the flying saucer scare), (p.121)

are examples of value-oriented beliefs. Let us examine, then, the process which produces a value-oriented movement, according to Smelser's theory of collective behaviour.

Firstly, the conditions of social structural conduciveness are those in which values are not differentiated from other components of action and this is clearly not the case in highly differentiated Western Societies. However, this differentiation permits the existence of many different types of personal beliefs, including a religious world-view which defines protests against the world in religious terms. Those sections of society which consider alternative means for reconstituting the social system to be unavailable, however, are generally the politically disinherited, such as recent migrants or the poverty stricken. According to Smelser there are also smaller numbers of people who are not necessarily structurally excluded from power, but who perceive other means of expressing protest as closed, due to "semi-paranoid personality tendencies". He writes:

> The beliefs of members of the 'flying saucer cults', for instance, frequently were based on the assumption that governments were helpless in the face of hostile, cosmic forces, unless they relied on the assistance of other, beneficient cosmic forces. Such beliefs defined protest to governments as useless. More generally, the esoteric cult may find its recruits among persons who have developed personality characteristics because of distinctive familial experiences ( e.g. a rejecting father).
>
> (p.334)

Whilst it is highly likely that only those with an undifferentiated religious world-view which interpreted the use of nuclear weapons as due to the US government being in the grip of evil forces, would choose to join a value-oriented movement like the contactee movement, rather than a norm-oriented one such as CND, it is doubtful whether we can explain this in terms of their 'semi-paranoid personality tendencies' or a rejecting father.[8] After all, there has been a marked increase in middle class militancy and extra-parliamentary activism over the last twenty years, including movements attacking basic values, such as 'morality crusades' (King and Nugent, 1979).

This problem arises again when we consider Smelser's explanation for the social strains involved in the production of small value-oriented movements, such as the 'bizarre cults' which cluster in Southern California. He remarks that because these movements draw people from a variety of backgrounds, strains may stem from early childhood experiences.

Whilst not wishing to dispute the fact that strains may be caused by early childhood experiences, this would not seem to be a very adequate explanation for why contactee cults gained the popularity they did. The main reason is that, in the light of the recent growth of new religious movements, contactee cults do not appear as bizarre as they did to Smelser writing in the early 1960s. In fact, as we have seen, these cults are no longer isolated but exist in a cultic milieu which overlaps popular culture. Under these circumstances, it would seem more appropriate to consider reasons for the existence of the cultic milieu: isolated family strains are probably less important than broader socio-cultural changes.

If the sociological literature is examined, there are four main types of explanation for the existence of the cultic milieu: those that deal with the emergence of a new lifestyle; those which postulate a growth in a particular type of religion; those which talk in terms of a romantic rebellion; and those which use the secularisation argument. Let me examine these in greater detail.

Modern society, with its rapid change and mass communication, produces 'historical dislocation' and the 'flooding of imagery' according to Lifton (1970), who argues that this has caused the adoption of a 'Protean lifestyle'. This lifestyle is characterised by psychological flexibility and change, by an "interminable series of experiments and exploration."

Lifton's 'Protean Man' has much in common with the 'Expansive Man' of Orr and Nichelson (1970) who is interested in enlarging his experience and enjoys:

> ... playfully exploring a number of world views, all of which exist side by side as perspectives of faith. (p.34)

Both Ellwood (1973) and Balch and Taylor (1977) have drawn comparisons between metaphysical seekers, with their desire for growth, exploration and experience, and these suggested broader changes in lifestyle.

For Campbell (1977) and Swatos (1981), the cultic milieu represents a growth in Troeltsch's (1931) category of spiritual and mystical religion, a comparison which was discussed earlier in the chapter. Campbell (1978) considers this type of religion to be particularly suited to the modern age because of its individualism, relativism, and sceptical attitude towards religious dogma.

Apparently, Durkheim predicted a not dissimilar type of religion for pluralist societies, according to Westley(1978). She describes Durkheim's predicted 'cult of man' in which men come to value and worship the one thing they still have in common, which is their humanity. The sacred would be located within each individual rather than outside them, and religion and science would combine,the one expressing and the other explaining the relationship of the individual to society.

An analysis of popular religion by Schneider and Dornbusch (1958), using forty-six best sellers published between 1875 and 1955, confirms trends towards the emphasis on the individual, on the value of subjective religious experience, and anti-dogmatism. In addition, they identify a 'spiritual technology" in the literature; a use of God and religion for the purposes of human beings. This instrumental attitude towards faith leads them to see magical elements in popular religion. They write that "the quality of magic is stamped upon a good portion of the literature precisely because of its unreserved promises of results", and they conclude that "the market for magic still appears to be very much alive".

Such a finding would not surprise O'Keefe (1982), who argues that religions grow more magical as civilisation advances, because, although magic appropriates religious symbolism for individual purposes, it is then re-appropriated by religion. Also magic is syncretic and rationalising and so

a magical world-view develops which, in our own time, is virtually everywhere the same. It is integral to modern society and its popularity is dependent upon the extent to which the world is experienced as fragmented, because its basic function is to defend the self against society.[b]

These writers suggest that mystical religion and magic are not anachronisms in modern society, but are in harmony with it and so the cultic milieu may be reflecting broader changes in religion.

A third explanation for the existence of the cultic milieu can be extracted from the work of Nowotny (1979). She argues that the counter-cultural movement of the late 1960s was a revival of a much older reaction against science and one which draws on modes of thought which preceded the rise of modern science. This tradition, which she identifies as the Romantic, utopian, or literary-humanist tradition, is holistic rather than atomistic, prefers quality to quantity, values the subjective rather than the objective, and emotion rather than rationality. Usually referred to as 'anti-science', it poses an alternative 'science' to that which has developed since the seventeenth century, one which re-introduces many of the considerations which were then excluded, such as values and ethics, and questions about ultimate reality and meaning, which in many cases results in an attempt to unite science and religion.

A number of other writers present material which is compatible with this argument. Cotgrove (1973), for instance, identified a growing 'anti-science' movement in the early 1970s, of which the renewed interest in mystical experience was one aspect, and Barker (1983) places the new religious movements within a wider context of reformative rather than revolutionary dissent, originating in the seventeenth century. Troeltsch (1931) describes the 'secret religion of the educated classes' as a 'religious romanticism' which combines features of the nineteenth century Romantic Movement with mystical religion, and Tiryakian (1974) argues that many of the ideas and values of Avante Garde culture, including the Romantic Movement, the Symbolists, and Surrealism, are derived from esoteric culture.

These studies place the metaphysical subculture within a wider context of social dissent which has been taking place in Britain since the seventeenth century, particularly reaction to the scientific revolution which split science from religion, of which the nineteenth century Romantic Movement with its emphasis on imagination and feeling, rather than rationality, seems to be an important aspect.

Finally, there are those writers who see contemporary religiosity as evidence in support of increasing secularisation. Wilson (1979) argues that new religious movements are another commodity in modern consumer society, and are tolerated only to the extent that they "do not disrupt or vitiate the inexorable forces of economic rationalisation." That is, religion has little general significance for the social structure and is essentially confined to the private sphere. However, there is another aspect of secularisation, apart from religion's decline of influence. This is Weber's process of 'disenchantment' or the 'de-magicification of the world'. Bell (1977) argues that this has ceased to take place, resulting in a "return of the sacred", but Wilson (1979) replies that, as this is only taking place among marginal groups, it is hardly a significant deviation from the general course of rationalisation. The secularisation thesis is also supported by the predominance of an instrumental and utilitarian attitude towards God, revealed in Schneider and Dornbusch's (1958) study of popular religion, which implies the intrusion of economic attitudes into the religious sphere, and by Truzzi's (1972) suggestion that the modern occult revival is a demystification of what were once fearful and threatening cultural elements.

These writers, then, imply that the part-time nature of participation, the emphasis upon individual experience and self-development rather than social change, and the predominantly instrumental attitude towards religious experience, in the cultic milieu, are further examples of the secularisation of religion.

These four explanations are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they seem to be complementary. The apparent growth in mystical religion, for instance, is not incompatible with the secularisation thesis, in that it is fundamentally a private religiosity which is not conducive to institutionalisation. It is a:

> ... theology of the subjective consciousness of salvation, and no longer one which confines itself to the objective facts of redemption. (Troeltsch, 1931, p.736)

Also, as I have mentioned earlier, it is not necessarily antagonistic towards science; in fact, its critique of religious doctrine, its universalism and emphasis upon intellectual redemption are in harmony with scientific thought, while its tolerance and syncretism open it to the absorption of different belief systems.

One of the best ways these different explanations can be brought together is in an analysis of urban belief systems. Borhek and Curtis (1975) have described the characteristics of urban belief as involving five features: The first is that these belief systems typically include two value characteristics; potency and voluntarism. That is, mastery of the world and the right to choose. The 'permanent identity crisis' of Berger, Berger and Kellner (1973) is actually a conflict between the imperative to choose ones own identity and the practical difficulty in doing so, they suggest.

The second characteristic is that urban beliefs parallel urban social structure. They are diverse, heterogeneous and subject to change. They write:

> Urbanites have become accustomed to the rapid adjustments in such beliefs that follow when science leads technology and new techniques are quickly put into practice. (p.145; emphasis in original)

The third characteristic is that the problems to which urban beliefs are addressed are the problems of urban people: interpersonal relationships, inner peace (peace of mind), or individual potency of some kind. Fourthly, in urban settings, procedural consensus replaces substantive consensus (general rituals replace specific beliefs), and, finally, beliefs associated with the organisation of an urban society as a whole, involve an accommodative consensus on how to live and let live.

Clearly these characteristics are aspects of some of the explanations mentioned above. The 'Protean lifestyle' suggested by Lifton (1970) is that of the urban dweller, with its psychological flexibility and desire for exploration. Secularisation is one of the processes contributing to the nature of urban beliefs, according to Borhek and Curtis, along with massification and bureaucratisation, differentiation, and the growth of new belief systems suited to the social vehicles available in the massified areas of urban society.

The metaphysical world-view seems to be a belief system which is suitable in this way. Much esoteric knowledge can be related to the problems of urban people: inner peace, the mastery of life, and social harmony. It is relativistic and tolerant, and the notion of spiritual evolution allows for an anticipation of continual growth and change. Also, as Borhek and Curtis suggest is likely to be the case in the uninstitutionalised areas of urban society, it is a belief system which is concerned with the 'whole person'.

Drawing upon a current of utopian thought which is a romantic reaction against science and technology, much of the cultic milieu seems to constitute a 'metaphysical rebellion' against many of the orthodox values of modern society; metaphysical teachings help the individual to adjust to the problems of urban living by encouraging inner development towards a mental or spiritual vision of the Good Society.

Thus, instead of locating the source of strain in individual family backgrounds, it would appear more relevant to relate it to the processes of urbanisation. Of course, as mentioned in relation to the UFO research movement, the problem with the use of a general concept like structural strain is the difficulty in connecting it to individual experiences and motivation. In Chapter III, an attempt was made to explain more specifically how individuals join the metaphysical subcultures. The processes of urbanisation, then, must be considered as factors which predispose individuals to accept some belief systems rather than others.

Returning now to the examination of factors involved in the generation of a value-oriented movement, the next essential element according to Smelser, is the crystallisation of a generalised belief. Value-oriented beliefs involve a basic reconstitution of self and society and can be either religious or secular. They contain the notion that society is in a state of chaos, instability or conflict, and the pervading sense of evil is extended to include a threat to the values of civilisation as a whole. The belief promises a vast regeneration of values, a vision of future harmony, the overcoming of evil, and the beginning of a New Age of human happiness.

Do contactee cults have beliefs which contain these elements ? The beliefs of members which were examined earlier, were that advanced extra-terrestrials were visiting the Earth to help the human race in its spiritual development and struggle against materialism; their intention was to try and prevent the destruction of the Earth by nuclear weapons; the governments of the world were keeping their knowledge of the existence of these extra-terrestrials from the public because they knew it would cause revolutionary change; the groups were divided over whether a) catastrophes would mean the sudden end of the old materialistic world and the immediate beginning of the 'Kingdom of God on Earth', or b) a slow change would take place in which humanity evolved towards a higher spiritual awareness in the new 'Aquarian Age' of peace and harmony.

The beliefs would seem to fit the description of a value-oriented generalised belief and the division between those who envision the sudden end of the old world and the start of the new and those who see a slower regeneration, seems to correspond to differences in the perception of

possibilities for reconstituting the social world, producing either passivity or activity, as Smelser mentions. The most passive contectee cults, which can also be described as world-rejecting, are hoping for a sudden end to current social conditions and dramatic aid from the extra-terrestrials who will rescue them in flying saucers. The more active cults, which are world-affirming, believe there will be a gradual change in conditions, which can be brought about by the pursuit of individual spiritual development under the guidence of extra-terrestrials.

The next element is the precipitating factor, an event that creates, sharpens or exaggerates a condition of strain or conduciveness. It provides adherents of a belief with more evidence of the workings of evil forces, or greater promise of success. The question which immediately springs to mind is whether a widespread belief in benevolent space beings existed before George Adamski popularised his claim to have contacted them. This does not appear to have been the case, although there were beliefs that a) UFOs could be extra-terrestrials and b) spiritually advanced beings exist. Adamski seems to have been the precipitating factor in the crystallisation of a popular belief about visiting superior aliens, and messages from his alien contacts reinforced belief in the evils of nuclear weapons. Contactee cults were not formed until after the publication of Adamski's first book.

Once crystallised, a value-oriented belief has the potential to move in many directions. Smelser writes that it may fizzle out, form a cult, a sect or denomination, an underground conspiracy or a revolutionary movement. A major determinant in the direction it takes lies in the behaviour of agencies of social control in response to the movement. In the main the contactee movement seems to have remained at the level of a collection of small cults, although larger conventions took place in the early 1960s . Much of this wider popularity seems to have been of a fairly superficial kind; the idea of alien contact has increasingly become more of an entertaining possibility than a serious proposition, as the success of films like "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "E.T." suggests. There are probably a number of reasons for this development.

Firstly, the attempt by contactees to claim scientific rather than religious legitimation for their teachings, very quickly lost any credence it may have gained initially. This was because space probes discovered no life on planets within our solar system and so the claims of Adamski and other contactees were discredited. This formed one part of more general criticisms and the exposure as fraudulent of a number of major contactees, (Story, 1980, p.52, p.89).[c]

Secondly, the media generally treated contactees in a light-hearted way, probably because they were not supported by scientists. This treatment must, of course, be placed in the context of the role of religion in modern society. With the separation of church and state, the power of religious orthodoxy has declined, thus allowing the growth of minority religious movements, although these are confined to the private realm of personal choice and thus have little general authority.

Thirdly, the mystical nature of the teachings of contactees is not conducive to the formation of long-lasting organisations, unless they change their relativistic and individualistic quality. Mysticism, as I have described, is radically individualistic in its emphasis on first-hand experience of the numinous and so, as Troeltsch (1931) comments, any group that forms tends to be "simply a parallelism of spontaneous religious personalities". Wallis (1974a) suggests that the only way to prolong the life of an organisation is for it to move in the direction of a sect. That is, for an "epistemological authoritarianism" to take over. He considers the Aetherius Society to have accomplished this task.

An alternative strategy would seem to be to institutionalise growth and development. What Schutz (1973) describes as the "platform society" parades the whole 'seeking subculture' before its members by introducing speakers on different subjects. The esoteric order (such as the Rosicrucians), on the other hand, uses a hierarchical grade sytem and initiation to give the impression of endless knowledge and to aid growth and development (Campbell, 1972).

Both the movement to a sect and the institutionalisation of means for continual development may be attempted by cults in order to preserve their existence. Indeed, the Aetherius Society also introduced a system of grades and so possibly this also added to its stability: not only does it now appeal to those seeking Absolute Truth, but also those desiring spiritual growth and individual experience of the numinous (which initiation gives). The typical cult formation in Britain appeared from my research to contain just these two elements. An 'inner circle' focused on the leader(s) who claimed special access to extra-terrestrials and an 'outer circle' of those who were interested in learning about a variety of esoteric subjects. In this way, different types of 'seekers', from the 'merely curious' to the 'highly committed', from those who want a charismatic leader to those who prefer to develop their own skills, could be accommodated.

Although the contactee movement would appear to be confined to a collection of small cults, it does not seem to be in the process of dissipation. Buckner remarked in 1965 that flying saucer cults were not thriving and that they only maintained themselves in the face of loss of

interest in flying saucers by choosing a general goal - that of building a better world - which could legitimate anything the members were interested in. However, his remark may have been a little premature in its dismissal of interest in contactees because many of the original contactee organisations are still in existence, and new ones, like the Raelian Movement, have been created.

Also, although contactees have been absorbed into the general metaphysical subculture, where their experiences are considered to be similar to contact with 'elementals' (i.e. fairies and gnomes) and 'hidden masters', the role of the contactee would still seem to be important to the UFO movement in general, albeit in a new form. The pattern of the 1950s in which a lone individual was contacted by advanced extra-terrestrials who gave him a mission to warn the world of impending doom unless humanity became less materialistic, may have virtually ceased; but instead there is the 'repeater' UFO experiencer, whose initial sighting of a UFO sets off a series of further experiences, including those of a psychic nature. Alterations in lifestyle (such as becoming vegetarian and joining the seeking subculture) often follow. UFO researchers have referred to these individuals as 'The Chosen', which implies that they have a special spiritual significance.[d] It could well be that these have taken the place of the discredited contactees as a significant part of the UFO movement.

In conclusion, it seems reasonable to locate the origin of the contactee movement in a conflict over basic social values aroused by anxiety over the development and use of nuclear weapons, which some saw as representing an increase in materialism and a lack of spiritual values and to those with a religious world view probably the growth of evil forces as well.

The movement emerged following the popularisation of George Adamski's account of his contact with advanced extra-terrestrials who gave him a mission to warn humanity of approaching catastrophe caused by the growth of materialism.

The source of membership for the movement was largely the metaphysical subculture, a social network within the cultic milieu involving mystical beliefs. The popularity of these beliefs was explained in terms of their suitability as an urban belief system, although the subculture has its origins in a tradition of religious reformatory dissent which began in the seventeenth century: in particular, reaction to the scientific revolution, which was most clearly articulated in the nineteenth century Romantic Movement. The metaphysical subculture draws on knowledge which was rejected by science and orthodox religion, much of which is mystical and particularly suited to the individualism, relativism, and universalism of modern urban society, and which, in its concern for self-development and experience, rather than social

revolution (except for the small number of millennial sects), fits easily into the private and uninstitutionalised areas of life, which are the only ones currently available. It is a 'metaphysical rebellion' which is founded on a belief that it is possible to change the world through imagination and subjective revelation: the power of inspired thought, rather than armies or social engineering. It is probably due to the esoteric and mystical nature of these beliefs, combined with the discrediting of the contactees, that the movement has not become more popular.

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Footnotes

a) It should be mentioned, though, that although most contactee cults did not engage in activity directed at changing norms, a few did. For instance, the group studied by Buckner (1965) attempted to form a political party, and Gabriel Green, founder of the California-based 'Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America' ran for senate in 1962. Ellwood (1973) quotes from a letter describing Green's position. He writes:

> "With the aid of our Space Brothers, the Flying Saucer Movement is rapidly growing into a dynamic worldwide social reform movement, dedicated to the mental, physical, spiritual and economic emancipation of man. This new Space Age ideology to champion the dignity and rights of man, to free him from economic bondage and to liberate him from the confines of regimentation, limitation and want, will render impotent those antiquated totalitarian philosophies based upon force and coercion. This will create a true Brotherhood of Man on Earth through the application of the philosophy of love, through service to others. " (p.149)

Also, during 1979, the Aetherius Society organised a petition on UFOs which collected 20,000 signatures, and handed it to the Prime Minister. However, Smelser states that value-oriented beliefs always imply normative change, the defining feature being the fundamental nature of the change necessary in value-oriented movements.

b) However, this original function of magic may have been subverted in modern society according to Nederman and Goulding (1981). In a critique of popular astrology following the work of the Frankfurt Marxist, T.W. Adorno, they argue that popular occultism fosters 'pseudo individualism' and a 'metaphysics of the dopes' which serves to stifle self-reflection and legitimates the irrational contradictions of industrial society by guiding its followers to maintain the values of liberal-capitalism, despite the inequalities of everyday life. Thus:

> "Occultism...claims to represent the real and true while in fact representing the mundane and meaningless circumstances of life in contemporary society. This conceptual treadmill, as an apology for the consumer society's irrationality, is best summarised by Adorno: 'While chasing the beyond after what is lost, all they (the occult followers) run into is their own nothingness.' " (Nederman and Goulding, 1981, p.330)

Despite the justified criticisms directed against mass society critics like Adorno and Marcuse (see for example Swingewood, 1977), their

analysis of popular culture often carried great insight ( not to mention the resonant phraseology !). Whilst disagreeing with the connotations of 'false' consciousness implied by this analysis of occultism, I would go at least some of the way towards agreeing that when the occult entered into the circulation of commodities, it lost its power to criticise social orthodoxies.

c) The controversy over George Adamski can be clearly seen in the letters section of the magazine Flying Saucer Review during the later 1950s and the early 1960s.

d) See the article entitled "UFOs: The Full Circle" in the magazine Strange Phenomena, Vol.1, No. 1, 1979, for example.

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## PART FOUR: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UFO RESEARCH GROUPS AND CONTACTEE CULTS.

## CHAPTER 1

## THE 'SEEKER' CONCEPT

From the foregoing analysis of UFO research groups and contactee cults, it would seem that these are two different movements, yet both are UFO movements. In what way are they related?

One obvious similarity is that both movements appear to have arisen from essentially the same events; the widespread reporting of sightings of UFOs during the late 1940s when there was a general fear of nuclear war. According to Smelser (1962), this simultaneity is not an unusual occurrence. The same strains may result in different types of collective behaviour depending on which set of structurally conducive conditions they combine with.

A further similarity is that the membership of both movements have features in common. Certainly they differ with respect to many of their beliefs, opinions and activities, but they share a belief in the existence of a government cover-up about UFOs, many share a belief in the extra-terrestrial nature of UFOs and many accept the reality of psychic phenomena. They also share a dislike of orthodox religion, an ambivalent attitude towards science and a similar interest in reading.

It is not only the fact that they read, however, but also the type of books they read. These books, which have been described as 'popular science' (Ashworth, 1980) provide alternatives to orthodox interpretations of the origins of the human race, the nature of reality, the capabilities of human beings, etc. In the main they appear to be attempts to unite science and religion, although they also have other definite characteristics such as the mixing of what is generally accepted as established fact with imaginative and speculative fiction, and the presence of few references. These books will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter, when popular beliefs about UFOs are considered, but here it is the part played by them in recruitment to UFO organisations, with which I am concerned.

A direct result of an interest in this particular type of literature is the adoption of an alternative world-view[2] before an organisation is joined. Other factors may contribute to the socialisation process, but

reading seems to be a vital component. Joining a group is then merely an extension of this world-view and so many of the processes normally noted in recruitment, such as the development of affective bonds with existing members, do not occur.

The presence of a subculture from which members of these groups are recruited, is consonant with Campbell's (1972) definition of the cultic milieu which

> ... if not conducive to the maintenance of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general. (p. 121/122)

He suggests that all organisations, belief systems and collectivities within the milieu share a common position as heterodox with regard to the dominant cultural orthodoxies and thus have a common consciousness of deviance. They are also united by a common ideology of seekership. Do contactee cults and UFO research groups share this ideology of seekership?

Where contactee cults are concerned, the alternative world-view was described as a 'metaphysical' one, which was associated with a 'seeking lifestyle'. UFO researchers, on the other hand, were not 'metaphysical seekers', because there was no mass acceptance of this world-view. Nevertheless, they were familiar with some metaphysical beliefs from their interest in the contactees, they held controversial views about UFOs and they were involved in research: they were 'searching for the answer to the UFO mystery'. Should the presence of these features lead us to describe them as seekers as well?

Clearly the answer depends on what definition is given to the concept of the 'seeker'. Most studies within this area have been of religious cults and consequently only religious seekers have been involved, but a few writers have referred to other types of cults in their theoretical analysis. Campbell (1972) describes the cultic milieu as bounded by a religious-science axis, and Jackson and Jobling (1968) describe cults as being either mystic-religious or quasi-religious, but the most comprehensive account of non-religious cults is that of Klapp (1969). He uses a very broad definition of the cult and includes all activities which are

> ... raised to a high enough level of seriousness and fervor to center the life interests of participants and make them devotees rather than just workers or players. (p. 147)

However, he then becomes more specific and lists six characteristics which help in distinguishing cultic activity. These are: an all-out commitment, mystique, ritual, the role of the devotee, identity change or redemption, and solidarity or brotherhood.

This definition is obviously at odds with that accepted earlier and would not seem to be very useful as far as religious cults are concerned: not only does it omit reference to the importance of individual authority and experience of the numinous, but it also makes ritual an essential feature, yet shared ritual is not generally a component of mystical religion, according to Troeltsch (1931). Nevertheless, it provides some guidelines for the identification of secular cults. He writes

> ...we should not overlook 'research' that is really a quest for self-realisation rather than just one for knowledge. (p.209)

and points to psychical research and occultism in particular, asking

> Should one call the goal of such inquiry facts or a mystique to give meaning to Man ? (p.209)

Klapp's basic thesis is that modern mass society creates an identity problem for individuals because there are no longer reliable reference points (such as status symbols, place symbols, style models, etc. ) by which they can locate themselves socially, realise themselves sentimentally, and declare to themselves and others who they are. Life becomes meaningless and so there is a collective search outside the organisational and institutional channels (work, school, church, etc.) for an identity. Thus he regards the urgent question of the twentieth century to be not 'what can I do ?' but' who can I be ?' In this analysis, then, the notion of the 'seeker' is a very broad one, encompassing all those who are trying to find out who they can become.

Whilst recognising the very general level of Klapp's analysis, which restricts its usefulness as a theory[b] (because he identifies a problem which permeates to varying degrees the lives of all of us), it is interesting to see whether UFO researchers fit into this concept of the 'secular seeker'. Is the goal of their research 'facts' or 'mystique' ?

During the examination of UFO research groups in Part Two , one of the most intriguing aspects was the use of the term 'mystery' in relation

to UFOs. Members were adamant that UFOs were 'still a mystery' and this was why they remained interested in them, but it was difficult to interpret exactly what they meant by this. UFOs were seen as a 'challenge to science', but did this mean they were beyond the physical laws that science has discovered, that methods other than those of science must be used to investigate them, or that UFOs were a challenge for science to explain?

Holzner (1972) writes that phenomenologically the mystery is the opposite of the feeling that the environment is entirely familiar, that it is stable, predictable and routinised. This can produce feelings of anxiety over the limitations of meaningfulness as such, and the recognition of the precariousness of the person's existence. One response to this is charismatic commitment, where hope and faith in the mystery overcome anxiety. There is reassurance in the belief that there is a reality beyond the perspective that is apparent. He writes that this commitment:

> ... makes the faith in meaningfulness and coherence possible, when value conflicts, paradoxes, or sheer disconfirmation of expectations by the facts threaten the person with meaningless chaos.
> (p.99)

However, charismatic commitment is not the only response to the feeling that the environment is unfamiliar and unpredictable; there is also one which seeks to gain control of the mystery, to make it familiar and predictable - to 'demystify' it. These two responses seem to be essentially those of religion and science: the one imbuing the mystery with superior power and meaning, the other making it subservient to human control and reason.[c]

Yet many UFO researchers seemed to take neither of these approaches alone, but one involving elements of both. The mystery of UFOs, like other 'popular science' mysteries, gave off an atmosphere of charismatic fascination, yet it was also treated as though it were potentially explicable. It promised revelation, yet it demanded investigation rather than awe. The aura of mystery surrounding UFOs appeared to enable researchers to 'try on' other ways of conceptualising the world. As I mentioned in Chapter V, an important aspect for many researchers seemed to be the sense of 'possibility' which the mystery brought. It implied that the exciting adventures of science fiction might come true. The mystery was a door into a fascinating world and, as long as UFOs remained unexplained, this

door remained open. In other words, rather than embracing the certainties of science or religion, many UFO researchers appeared to cultivate a deliberate uncertainty, an unwillingness to close off possibilities. They were not fully socialised into the metaphysical world-view, yet neither did they reject its existence, instead they suspended their disbelief in it long enough to absorb some of the charisma which emanated from it: UFOs were a mystery and so anything was possible.

Do we infer from this that UFO researchers are characterised by this 'mystified demystifying' response[d], or are those of science and religion involved as well? This is a difficult question to answer because the analysis of research groups showed that members were a heterogenous collection, differing in a number of ways which could influence their interpretation of the UFO mystery, such as whether they considered the subject to be a serious or a fun pursuit, and whether they were beginners or experts. Some light was shed on this problem by an examination of letters and editorials in UFO reporting publications, which revealed a conflict between two different approaches to the subject.

## Examination of 'Nuts and Bolts' and 'Paranormal' Positions

When letters and editorials in publications of the UFO reporting type were examined, there seemed to be a conflict between two positions: a view which saw the study of UFOs as taking place within a natural science framework, and a view which considered that UFOs should be studied within the context of parapsychology. The two views were often referred to by members as the 'nuts and bolts' versus the 'paranormal' positions.

The 'nuts and bolts' or natural science position, sought to separate itself from the 'paranormal' approach because it did not want to be associated with the occult. That is, those who considered themselves supporters, rejected the paranormal because they associated it with mysticism and magic, and their intention was to make ufology more scientific. They were generally of the opinion that UFOs could be explained by science, and the two common explanations were, either that they were extra-terrestrial vehicles or probes, or that they were an unknown kind of natural phenomena, such as ball lightening. They were vehement in their condemnation of the paranormal. For example:

> There would seem to be a rising trend of people taking things at face value and a rejection of the scientific method. The most alarming aspect of this trend is the acceptance, apparently without question, of the 'psychic connection' and the use of hypnotic regression by people whose qualifications to do so leave much to be desired.
>
> (UFO Insight, Vol. 1, No. 4, Feb. 1980, Editorial)

> It is time something is done to limit this current insane craze which cannot help but reduce our subject from a scientific research into a diabolical superstition ... What is the matter with everyone? Can they not see that, either intentionally or by chance, this belief in the psychic answer will eventually kill most of the useful research into UFO phenomena?
>
> (Flying Saucer Review, Vol. 26, No. 6, 1981, letter)

The 'paranormal' or parapsychological approach, on the other hand, considered the natural science approach to be unnecessarily limiting. Those who studied UFOs from this perspective wished to include ideas from many different areas, including those seen as disreputable by orthodox science, such as the idea that UFOs were the product of undiscovered human powers, or that they were created by 'ultra-terrestrials' (invisible intelligences co-habiting with humanity), and also more orthodox areas, such as the human sciences. There was quite an input from sociology and psychology, but there seemed very few individuals who thought that UFOs could be explained solely in terms of these disciplines: it was to parapsychology that they looked primarily for ideas. This seemed to be because orthodox disciplines are generally founded upon materialist presuppositions, whereas those adopting a 'paranormal' position were idealistically inclined: they placed great importance on the mind, other levels of reality and altered states of consciousness. This led them to regard orthodox science as unnecessarily restrictive. For example:

> We have been appalled at the rush to define ufology into a tight little positivist box before we have any idea of what its limits may be ... It is foolish, unnecessarily limited and totally impossible to attempt to come up with a set of definitions for a phenomena which most of us have not yet even agreed on how to recognise!
>
> (Magonia, Summer, 1979, Editorial)

> If we are to limit our studies to 'unexplained things seen within the context of flight' then are we to ignore reports of landed craft or apparent entities? Additionally, if a person, or persons, psychically visualises a UFO (possibly with occupants) that is not physically there by any scientific standards, then doesn't that alone need investigation?
>
> (MAPIT Skywatch, No. 40, Sept/Oct, 1981, letter)

Although the apparent existence of this conflict of approach was supported by impressions gained during interviews and participant observation, is there any evidence to indicate the extent or duration of its existence?

An examination of early copies of the popular magazine Flying Saucer Review seemed to suggest that this type of conflict has existed within ufology from the beginning, although in a slightly different form.[e] The topic of parapsychology was not mentioned to the same extent in editorials or letters, but the contactees were a major source of controversy. Flying Saucer Review featured articles written by contactees and frequently fought criticism directed at their publication. In a typicaleditorial, they wrote:

> Perhaps it has appeared that it would be better to take the advice of the scientific group and keep silent about those wild contact claims, to buy respectability at the price of suppression and to dismiss Adamski and his fellows as fantasts or something worse. This is tempting counsel, but for one consideration: it happens to be unscientific. It would ignore all the evidence which, whether we like it or not, favours Adamski in his earliest claims at least.
>
> (Flying Saucer Review, Vol. 9, No. 5, Sept/Oct 1963)

The debate over the validity of the contactees portrayed similar features to the current conflict. There were those who wanted to give due consideration to all views on UFOs, however disreputable they may be in the eyes of science. They were against limitingUFOs to the natural sciences and were 'open minded' towards occultism and mysticism. Then there were those who were totally against the association of UFOs with metaphysics, which the contactees proclaimed. They occasionally burst into indignant comment, as in:

> Years ago, when space craft were within the province of science fiction, there might have been slender justification for imagining that extra-terrestrial objects and beings were remotely connected with supernatural phenomena, or with a spiritual plane of existence... In my humble opinion, it would enhance the value and prestige of your REVIEW if you were to limit yourself to articles of a solid scientific background which avoid touching on the matters that have

> hitherto brought discredit to the flying saucer controversy. For one of the main accusations that are flung at those who believe in the existence of the saucers is that we dabble in occultism and play at telepathy, and are, hence, unreliable when evaluating physical, concrete phenomena.
>
> (Flying Saucer Review, Vol. 8, No. 1, Jan/Feb 1962, letter)

which drew the following interesting comment from the editor:

> Our correspondent's views are representative of those of a large number of our readers, but, in fairness, it must be mentioned that there is another section which takes a more 'advanced' attitude towards our mystery. Our policy has always been to give a fair hearing to both sides.

The reply clearly delineates the opposing factions, which would appear to be identical to the current ones.[f] Contactees no longer occupy the same amount of space in Flying Saucer Review, or any other magazine of the UFO reporting type, and it seems from issues of Flying Saucer Review, that they began to fade out and the new controversy began to emerge around 1967. It was at this time that articles on the interpretation of UFOs as something other than extra-terrestrial vehicles began to appear. Yet, although the metaphysical philosophy of the contactees was no longer of interest, science was still considered to be too restrictive in the study of UFOs. The following extract from a typical article by a well-known writer taking this type of approach (usually termed 'New Ufology' by participants), gives an idea of the genre:

> We have spent twenty years searching for a simple (extra-terrestrial 'survey') type of conclusion. The truth is infinitely more complex. It may lie completely outside of the recognised and much-touted sciences. The only way to find out is to perform in-depth studies of everything happening in the flap areas, and to make correlations of the incidents uncovered in many such areas ... People throughout the U.S. are now caught up in a science fiction nightmare ... we can no longer dismiss the weird and seemingly irrelevant.
>
> (John Keel 'A New Approach to UFO Witnesses' in Flying Saucer Review, Vol. 14, No. 3, May/June 1968, emphasis in original)

The late 1960s also saw the start of the publication of popular books which treated UFOs are part of a much greater mystery: as one element in an 'unexplained' universe which included psychic phenomena, ghosts, monsters, etc. The publication of this type of book gathered momentum during the 1970s (e.g. Vallee, 1969; Keel, 1970; Clark and Coleman, 1975; Steiger, 1976)

The contactee controversy faded out for a number of reasons associated with events occurring within the UFO movement, and also in the wider society. After much debate among ufologists, the contactees lost much of the unconditional credibility they may have had for some, particularly as no new information in support of them was forthcoming, a state of affairs which was exacerbated by the death of George Adamski, the most popular and credible of the contactees, in 1965. Further, the finding that no life existed on the Moon, Mars, or Venus, blatantly contradicted the claims of the contactees and also threw doubt upon the existence of life elsewhere in the universe. Also, UFO experiences began to take an unpleasant turn and, instead of reports of contact with god-like extra-terrestrials, individuals began to report being abducted and having undergone unpleasant examinations at the hands of aliens.

In the wider society during the mid-1960s, major cultural changes were taking place, and these probably contributed to the emergence of a view in which UFOs were part of a much larger mystery, the answer to which lay outside the confines of natural science. These changes, commonly referred to as the growth of the counter-culture (Westhues, 1972; Roszak, 1971; Berke, 1969), included the re-emergence of romantic values among a wide section of young people (Musgrove, 1974), which found expression in many different ways, from youth groups such as the 'hippies' to changes in scientific disciplines, such as the growth of ethnomethodology in the social sciences.

An essential element for many young people was the exploration of altered states of consciousness and the experience of other realities. The hippies, in particular, were fascinated with mystery and ambiguity (Willis, 1978). John Michell, who became a 'guru figure' for many young people, in his book The Flying Saucer Vision (1967), presents a not dissimilar thesis to Erich von Daniken, in that he looks to myths and legends for evidence of contact with extra-terrestrials, but he does so in a completely different way. His emphasis is on the effects of the 'eternal symbol reborn' on consciousness and on the approaching 'New Age', rather than on extra-terrestrials as an explanation of myth and legend. It is those aspects of UFOs which transcend the laws of natural science which are of interest to Michell, rather than those aspects which explain mysterious legends in technological terms, as in von Daniken.

As far as British UFO publications are concerned, then, the conflict between the 'nuts and bolts' and 'paranormal' approaches to UFOs is a long-

standing one, although its form changed slightly during the mid-1960s. Is there any evidence that this conflict is widespread and not confined to the pages of UFO publications in Britain?

In his analysis of ufology,[8] Blake (1979) describes two general ways of accounting for UFOs. The first is to define them as a natural phenomena, thus including them within the bounds of normal science. In this category are the 'debunkers' and the 'hopefuls':

> The former are convinced that UFOs are 'nothing more than' stars, birds, swamp gas, hoaxes, or 'mass hysteria'. The hopefuls are those who would argue, and hope to demonstrate, that UFOs are secret weapons, extra-terrestrial vehicles or something else subsumable under normal science. (p.315)

The second style of accountability is the attempt to present UFOs as something beyond the confines of normal science. This has been monopolised by cults and their leaders, but from it the 'macrocosmic approach' to UFOs has emerged:

> Such schemes have all fixated one basic fact... and that is the essentially experiental nature of UFOs. (p.316)

Also this approach includes in the UFO phenomena all sorts of material referred to by the former as peripheral or irrelevant.

Blake (1979) describes these two ways of accounting for UFOs as the 'naturalist' and 'macroscopic' perspectives, arguing that they are distinguished in terms of theoretical scope, methodology and emphasis, but are similar in problem and conceptualisation. Clearly these perspectives are essentially similar to those of the 'nuts and bolts' and 'paranormal' positions mentioned previously, and this implies that they are fundamental differences which exist among UFO researchers. However, Blake's analysis is at the cultural rather than the social psychological level; he is talking of two clearly distinguishable approaches and these are analytical entities, not aggregates of the opinions of UFO researchers, so we have no indication of how many people follow each approach. How then, can we relate these approaches to the different ways of conceiving the 'UFO mystery' which were mentioned in the previous section?

One way is to see the naturalist (i.e. 'nuts and bolts') and macroscopic (i.e. 'paranormal') positions as extremes forming each end of a continuum.

As the macroscopic position seems to have its origin in the world of contactees, it is rooted in metaphysical philosophy and mystical religion, while the naturalist position is clearly based upon the natural sciences. The religion-science axis mentioned by Campbell (1972) as operating within the cultic milieu, appears to be here present in one particular movement within that milieu. This may not be untypical. Newton (1981) describes organised astrology as being split down the middle into scientific and religious wings, but she mentions that most individual practitioners combined the two different approaches. This combination of approaches is also present in ufology, in fact Blake (1979) argues that it is in the coalescing of these perspectives that ufology is becoming a science. This suggestion will be examined in the next section, but let me first consider this combined approach further, particularly its implications for conceptualisation of the 'UFO mystery'. What evidence is there that many UFO researchers combine both the naturalist and macroscopic positions?

It would seem to be rather difficult for UFO researchers to take a perspective which combines a view that UFOs are beyond the confines of normal science with one that includes them within it, yet they were able to do so by 'hedging their bets'. That is, by arguing for a multiplicity of explanations. During interviews and participant observation, UFO researchers repeatedly expressed the opinion that there was unlikely to be one answer to the question of what UFOs were. After emphasising the mysterious nature of UFOs, they would list a number of possibilities, saying that many were undoubtedly misperceptions, others were probably some form of as yet unknown natural phenomena, some were likely to be extra-terrestrials, and there was also likely to be a psychic element involved in close encounters: perhaps the aliens were from another level of reality or another dimension and were encouraging us to develop our psychic powers so that we could explore their reality, etc.

It was because of this preference for multiple suggestions that in the BUFORA survey the question about what UFOs might be was couched in terms which allowed respondents to choose a number of alternatives, but, in order to obtain some idea of preference, they were also asked to rank them. From these choices it was possible to obtain some indication of whether they adopted a naturalist, a macroscopic, or a combined approach. That is, if members chose a combination of macroscopic and naturalist explanations in their first three choices, it seemed reasonable to infer that they were combining the two perspectives. The BUFORA survey indicated that 42% of

them were using a naturalist approach. 4% of them a macroscopic approach, and 43% of them a combined approach.[h]

Perhaps not surprisingly, UFO researchers seem to be about evenly split between naturalists and those adopting a combined perspective. It is probable that at least some contactee cult members would also have adopted a combined perspective even though the macroscopic one would be in the majority,[j] making it a major one within the UFO movement as a whole. Given that an essential feature of movements within the cultic milieu is the attempt to unite science and religion, it is not an unexpected discovery, but what implications does it have for conceptualisation of the 'UFO mystery'?

During the earlier discussion of mystery, three types were mentioned: the first was the religious mystery which involved charismatic commitment, reassurance in the belief that there was some greater ordering of existence; the second was the scientific mystery which involved an attempt to gain control, to make the unexplained familiar and predictable; and the third was a combination of these, found in the 'popular science' mystery, involving a sense of 'possibility'; a feeling that something awesome and profound was just around the corner if investigation was carried far enough. If these three types of mystery are identified with the three approaches to UFOs outlined above, then it is possible to get some idea of what proportion of UFO researchers can be termed 'secular seekers'.

The criterion, according to Klapp (1969) was whether the object of their research was 'facts' or a 'mystique to give meaning to Man'. The naturalists, in their assumption that UFOs can be subsumed under the laws of normal science, are supporting the scientific investigation of UFOs: they are pursuing facts rather than mystique. Of course, they may fail to be scientific for a number of reasons and these will be discussed in the next section, but their intention is to follow the guidelines laid down by scientific research.

The macroscopics, few of whom seem to be involved in UFO research, consider UFOs to lie outside the confines of natural science and part of a metaphysical reality: they are 'metaphysical seekers', as has been described in some detail in the last

Those who combine these two approaches, however, seem to be interested in preserving the mysterious nature of UFOs in order that they might continue to investigate it. On the one hand, they call for scientific investigation,

whilst, on the other, they hold onto the notion that UFOs are beyond the capabilities of science to understand. They make fun of the naturalists for taking such a narrow and limited view, and they laugh at the cultists for being so gullible. Theirs is the 'open-minded' approach and at face value it seems an eminently sensible one: it is the approach with the widest scope because it can find a home anywhere. Yet this openness and fluidity can easily become vagueness and vacillation: the celebration of the ambiguous.

A love of ambiguity was a feature of 'hippie culture', according to Willis (1978). The hippies gave particular attention to weird and unusual experience and preferred elements of surprise, contradiction and uncertainty in their music. Instead of 'meaning', there was a 'rich ambiguity'. In Willis's opinion this was because at the heart of hippie culture lay a paradox: how could the notion of something beyond be kept alive when it could never actually be possessed? He writes:

> Their resolution of this paradox took the form of the playing out of an interminable and symbolic game. The result of the game always promised to bring final proof of transcendence, and the ambience of this result came back through the game so that one could be forever on the brink of experiencing ultimate truth... existentially the game is a solution. (p.86)

While not wishing to identify UFO researchers with the hippies, the counter-culture certainly had an influence on the UFO movement, as I have described earlier. In the UFO books written by popular authors like Jacques Vallee, Brad Steiger, John Keel and John Michell in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the love of the bizarre and the paradoxical, of mind games, altered states of consciousness, alternative realities, and, most of all, of the mysterious, is clearly present. These authors formed the spearhead of 'New Ufology' which, although rooted in the metaphysical subculture of the contactee cults, was different from it. Many ufologists seem to have grafted the ideas from these books onto a former naturalist perspective and this has produced the combined approach which has been described. There may be a pursuit of facts here, but there is also a desire for mystique. This being the case, it seems quite reasonable to describe a considerable number of (but by no means all) ufologists as 'secular seekers'. Let me now consider the implications of this for the subject of ufology.

Footnotes

a) The term 'world-view' is taken from Balch and Taylor (1977) who describe the "metaphysical world-view" of the seeker, although the concept is not defined by them. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) have defined it as the 'central core of meanings' possessed by people. They quote Bateson (1944) as summarising one of the major assumptions underlying the concept:

> The human individual is endlessly simplifying, organizing, and generalizing his own view of his own environment; he constantly imposes on this environment his own construction and meanings; these constructions and meanings (are) characteristic of one culture, as over against another. (p.273)

However, it is possible that the term 'world-view' is too all-encompassing to be used in all cases. Stupple and Dashti (1977) draw a distinction between deviant belief systems which constitute a 'paramount reality' and those which are a 'subuniverse of experience'. While the former seems to correspond to a 'world-view', the latter is merely a temporary dwelling place. Their study of subscribers to the Saucerian Press, implies that, whereas members of UFO cults take the occult social world as their paramount reality, for the Saucerian Press readership:

> ...the flying saucer folklore appears to be, at most, a diversion - in theoretical terms, a subuniverse of experience. (p.491)

In other words, as implied in Part Three, there are probably varying degrees of socialisation into the world-view concerned.

b) Because there is no indication of why people should follow one path of seekership rather than another, or why some should feel the problem more acutely than others.

c) Of course, I do not wish to imply that it is impossible to take a religious attitude towards science, or a scientific attitude towards religion.

d) A similar tendency in the approach of marginal or unorthodox scientists has been noted by Henry (1981) who remarks:

> ... a surprising amount of their work, and their implicit criticism of orthodox science for its narrowness and lack of imagination, might be interpreted as efforts to re-enchant the world through science.. Theirs is, in other words, a fascinating apparent effort to be 'for' science and yet, at the same time, against its 'impoverishing' impact on our modern world view.
> (p.12, emphasis in original)

e) Flying Saucer Review is the longest running and most well-known UFO magazine in Britain. The issues examined were those between 1958 and 1968, which formed a collection in the J.B. Morrell Library, University of York.

f) Although the 'paranormal' position may have been more widely identified with the metaphysical world-view in the early days, the increasing acceptance of the 'scientific' status of parapsychology has meant that participants are able to place a greater distance between themselves and occultism, at least among themselves.

g) As I have mentioned, ufology is specifically associated with UFO researchers and research groups.

h) Theories considered to be 'Naturalist' were those which could be subsumed under normal science, that is: physical extra-terrestrials travelling in vehicles, as yet unknown natural phenomena, secret weapons, and misperceptions of known objects. Those considered to be 'macroscopic' were those which implied phenomena outside the confines of normal science: spiritual beings, psychic events, and evil entities. The first three choices of individualswere counted.

i) Because, as I have described in Part Three, most members have adopted a metaphysical world-view in which paranormal phenomena are taken for granted, but there are varying degrees of socialisation into this world-view and so some may have embraced a combined perspective.

## CHAPTER 2

## IS UFOLOGY A SCIENCE ?

What has come to be called 'ufology' appears to be specifically associated with UFO research groups and individual researchers, but, although the term is frequently used in the literature (e.g. Story, 1980), it is rarely defined. There are two notable exceptions: Oberg (1979) in his essay which won the 'New Scientist/Cutty Sark Whisky prize' for the best research on UFOs, writes:

> The study of such reports - the objects themselves, not being physically present, cannot be studied - came to be called 'ufology'. (p.102)

That is, he defines it as the study of reports of UFO experiences. He goes on to examine why ufology has not been accepted as a science, and this will be considered in a moment. The second definition is that of the US sociologist, Blake (1979), who, in his article on ufology defines it as:

> ... the study of unidentified flying objects as elements in an independent theoretical-conceptual scheme. (p.315)

He adds that this is a roundabout way of referring to ufology as a science, necessitated by the fact that its status as a science is in question.

These definitions suggest that UFO research groups are practising what they consider to be, or hope will eventually become, a science, but that orthodox science does not share this view. Why is ufology's status as a science in question? Oberg (1979) gives the following reasons:

> ...Ufology allegedly refuses to play by the rules of scientific thought, demanding instead special exemptions from time-tested procedures of data verification, theory testing, and the burden of proof. Ufologists assert the existence of some extraordinary stimulus behind a small fraction of the tens of thousands of UFO reports on file. The cornerstone of the alleged proof is the undisputed observation that a small residue of such reports cannot at present be explained in terms of prosaic (if rare) phenomena. Yet this claim is invalid: it is clearly not logical to base the existence of a positive ('true UFOs exist') on the grounds of a hypothetical negative ('no matter what the effort some UFO reports cannot be explained'). (p.103)

Two accusations are made against ufology in the above quote: firstly, that ufology refuses to follow the rules of scientific thought because it demands exemptions from data verification and theory testing; and, secondly, that

its proof is invalid because it argues illogically that 'UFOs exist' because not all reports can be explained. Do these criteria enable a distinction to be made between science and nonscience?

The use of rational criteria such as principles of data verification and theory testing, in order to demarcate between science and nonscience, has been the subject of much controversy amongst philosophers of science during the twentieth century. Early in the debate a number of rational criteria were proposed, such as the Verifiability Principle of logical positivism (Ayer, 1946; 1959) and the method of conjecture and refutation suggested by Karl Popper (1959). However, subsequent criticism resulted in the extensive elaboration of these principles and, during this process, they lost much of their usefulness as ways of distinguishing between science and nonscience. It does not seem possible to describe any "time-tested methods of verification" which science has consistently followed. In fact one philosopher has argued that the only rule is that there are no rules (Feyerabend, 1975).

As far as the question of illogicality is concerned, it is certainly true that ufologists argue in this way, but two things need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, as Westrum (1979) has argued, there is a similarity between the sceptical attitude of the French Academy of Sciences to reports of stones which fell from the sky in the early nineteenth century and science's sceptical attitude towards UFO reports. Secondly, studies of the files of the US Air Force's investigation of UFOs indicate that they did not carry out the careful investigation of UFO reports which they claimed (Hynek, 1975; Jacobs, 1975; Strentz, 1970). Their primary aim seemed to be one of public relations, ensuring that there was no panic over UFOs by the general public. Ufologists are justified, then, in pointing to the numerous attempts to explain away UFO reports in terms of misidentifications of highly unlikely objects, as evidence of the fallibility of many explanations.

If these explanations for why ufology is not a science are not very adequate, are there any others which may be more satisfactory? One suggestion is that, unlike science, ufology has a popular rather than an academic social base. That is, the majority of new recruits, funding, and other forms of encouragement and support, come from the general public; a state of affairs which has serious consequences for ufology.

For instance, this means that the majority of new recruits are not

scientifically trained and so have little idea of the conventions of science. Their failure to be scientific is less a deliberate refusal (although it may be for some), than a lack of knowledge. Let me be clear here, though, what is meant by 'being scientific'. My intention is not to refer to certain norms, such as those of emotional neutrality or organised scepticism, as Merton (1949) discovered, but to the far more complex processes described by recent sociologists of science (e.g. Mitroff, 1974; Mulkay, 1979); Barnes, 1974). Thus ufologists are not unscientific because they have a strong belief that UFOs are extra-terrestrial entities, because scientists too frequently have strong beliefs about the outcome of their research.[a] Rather, they are unscientific because they have not learned the many informal and formal assumptions which are usually learned during research training.[b]

An important aspect of this training is likely to be the learning of 'paradigms', according to Kuhn (1970).[c] By this he means:

> ... the concrete problem-solutions that students encounter from the start of their scientific education... (p.187)

A paradigm is a shared example of what is to be considered problematic and the way such problems might be solved. Scientists do not encounter problem solutions which are related to ufology, which means that UFO reports are not seen by them as problematic. Most ufologists, on the other hand, have not had this socialisation into the problem areas of science and so the anomalies which concern them are those of popular and folk culture.

Strange events, such as lights in the sky, ghosts, monsters, vivid dreams, meaningful coincidences and mystical experiences, have always been reported, but historically these events were interpreted in a traditional (usually magical or mythical) or religious manner. They occupied an important position within religious and folk beliefs. With the breakdown of traditional communities and the decline of orthodox religion, this body of subjectively meaningful experience no longer occupies an explanatory framework for a large section of the population. The only ones legitimately available are those of 'illness' or 'misperception' and these devalue what are usually felt to be important and significant experiences. This, I think, is one reason why such experiences have recently become topics for popular magazines like The Unexplained, although there may be other reasons as well, and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

An important reason why some people start to investigate (rather than just read about) these 'anomalies', according to Nowotny (1979), is because science has such a monopoly on definitions of nature and access to its investigation that these are the only areas left for those excluded from the privileged ranks of science. She writes that UFOs and similar phenomena, and the occult sciences:

> ... seem to promise a rich field of activity for all those would-be scientists and amateurs who, long ago, had to give up their last foothold in science as it became industrialized. An increasing esoteric and elitist 'high science' has nothing but contempt for them. The 'low sciences', i.e. folk and pseudo science, have become the obvious recruiting ground for all those who fight the scientific monopoly to define what the world is and what is in it. (p.17)

An additional factor contributing to this fight might be the cultural theories of potency and voluntarism, mentioned by Borhek and Curtis (1975) as characteristic of urban beliefs. If individualistic and relativistic ideologies are important in modern urban society, individuals are encouraged to feel that they are in control of the world and that they have the right to choose how they define it, yet such aspirations are in direct conflict with actual power structures in Western society.

Of course, the elitist structure of science brings a wide range of advantages to those involved, and it seems largely the lack of these advantages which contributes to the nonscientific nature of ufology. For instance, the rigorous training potential scientists undergo ensures that only those highly committed to their subject do research, but in ufology there is no similar mechanism and those pursuing it for entertainment work side by side with those having serious aims. The long training also encourages socialisation into the fairly well-defined role of the scientist, but in ufology there is no clear role for aspiring researchers to adopt. During interviews and participant observation, members of UFO research groups frequently expressed confusion over what their role should be during the investigation of UFO reports. Some drew parallels with police work and saw themselves as attempting to get to the bottom of an incident, others wondered if they should give comfort or advice to the puzzled and sometimes frightened people from whom they collected information, rather in the manner of social workers.

Even more important in its consequences is the lack of funds, which makes

serious ufologists dependent on their own limited resources, or on the general public, who may be more interested in entertainment than knowledge. As we have seen, most support comes from members of the cultic milieu and here 'epistemological individualism' is the dominant approach, yet this is not conducive to the kind of consensus necessary in 'normal science' (Kuhn, 1970).[d] The general tolerance of a wide variety of approaches within ufology which results in disagreement over many aspects of UFO investigation, from what would be the best definition of a UFO and what constitutes a complete UFO report, to what are considered to be the most likely hypotheses, means that, not only is it frequently difficult to compare different UFO reports because there is no standard investigation procedure, but also there is no common language. A lack of consensus was also found in parapsychology. Collins (1976) established six stages at which negotiation was possible during an experiment and showed that in parapsychology all six stages are open to negotiation, whereas in established scientific fields none, or only some of these stages reveal ambiguity.

Probably the most important factor affecting the development of ufology is the specific nature of the social base from which it has emerged. As was shown in Part Two, UFO research groups are organisations within a norm-oriented movement which developed following the crystallisation of a generalised belief, a major component of which was the focusing of anxiety upon governments and science. These were thought to need modification in order that information about UFOs could be released and scientists would investigate UFOs in an adequate manner. This belief is founded upon a certain suspicion and hostility towards science, which means that at the heart of UFO research culture there lies a mistrust of science, a situation in conflict with the development of the 'science' of ufology.

A final important factor is that orthodox science possesses the power of exclusion. By rejecting aspiring sciences it not only preserves its own status, but also makes it difficult for potential sciences to emerge from the 'pseudo science trap': the circular process which anchors them to a popular base and reinforces their nonscientific status. Blake (1979) suggests that ufology is an emerging science, but the above analysis highlights the difficulties involved in this process. There are three distinct patterns by which the claims of a deviant science can become respected science, according to Dolby (1979). The first is for the same ideas to be developed independently by orthodox scientists; the second is for scientific orthodoxy to take up an idea from deviant science in its own way, and, having

found value in it, to keep it and develop it on its own terms; and the third is for the deviant movement itself to become orthodox.

It is possible that the study of UFOs might take any one of these three routes, but the second seems to me to be the most likely. The main problem with the third route is that it presupposes the scientific acceptance of parapsychology[e] and, unless researchers in the discipline have a major breakthrough in the next few years, this is unlikely to happen in the near future. Yet a number of scientists from various disciplines have already taken an interest in UFO reports and this interest may grow.

In sum,

The fact that ufology has a social base which stretches quite extensively into the cultic milieu, combined with the origin of the subject in a norm-oriented social movement which is mistrustful of science, has serious implications for its aspirations towards scientific status. Not only does this generate a certain amount of conflict, but also the minority of ufologists who are struggling to turn ufology into a science have to cope with the limitations of a lack of scientific training, inadequate funds and the hostility of orthodox science. For these reasons, ufology will probably never become accepted as an orthodox science, although UFO reports may well be more widely studied by scientific disciplines (particularly by the human sciences, and meteorology), in the future.

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Footnotes

a) For instance, Mitroff (1974) in his study of scientists studying the moon found that his respondents felt that the only people who took the idea of the objective, disinterested scientist literally and seriously were the general public or beginningscience students. He discovered support for a system of counter-norms: some scientists were keen observers precisely because of their commitments, not in spite of them. One of the conclusions of this fascinating study is that:

> Science, as opposed to other systems of knowledge, is distinguished by the fact that, if not in theory then in actual practice, it has learned how to make use of strong determinants of rationality (testing, evidence, etc.) plus strong emotional commitments. (p.249)

b) Polanyi (1967) discusses in some detail the importance of the informal or 'tacit' dimension of science. Also a study by Collins (1974) describes the difficulties encountered by different laboratories trying to copy a particular design of a TEA laser: only those who had actually built an operating TEA laser could build another - the plans were not enough. This implied that there was some knowledge which was passed on informally and was not formally written down.

c) Kuhn has been criticised for being insufficiently precise in his use of the term 'paradigm'. However, this is the updated and revised version formulated in response to his critics.

d) By 'normal science', Kuhn (1970) means; ".....research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice." (p.10). Thus they acknowledge an authority other than that of their own, unlike those in the cultic milieu.

e) Because, if ufology is characterised by the coalescing of the two perspectives, as Blake (1979) argues, the implication is that UFOs are 'beyond the bounds of normal science' to some degree and the language of parapsychology seems to be the only one which attempts to describe what this might entail. Certainly, as I have described, this is the discipline which many ufologists draw upon for their ideas and 'theories'.

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# PART FIVE: OTHER ASPECTS OF THE UFO MOVEMENT

## CHAPTER 1

## POPULAR 'BELIEF IN UFOs'

What do we know about popular 'belief in UFOs'? In 1978, a US Gallup poll found that 57% of the population thought that flying saucers were 'real' (Westrum, 1977). In Britain, a 1961 Gallup poll showed that 24% of people 'believed in flying saucers'[a]. The problem with these figures is that it is difficult to interpret the nature of the belief involved. What is meant by 'flying saucer'? What is meant by 'real'? How certain is the belief? Is it an isolated belief or part of a wider constellation involving psychic phenomena, the Loch Ness Monster, and similar 'strange mysteries'? Answers to these questions are obviously important for an understanding of popular 'belief in UFOs' and this data is not available, but can the analysis of UFO groups shed any light on this problem?

The analysis shows that members of at least three different populations may give a 'yes' response to a question about the existence of flying saucers. There are those who believe they have seen a UFO, those who have read books on the subject, and those who have joined a UFO group.[c] It is the second category, those who have read UFO books, which will be the focus of attention here because the sales of popular books on UFOs, ancient astronauts and similar subjects, are sometimes taken as indicators of popular belief (Ashworth, 1980; Carroll, 1977; Evans, 1973; 1976).

The central issue is whether the data on UFO groups enables us to make any inferences about those who read UFO books: how they interpret them, the nature of their belief in UFOs etc. It seems to me that this procedure is quite valid because the analysis of UFO groups showed that, as far as belief was concerned, there was no clear division between those who read books on UFOs and those who joined UFO groups. That is, socialisation into the UFO 'world-view' (whether the contactee perspective or the UFO research one) generally occurred before an individual joined a UFO group and reading was usually a major part of this process. This implies that there are likely to be many similarities between group members and those who only read UFO literature. Indeed, as I have mentioned earlier, it is useful to consider many of these as forming 'collectivities' or 'audience cults' as Stark and

Bainbridge (1979) call them which are part of the cultic milieu. Of course, this does not mean that the two populations are identical and so possible differences will also need to be taken into consideration.

So what can the analysis of UFO groups tell us about popular 'belief in UFOs?' The study has shown that there are two main wings to the UFO movement: contactees and UFO research. These involve different conceptions of the nature of UFOs. Belief in them for the former means acceptance of spiritual beings who have contacted individuals in order to help humanity. It is also likely to involve related metaphysical beliefs, such as other levels of reality, psychic powers, hidden masters, Atlantis, evil entities and the like.

Belief for the latter, on the other hand, means a belief in the unexplained nature of UFOs and there are two main types of interpretation involved. About half of those in this category consider it likely that flying saucers are extra-terrestrial spacecraft. This does not necessarily mean they also believe the aliens to be spiritually advanced, nor that they believe in other levels of reality. Those proposing the extra-terrestrial hypothesis are likely to accept a natural science interpretation of the world and conceive of UFOs as machines. They may also believe in the existence of other phenomena, but these are likely to be 'anomalous facts'[d] such as the Loch Ness Monster, or Bigfoot. The other half are taken up with the mysterious nature of UFOs and many live in a world of perpetual possibility. UFOs are considered in the context of many other 'strange mysteries' and so they are also likely to believe in psychic powers and other levels of reality but, unlike the contactee followers, this will probably not involve the acceptance of a metaphysical world-view, because the explanations involved place limits on the possibilities.

What kind of differences are there likely to be between group members and the population of readers? The analysis of UFO research groups implied that availability of time and money were important factors in whether a group was joined or not, but since, as Wallis and Bruce (1982) argue, these are not fixed qualities, other factors, such as friendship with group members, the extent to which UFO beliefs have become an important part of an individual's life, and identification with the aims of some aspect of the movement, were also considered to be important. This implies that a major difference between the two populations will be in the degree of importance and significance attached to UFO beliefs. We might assume that

many of those who read UFO books do so out of passing curiosity, that strength of belief is not very great and that the UFO problem does not occupy much of their leisure or working life. In other words, the statement 'flying saucers are real' for these people is little more than an interesting idea which they would like to be true.

The three perspectives outlined above of the metaphysical world-view (contactee followers), the naturalist UFO'world-view' (believers in the extra-terrestrial hypothesis and others adopting a natural science approach to UFOs), and the paranormal UFO 'world-view' (those living in a world of perpetual possibility), then, are best seen as general frameworks into which a 'belief in UFOs' is typically fitted.[e] The degree of commitment to one of these frameworks is probably dependent upon the level of involvement in the UFO movement, although, once an intense level of commitment is reached, the details of the framework may be modified due to organisational demands. For instance, those joining a contactee cult may well find themselves being socialised into a distinctive set of beliefs (Wallis, 1974; Balch and Taylor, 1977), while many of those joining a UFO research group will find themselves learning basic scientific method.[f]

Let me turn now to explanations for popular 'belief in UFOs' so that they can be examined in the light of the above analysis. As described in Part One, there are two main types of explanations: those which explain belief in terms of normal social psychological traits such as externality or affiliation motivation (Littig, 1971; Rasta, 1975) and those which explain it in terms of more general cultural processes, such as the generation of myths (Jung, 1959; Ashworth, 1980; Carroll, 1977). Both of these types of explanation concentrate only on belief in extra-terrestrial visitation (and Atlantis in the case of Ashworth, 1980, and Carroll, 1977), and so only refer to two of the three perspectives described above. The belief in UFOs as a mystery suggesting that 'anything is possible' is not explained.

Before assessing the adequacy of these previous explanations let me try to account for this 'mystery' perspective. In Part Four attention was drawn to the similarity between elements of the counter-culture and the fascination with mystery shown by some ufologists. Both exhibited a love of ambiguity, an interest in altered states of consciousness, alternative realities and the bizarre. Writers like John Michell and John Keel were popular among ufologists and hippies. Possibly then, explanations for

the existence of these features in the counter-culture may also apply to their existence among ufologists.

A number of writers have pointed to the profound anti-rational and anti-science features of the counter-culture (Westhues, 1972; Cotgrove, 1973; Staude, 1972) and it seems to be these rather than the communal, anti-establishment and drug-oriented aspects, which ufologists share. They are drawn towards paradox, ambiguity and non-logical ways of thinking and to the experiential features of UFO reports. Given that this is the case, it suggests that a substantial part of popular 'belief in UFOs' can be characterised as 'anti-science'. However, let me be clear what is meant by this term. Sheaffer (1981) considers the anti-scientific nature of UFO belief to be due to regression caused by disenchantment with the scientific world-view. He writes:

> ... there can be no reasonable doubt that the UFO movement as a whole represents a regression to prescientific modes of thinking. (p.236)

While disenchantment with the scientific world-view seems to be an important aspect, regression need not be implied. There has been opposition to the growth of modern science since its beginnings in the 17th century. Nowotny (1979) characterises this tradition of opposition as the "romantic, utopian or literary-humanist tradition" which argues for the holistic against the atomistic, subjective rather than objective, quality rather than quantity, emotion rather than rationality etc. Thus anti-science, along with other forms of protest against science, have

> ...more to do with who is to control a future world and divergent views as to what it should look like, than a turning against science as such. (Nowotny, 1979, p.2)

Belief in UFOs as a mystery, then, can be seen as part of a much larger current of dissent towards modern science, even though it does not embody a complete rejection of science. It is in favour of a <u>different kind</u> of science and the search for a 'new paradigm' (which the mysterious nature of UFOs promises to eventually reveal) seems to be really a desire for a new kind of science which includes subjective experience.

Turning now toprevious explanations for popular 'belief in UFOs', it

is clear from the foregoing that the structuralist analysis which discovers two new myths in the work of von Daniken and other popular authors[8] (Ashworth, 1980; Carroll, 1977) does not take into account another way these books may be 'read'. Danikenism and Atlanticism may well be two new myths (and this possibility will be discussed in a moment), but the books they refer to can also be interpreted in another way by readers. Both the books of von Daniken and other proponents of the ancient astronaut story, and those on Atlantis (such as Berlitz, 1978), contain 'mysteries', that is, 'anomalous facts' which are interpreted in a particular way. Yet, as Palmer (1979) argues, these 'facts' have been appropriated in such a way that they appear to be autonomous - as independent of any theory and thus open to the interpretation placed upon them by the author. It seems to me that this makes it possible to assimilate them into frameworks other than those used by the authors. Indeed, as Carroll (1977) remarks, the same evidence is used to support both the Atlantis and the ancient astronaut myths. So what is to prevent these 'facts' being interpreted as part of a mysterious universe in which many things are completely unexplained and promise to totally transform modern science during their investigation: a 'mystified demystifying' framework in which 'anything is possible'?

Of course, this is an additional interpretation and it does not mean that the two new myths of Danikenism and Atlanticism are non-existent. However, the problem raised during the initial description of the 'new myths' explanation in Part One was the question of institutional support for these myths. In traditional societies there are social and cultural institutions which reinforce myths, but do these exist in modern society?

The obvious suggestion for this kind of institution are the many different kinds of cult which flourish in the cultic milieu which, as Campbell (1972) describes it:

> ... includes all deviant belief systems and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs. (p.122)

In other words, popular belief in these two new myths is supported by the cultic milieu which continually reproduces and distributes the myths, along with new mythical material. It is a "major agency of cultural 'innovation'" (Campbell, 1972), a "seed-bed source of change and wide-ranging innovations"

(Tiryakian, 1974), populated by seekers continually looking for new experiences, knowledge and information.

An important question still remains to be answered: why is it these particular myths and not others which have become so popular? Ashworth (1980) and Carroll (1977), using a structuralist approach, argue that it is because they are more efficient at resolving certain contradictions which the mind experiences, than are other myths. For Ashworth, the main contradiction is that between facts and values, which he claims religion once reconciled but which is now left divided between science and religion. For Carroll, the contradictions are more strictly Levi-Straussian, being the universal oppositions between nature/culture, high/low and life/death.

As far as the content of the new myths is concerned, Ashworth puts this down to contemporary experience. In the case of Danikenism, this is of a world-wide technical system, the actuality and possibility of manned space flight and the possibility of life on other planets. Where Atlanticism is concerned, it is the experience of the need for a common ancestry for humanity rather than the Greece and Rome preferred by followers of Platonism in past history. Modern archaeological findings show that there were a number of civilisations prior to Greece and Rome, so Atlantis is now said to have been the capital of a world-wide civilisation which existed before the Ice-Age.

A number of other factors may be added to Ashworth's explanation for the content of the myths. Where the myth of ancient astronauts is concerned, as Story (1980) points out, the publication of von Daniken's first book Chariots of the Gods? coincided with the first moon landing and with the release of the highly successful film,"2001: A Space Odyssey", which expressed a similar theme to that in the books of von Daniken.[h] The notion of the 'spacemen gods' seemed to reconcile modern science with a literal interpretation of the Bible, in the process capitalising on the desire for the promised return of the Saviour who is a reassurance that God has not forgotten the human race, that 'we are not alone', a concept which is reinforced by reports of UFOs.

The Atlantis myth is clearly but one part of esoteric culture (Tiryakian, 1974), the 'alternative reality tradition' (Ellwood, 1973) or the 'metaphysical world-view' (Balch and Taylor, 1977) which has been discussed in detail earlier, particularly in Part Three, and so its popularity

is probably due to the growth of mystical beliefs in general. The sudden rise of its popularity in the 1960s coincided with the emergence of the counter-culture and so some of this popularity may be due to its identification with the ideals and values of this rebellion: anti-science, anti-establishment and mystical.

Finally, it is perhaps worth emphasising that the popularity of these books must not be equated with belief in the ideas expressed in them (whatever interpretation is put upon these ideas). Urban culture is highly susceptible to fads (Borhek and Curtis, 1975), and Truzzi's (1972) comment that much interest in the occult is playful probably applies to popular interest in all areas of the cultic milieu. Nevertheless, many people do adhere to these beliefs and so some kind of explanation for this must be given.

Three explanations have been offered for why some people rather than others profess belief in extra-terrestrial visitation, and they are all social psychological. Littig (1971) found a significant correlation between strong affiliation motivation (the desire for friends) and belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrials, and Resta (1975) found a statistically significant relationship between the degree of externality (an external individual is one who feels powerless to control his or her own destiny) and strength of belief in UFOs. Carroll (1977), drawing on cognitive dissonance theory, suggests that those whose tolerance is relatively low, would need the dissonance-reducing structure provided by the ancient astronaut (or Atlantis) myth. What are we to make of these suggestions?

As suggestions they are worth considering but the actual evidence in support of their use as explanations is rather insubstantial.[i] In addition, Fox (1979) found that the results of a questionnaire survey on belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrials did not support a psychological theory ('open-mindedness' using Rokeach), or a social psychological one (derived from Warren's research on status inconsistency). However, Fox's hypothesis that

> ... belief in flying saucers is consistent with the United States's world view and has emerged as a collective attempt to understand ambiguous and problematic stimuli (p.23)

not only would appear to be restricted to the United States, but also does not account for the immense enthusiasm shown for this idea, or for alternative interpretations such as the association of UFOs with metaphysical beliefs,

or their place as one aspect of a mysterious and unexplained universe.

A more adequate explanation seems to be one which associates belief with involvement in a subculture which reinforces such beliefs, and considers the rest to be merely fashion. That is, popular 'belief in UFOs' can be characterised as having two layers which merge into one another. At the edge is a superficial interest in UFOs which is little more than a transient fad. This merges into a more serious interest which can be divided into the three orientations described above and which forms the outer reaches of the cultic milieu, the subculture which supports a wide range of unorthodox beliefs. Choice of orientation is likely to be dependent upon a number of psychological and socio-cultural factors, such as those described in the sectionson recruitment in Parts Two and Three which detail the process from an initial serious interest referred to here, to eventual membership of a UFO group.

In sum, although about a quarter of the population in Britain say they 'believe in flying saucers', it is not easy to interpret and explain this finding due to the vagueness of the statement. However, since it is likely that many of those who give a 'yes' response to this statement have read books on UFOs and the population of readers overlaps with that of members of UFO groups, it is possible to draw inferences about popular beliefs from the analysis of UFO groups.

This analysis suggests that three interpretations are involved: the first sees flying saucers as evidence of advanced spiritual beings who are in contact with humanity; the second regards them as likely to be extra-terrestrial vehicles which are surveying the Earth; and the third views them as a mysterious phenomenon which is probably beyond the comprehension of modern science.

The first two interpretations seem to be associated with what some writers have described as two modern myths: Atlanticism and Danikenism. The popularity of these beliefs, then, may be due to their ability to reconcile certain universal oppositions. More obviously they are another example of the attempt to unite science and religion which has been described as a general social movement having its origin in the second half of the 19th century (Wilson, 1973). In addition, they probably rode on the back of general socio-cultural changes: the spaceflight revolution (in

the case of Danikenism) and the growth of new religious movements ( in the case of Atlanticism). The third interpretation also seems to be an attempt to unite science and religion, but one which draws on a tradition of opposition to modern science, heavily influenced by the counter-culture of the late 1960s.

Much popular 'belief in UFOs' is likely to be lighthearted wishful thinking, but, where more serious beliefs are involved, they are probably supported by a degree of involvement in the cultic milieu, albeit at the level of 'audience cult' or 'collectivity'.

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Footnotes

a) Reported in the Sunday Telegraph, December 27th, 1981.

b) The term 'flying saucer' summons up images of extra-terrestrial visitation whereas that of 'UFO' focuses on the unidentified nature of the phenomenon rather than its interpretation. This implies that a 'yes' response to the question about belief in 'flying saucers' may not be the same as a 'yes' response to a question about belief in UFOs. See footnote one, in the Introduction, for further information about the use of these two terms.

c) It is possible that some people develop a belief in UFOs after reading about them in newspapers or through television or radio but I would have thought that, if the subject really meant something to them, they would wish to find out more about it through reading a book. I am aware that this assumption does not take into account those who have difficulty in reading and so admit that there are likely to be some people whose belief is shaped entirely by media representations which have until recently been of the 'extra-terrestrial visitation' kind.

d) Bruzzi (1977) distinguishes between two types of 'anomalies' ( that which is said to be unexplained by science): anomalous facts and anomalous processes. The former are variables or facts which do not fit our expectations but which would cause no revolution in science if they were found to exist, such as a striped swan or a unicorn. The latter are relationships or 'forces' which would require serious changes in current laws of science if they were found to exist, such as astrology, or telepathy. Sobal and Emmons (1982) found a rather similar distinction during a survey on patterns of belief in unexplained phenomena. Factor analysis of their data revealed three underlying dimensions in beliefs about the unexplained: religious, psychic and other beings. The last two seem to correspond to Bruzzi's anomalous processes and anomalous facts.

e) As mentioned in the above footnote, Sobal and Emmons (1982) found th very similar underlying dimensions in beliefs about the unexplained following a factor analysis of data collected during a survey conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion in 1978 (1553 adults). Religious beliefs were angels, devils and life after death; psychic beliefs were ESP, precognition, deja vu and clairvoyance; and the belief in other beings comprised the Loch Ness Monster, or Sasquatch (Bigfoot). These clusters of belief seem to correspond to: conactee beliefs, (religious), naturalistic UFO beliefs (other beings) and psychic UFO beliefs (psychic).

f) As described in Part Two , the larger groups publish instruction manuals on research methods and techniques. Also a number of scientifically informed UFO books have appeared recently; see, for example, Haines (1979; 1980), Hendry (1980).

g) Ashworth (1980), who calls the work of these authors 'popular science', argues that they form a distinct category because they refer repeatedly to each other, rather than to outsiders. He gives as examples, the following authors Lyall Watson, John Michell, Guy Lyon Playfair, Charles Berlitz, Francis Hitching, John Brennan, Erich von Daniken and Geoffrey Ashe. They are part of a multi-million pound industry (forty-two million copies of Erich von Daniken's first six books have been sold, according to Story (1980)). Ashworth identifies two myths in the work of the above authors. These are 'Danikenism' which (briefly) states that the Earth was visited by extra-terrestrials thousands of years ago, who copulated with (or genetically mutated) proto-hominids to produce a new hybrid species which became modern humanity: and 'Atlanticism' which describes the existence of an original perfect society centred on a lost island called Atlantis, the advanced knowledge from which has gradually been lost, remaining only in secret teachings such as the 'Esoteric Tradition'. See Ashworth (1980, pp 360-363) for further details.

h) Story (1980) quotes Stanley Kubrick, the film's producer (and co-author, with Arthur C. Clarke, of the screenplay), who, during an interview for Playboy magazine, said:

> I will say that the God concept is at the heart of 2001 - but not any traditional, anthropomorphic image of God... The important point is that all the standard attributes assigned to God in our history could equally well be the characteristics of biological entities who, billions of years ago, were at a stage of development similar to man's own and evolved into something as remote from man as man is remote from the primordial ooze from which he first emerged. (p.19)

i) Resta (1975) used only seventy subjects randomly selected from three suburban areas of the state of Maryland, while Littig (1971) conducted his study with seventy-seven undergraduates.

CHAPTER 2

## REPORTS OF UFO EXPERIENCES

In 1966 a poll showed that 5% of Americans over the age of eighteen years said they had seen a UFO. By 1973, this percentage had risen to 11%, although it had dropped to 9% (about thirteen million people) by 1978 (Westrum, 1977; Hendry, 1980). Comparable figures for Britain seem to be unavailable but perhaps some idea of the level of UFOs reported can be gathered from figures issued by the Ministry of Defense and UFO organisations. The MOD claimed to have received 750 UFO reports in 1978, 550 in 1979, 350 in 1980, and 600 in 1981.[a] The Northern UFO Network, a confederate of UFO groups in the north of England, claimed that the number of reports they had received had declined quite considerably since 1977 when they had 332. In 1978 they received 273, the numbers dropped to 156 in 1979, 84 in 1980, 68 in 1981 and just 36 in 1982.[b]

How can these reports be explained ? As I mentioned in Chapter 2 (Part One), they have been explained in three main ways:[c] as the result of status inconsistency, as due to errors of the mind and senses, or as caused by hysteria produced by psychic stress. Let me examine each of these explanations in turn.

The least substantiated of the hypotheses is undoubtedly that of status inconsistency. It is based upon the work of Warren (1970) who used the 1966 US Gallup Poll data to argue that status inconsistents ( such as people with high education and low income) were the most likely group to report seeing UFOs. However, not only are there problems connected with the theory of status inconsistency (Knoke, 1972; Nelson, 1973; Jackson, 1962), but also Warren has failed to replicate his findings in subsequent studies (Fox, 1979). In addition, Westrum (1977) found in an analysis of the 1973 Gallup Poll data that UFO experiencers were not very different from the

general population.

When UFO reports are investigated, they are frequently found to be reports of known phenomena which were somehow misperceived. For instance, Sheaffer (1981) examined a number of 'classic' UFO reports, including the famous one of former President Jimmy Carter. He found that most could be explained in terms of misperceptions, common culprits being celestial objects, particularly the planet Venus which fooled Carter. Sheaffer writes:

> Mr. Carter is in good company in misinterpreting Venus as a UFO. No other single object is responsible for so many UFO sightings. (p.10)

Hendry (1980) analysed over 1,300 UFO reports in the USA and found that the great majority of sightings represented faulty perception of natural and man-made stimuli, most of them being caused by "a small number of unusual astronomical and aeronautical phenomena."

Research on human perception shows that misperceptions can be explained in terms of limitations of the human mind and senses (Haines, 1980), but it cannot explain why mundane phenomena are consistently misperceived in a particular way. That is, why the Moon, Venus, aeroplanes or whatever, are seen as 'flying saucers'. A sociological explanation is also necessary and the one most commonly referred to is that of 'mass hysteria' or 'social contagion'. The most detailed example is probably that of Smelser (1962) who uses the phenomena of UFO sightings to illustrate the nature of a hysterical belief. He writes:

> Recently anxieties over the potentialities of atomic warfare have led not only to predictions of world destruction, but also to many apparent misperceptions and hallucinations of 'flying saucers' believed to be omens of destruction. (p.90)

As I mentioned in Parts Two and Three, UFOs are not only believed to be omens of destruction; in fact, this view has largely fallen out of popularity in favour of ideas about the development of a 'New Age' (among contactee cults) and the emergence of a new paradigm in science (among research groups), but these developments do not necessarily mean that Smelser's analysis is invalid. What seems to have happened is that the original generalised belief has been elaborated following the development of the UFO movement. Beliefs associated with contactee cults and UFO research groups

have filtered into popular consciousness reinforcing the concept of the UFO and maintaining a propensity to misperceive aerial phenomena. More serious problems connected with Smelser's analysis are those involving the nature of the transmission between individuals and the link between structural strain and psychic tension. These will now be examined.

Research into episodes of 'mass hysteria' usually involves situations where individuals are in close physical proximity. For instance, Kerckhoff, Back and Miller (1965) describe an incident in a US clothing manufacturing plant where, during one week in the summer of 1962, sixty-two people suffered what purported to be insect bites and received medical attention, although a physician and an entomologist could find no toxic element capable of causing these symptoms. Almost all of the victims were women and the great majority were physically located within one area of the plant. Stahl and Lebedun (1974) described a case where about thirty-five female workers in a US university's data processing centre were exposed to a mysterious gas which caused dizziness, vomiting, nausea and fainting, and Shuler and Parenton (1943) described an epidemic of 'nervous twitching' among high school students. Clearly these cases are unlike UFO sightings which are usually specifically perceptual rather than generally physiological in nature, and frequently occur among individuals who are not in contact. However, Johnson (1945) described a case of a 'mystery gasser' who struck over all parts of a small town, and Medalia and Larsen (1958) and Miller, Mietus and Mathers (1978) analysed cases of a specifically perceptual nature: one concerning the mass perception of pits in car windshields and the other of the sighting of a 'monster'.

In cases of physical proximity, hysterical symptoms have been found to follow social networks (Kerkhoff, Back and Miller, 1965; Stahl and Lebedun, 1974) but, where the outbreak is more dispersed, the media, particularly local newspapers, seem to play a vital role (Johnson, 1945; Medalia and Larsen, 1958; Miller, Mietus and Mathers, 1978). We might assume, then, that newspapers are also important in the occurrence of 'waves' of UFO sightings. This fact has been noted by a number of writers. Hackett (1945), for instance, suggests that the concept of the 'flying saucer' was manufactured by the press. He considers the sighting of Kenneth Arnold[4] to have had little immediate interest, but that the wire services carried the story 'tongue in cheek', and, because they had little news in the area at the time, they kept it alive from day to day. The concept was later

strengthened by

> ... repetition, repetition by variations, 'scientific' evidence and speculation, photography, analogy, wit, denial, apology. Newspapersthrough juxtaposition, headlining, and suggestion, soon related it to other concepts, to well-established stereotypes and slogans - 'The greatest air force in the world' and universal military training to protect 'the American way of life' from 'the menace of red-Fascism!'... (p.869)

and other events were soon reported which fitted the general pattern of that first story of early June 1947.

Although some researchers might want to argue with Hackett over the amount of power to influence public opinion which he attributes to the media,[2] there seems little doubt but that newspapers were initially responsible for whipping up popular interest in the possible existence of strange aerial phenomena. After an analysis of newspaper coverage of UFOs between 1947 and 1966, Strentz (1970) concluded that newspapers had also played a major role in sustaining that interest. Can they also be seen as important in the generation of UFO experiences?

This is a more difficult question to answer because it involves two elements which are not easily distinguishable: UFO experiences and UFO reports. The problem is that a UFO experience is only available for analysis once it has been reported and so it is difficult to separate the issue of why people report UFO experiences from that of why they have them in the first place. Westrum (1979) who has gone into this problem in some detail, argues that, because the flood of UFO reports which follow the appearance of an account of a UFO experience in the press usually pre-date the 'trigger' report, it is difficult to see how they could have been stimulated by it. In other words, newspaper coverage of UFO sightings encourages people to report their experiences, rather than to have a UFO sighting themselves. However, in a footnote, Westrum adds that fellow sociologist, Marcello Truzzi, has suggested that these may be explained by the hypothesis of 'retrospective hallucination' (i.e. memory reconstruction

Whilst admitting the vital role played by the press it would nevertheless be wrong to lay complete responsibility for UFO reports (or experiences) at their feet. When other aspects of the UFO movement are taken into consideration, it is clear that a number of additional factors are involved.

Firstly there is the role of UFO organisations. The analysis of research groups and contactee cults in Parts Two and Three shows that newspaper reports of UFOs had only a minor place in their development, yet these groups have played a large part in keeping UFOs in the public eye. As I have described, one of the aims of most research groups is to provide the public with information about UFOs, while contactees usually claim to have been given a mission to make public their contact with aliens. Members of these groups seek out publicity and so frequently it is they, rather than newspaper staff, who are responsible for media attention on UFOs.

They may appear only to initiate articles on the genesis of new UFO groups or on the topics discussed at conferences and meetings, but these probably stimulate further UFO reports as well: after all, this is one of the intentions of research groups - their object is to obtain UFO reports to investigate in order that they may find out more about the phenomena. Westrum (1979) describes three ways in which research organisations encourage the reporting of UFO experiences: they provide sympathetic ears to the person who wishes to make a report; they legitimate the witness's experience by publishing reports of other witnesses, by giving interviews to the press and in some cases by persuading the witness's primary group that such events can take place; and they provide opposition to the opinions of scientific and military experts. Furthermore, the fact that they are often the recipients of the reports they encourage, leads to a cyclic process in which "...the encouragement of reports leads to more reporting, which leads to more articles advocating the reality of UFOs, which encourages more reporting, and so forth."

The second aspects of the UFO movement which plays a part in generating UFO reports is that of popular 'belief in UFOs'. As described in the previous chapter, I have taken the consumption of popular books on UFOs, ancient astronauts and the like, as an indicator of popular interest in the subject and have assumed that popular belief is contained within this interest. The popularity of these books was said to be due to the myths they conveyed. These reconciled certain universal oppositions, attempted to unite science, and religion, and were consonant with certain socio-cultural changes: the spaceflight revolution, the growth of new religious movements, and the strengthening of opposition to modern science. The growth of a subculture

which supported these myths - the cultic milieu - was seen as particularly important. There are a number of reasons why these factors are also likely to encourage the reporting of UFO experiences.

Firstly, popular books about UFOs are likely to stimulate UFO reports in a similar fashion to newspaper accounts. In fact in many ways they combine the effects of both newspaper reports and research groups in that they both draw attention to the subject and legitimate it. Secondly, if the ancient astronaut myth reconciles certain universal oppositions, then perhaps popular beliefs about UFOs do the same. The notion of a 'UFO myth' is suggested by Sanarov (1981) and Jung (1959). In an article drawing comparisons between sightings of flying saucers and their occupants and folklore tales such as that of the world-tree, Sanarov concluded that flying saucer images carry the same functional load as other myths, differences being due only to social development, situation and beliefs, while Jung argued that UFOs are modern symbols of order and individuation. Thus UFO reports (and experiences) may be spontaneously generated or 'lived' versions of the UFO myth.

Thirdly, the cultic milieu may encourage and legitimate subjective experiences of the psychic, UFO and altered state of consciousness type. The analysis in Part Three shows that this is certainly true of the role of 'metaphysical seeker', but it is less clear whether these experiences are important to 'secular seekers' and other members of the cultic milieu. BUFORA members did seem more likely to report UFO experiences than members of the general public and, as a sighting was only a factor in their interest in the subject for 19% of them, this suggests that involvement in the cultic milieu played a part.

To summarise the above examination of the possible nature of transmission between individuals in cases of 'UFO hysteria', it is clear that, while newspaper reports certainly play an important role, they are not totally responsible for 'UFO waves'. Organisations and popular interest in the subject are also involved.

Let me turn now to the second problematic area in the 'mass hysteria' explanation: the relationship between structural strain and psychic tension. As described earlier, Smelser (1962) explained the emergence of UFO sightings

in terms of anxiety over the possibility of atomic warfare following the conclusion to World War Two and the cold war situation which followed. What status does this explanation have now?

It is possible to argue that the continued development of nuclear arms, the persisting hostility between the USSR and the USA, and the activity of movements such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, means that, although international situations have changed since the 1950s, anxiety over the possibility of atomic war has not decreased to any extent. Smelser placed no time limit upon the existence of hysterical beliefs, indeed he pointed out that they could become institutionalised, as in fears of witchcraft. Possibly UFO reports have become a culturally acceptable way to deal with strain. However, this seems far too general an explanation for UFO sightings, to be satisfactory, and in any case a major question remains unanswered: how is strain linked to 'UFO waves'? Does strain become particularly intense in some locations at times? Why are UFO reports global in nature and why does it seem impossible to predict when and where there will be an outbreak of UFO sightings? The problem seems to be that the notion of structural strain is just too general to explain the generation of specific waves of UFO sightings.

In other words, it can be only a partial explanation because UFO 'waves' do not only consist of UFO sightings, indeed they do not really consist of these at all but of UFO reports; an important distinction. They also usually include a great deal of local (and sometimes national or international) interest, and the movement of people into the area where the reports are occurring: reporters, members of UFO groups, curiosity seekers. These different social phenomena make up a 'UFO wave' and the identification of UFOs is but one small part of the process. Thus, while the concept of structural strain can perhaps be a major part of an explanation for why a hysterical belief 'takes off', it can be at the most only a minor part of an explanation for why it continues. In the case of UFOs, it can possibly account for why the skies became a source of anxiety and why concern developed over apparently ambiguous aerial objects, but it cannot explain why a particular person should report a UFO experience, or who they report it to, or why a newspaper should decide to print a UFO report (although it may be a factor in how they present it[6]), or why people flock to an area to 'UFO spot'.

Rather than looking for a direct connection between structural strain

and outbreaks of UFO reports, then it is probably more useful to examine the various events which go to make up an outbreak.

In conclusion, although further research is necessary before any definite statements can be made, it is suggested that UFO reports have continued to occur for a combination of three main reasons. At the most general level, the anxiety which first caused concern over strange aerial objects is still with us: the possibility of nuclear war has not decreased. the original hysterical belief to develop into more complex beliefs which maintain the misperception of mundane celestial and man-made objects. Also socio-cultural changes have encouraged the success of other beliefs (Atlantis and ancient astronauts) which indirectly reinforce UFO beliefs and thus UFO sightings. Thirdly, other aspects of the UFO movement also sustain UFO reports at a structural level through the activities of UFO researchers and networks and institutions within the cultic milieu.

UFO waves can be usefully analysed as episodes of hysterical contagion where the media, particularly local newspapers, act as a major agent of transmission although UFO researchers probably also play a part. However, it is important to recognise that a variety of different social phenomena are involved in a UFO wave and so it seems necessary to examine the processes which comprise these different aspects rather than to look for any direct connection between structural strain and outbreaks of UFO reports.

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Footnotes

a) Reported in The Times, March 5, 1982.

b) See Northern UFO News, No. 100, Jan/Feb 1983, p.2.

c) That is, the majority have been explained in these ways. UFO proponents claim that there is a residue of reports which cannot be explained in these ways, whereas sceptics argue that, even this minority, are ultimately explainable in such terms.

d The sighting by Kenneth Arnold on June 24, 1947, is generally considered to have heralded the 'flying saucer movement'. See Chapter 1 for further details.

e For example, in his introduction to a volume of readings on media sociology, Tunstall (1970) describes a number of studies which question the power of the media to cause changes in audiences. He includes a much-quoted sentence from Joseph Klapper's The Effects of Mass Communication (1960):

> Communications research strongly indicates that persuasive mass communication is in general more likely to reinforce the existing opinions of its audience than it is to change such opinions.

Tunstall adds that many modern researchers regard the question 'What do people do with the media?' to be more relevant than the more popular 'What do the media do to people?'

f) A possible suggestion might be that the UFO experience reconciles the split between the subject and the object, which some writers have argued is a feature of our culture. Whilst I have no space to go into this in any detail, a recent example of such an analysis of modern Western society is provided by Frankl (1973), who argues that 'objective' knowledge is opposed to 'subjective' opinions, producing a split in thought between

> On the one hand, the field of opinions, or of the subject, or of what one wants, where at leisure and without harm - because this is outside reality - Man can nourish dreams or aspirations, pursue ideals and cut down ideas. On the other hand, the field of knowledge, of the object, or of what is: here one is realistic and one remembers that things 'are what they are'. What happens to truth in all this? It is assigned a place beside the object. As for values, they are left to the subject, he will dispose of them as he sees fit. (p.41)

Working within this framework, we might assume that outer space is characteristic of technology (the objective) whereas inner space represents values, opinions, and meanings (the subjective). In a 'close encounter' with a UFO, these two are reconciled when the alien from outer space causes profound changes in the inner space of the individual.

g) In that UFO reports may be associated with current tensions in the way that Hacket (1965) describes.

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## CONCLUSION

The subject of unidentified flying objects has proved to be a resilient part of popular culture, and one which has become the focus of a number of different forms of collective behaviour. Although social science researchers in the early years of UFO enthusiasm considered it to be the result of "a mild form of mass hysteria" caused by post-war nerves, associated mainly with "bizarre cults", there is manifestly more to the UFO movement than at first supposed.

The first phase of initial widespread concern over UFOs gave way in the mid-1950s to a period of group formation and organisational growth, but mobilisation occurred not only around contactees like George Adamski, but also to promote research into UFOs in order to encourage the government to release information about its knowledge of UFOs and to pressurise scientists into taking the subject more seriously.

In the late 1960s, UFOs became a subject of interest to many of those in the youth counter-culture and consequently the UFO movement was subject to a considerable amount of influence from this source. It seems to be largely as a result of this influx of new ideas and attitudes that UFOs became associated with a whole variety of 'strange mysteries', subjects considered to be unexplained by science, which led many UFO researchers to see themselves as part of a "science fiction nightmare".

Yet, although the 1960s "rebirth of the Gods" appeared to encourage the mystification of UFOs, it has been followed by the rationalisation of the UFO research movement. Not only have research groups become more organised and professional, but also the inclusion of UFOs within the wider topic of 'the unexplained' has resulted in the systematisation of UFO beliefs, although it is as yet too soon to tell whether this will lead to the de-mystification of these subjects: that is, whether the growth of scientific interest in 'anomaly research' will predominate or whether popular interest in mysterious and occult phenomena, fuelled by the current of opposition to modern science, will generate the majority of such research organisations. Either way, it looks as if the association of UFOs with the paranormal will become a major perspective, despite opposition

from some researchers. Of course, this is unlikely to result in the death of the extra-terrestrial hypothesis, since interest in contact with aliens remains high. Nevertheless, not only does the contactee movement appear to have declined in strength, but also it seems to have become almost completely re-absorbed into the occult subculture from which it emerged.

By examining the relationship between the different elements of the UFO movement, it has been possible to see the part each has played in sustaining the movement as a whole. For instance, a UFO report appears in the national press and it stimulates interest in UFOs. People buy UFO books, join UFO groups and report further UFO experiences. Book sales, group membership and the number of UFO reports subsequently increase, encouraging an increase in the activity of UFO organisations and the likelihood that more UFO reports will appear in the press, and so on. It is a pattern which occurs in many popular movements.

Of course, these spirals of activity do not occur in a vacuum and so the exact nature of each outbreak will depend upon events occurring in the wider society, including, in particular, the response elicited from social institutions and agencies of social control. If such interest is viewed with alarm, as it was by the US government during the first burst of interest in UFOs,[a] causing an attempt at suppression by the discrediting of the subject and the labelling of those interested as eccentric or crazy, then adherents are encouraged to develop a 'deviant consciousness': they will start to formulate theories to explain their deviant position, drawing on ideas about government conspiracies. When science is also involved, then the subject takes its place among other 'rejected sciences' in the cultic milieu and the overlapping communication networks ensure that it becomes assimilated into this subculture.

Once a subject becomes popular within the cultic milieu, it seems that most recruitment takes place through the medium of reading collectivities. Overlapping communication networks (i.e. magazine distribution and exchange, and reciprocal advertising and publicity) seem to take the place of the friendship networks through which many new members of religious organisations are recruited. However, if access to the overlapping communication networks within the cultic milieu brings an individual into contact with a wide variety of different types of organisation, what influences their choice ? It seems likely that this is dependent upon their particular 'doorway' into the milieu. Those entering through the 'UFO research collectivity' are not likely to have the same interests and beliefs as those entering via audiences for astrology, Earth mysteries, or metaphysics, and these predisposing factors will place restrictions upon their movement into other areas of the milieu.

As far as recruitment to a particular collectivity is concerned, the important question seems to be not 'Why do people become interested in UFOs (astrology, metaphysics or whatever)?, but 'Why do they remain interested in these subjects?' Clearly the majority of topics within the cultic milieu are part of popular culture. Not only are paperback books on most heterodox science and religion subjects readily available, but also many of these subjects make popular films and television serials (particularly in the science fiction and horror genres), some are embodied in games (ouija board, Tarot cards and fantasy role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, Traveller and Illuminati ), and some are regularly featured in the media (astrology, UFO reports, alternative healing and health care). With such a wide popularity, it is not the topics themselves which are deviant, but a serious interest in them. It is one thing to read a daily horoscope, see "Close Encounters of the Third Kind", read a book on 'The Black Arts' or play with the ouija board at a party, but quite another to become a ufologist, a witch, or an astrologer.

So what determines who will become seriously interested enough to remain a member of a collectivity and perhaps eventually join an organisation? It is difficult to generalise from the factors which were important in membership of the UFO research and contactee movements, but it is worth giving them some consideration in an attempt to answer this important question.

In the case of UFO research, a prior interest in space or 'frontier science' subjects made the reading of a book on UFOs, a newspaper report about them, or a personal experience of one, especially important in that it not only encouraged a belief in the possibility of extra-terrestrial life, but also frequently popularised a view in which science 'knows no inherent limitations'. Also, the interest was often combined with a love of science fiction which encouraged imaginative speculation and dis-enchantment with modern science.[b] This combination of faith in the potential of science and technology and disappointment or frustration at its failure to match expectations, resulted in an ambivalent attitude towards science, thus enabling rejection of the official and scientific verdict that all UFO reports were explicable in terms of known phenomena. There was also a readily available 'role', that of the 'frontier scientist', the researcher battling for the sake of truth against the close-mindedness of authorities and pedestrian scientists.

The metaphysical seeker who joined the contactee movement, on the other hand, seems to have started with an interest in existential questions concerning the nature of the self, which developed through reading books on metaphysical and esoteric subjects, a personal psychic experience, or contact with a metaphysical seeker, into an acceptance of the occult world-view. It might be thought that, because of the dominance of science in our culture, the position of metaphysical seeker is more deviant than that of the 'frontier scientist' and so those who adopt it must be correspondingly more unconventional. However, not only is the concern with self-development and self-exploration consonant with trends towards a pre-occupation with psychotherapy which have been noted in modern Western culture (Lasch, 1980; Rieff, 1966), but also the mysticism which is at the heart of the seeker role is not antagonistic towards science, in fact it shares with it a number of characteristics, including a critique of religious dogma, universalism, and a developmental attitude towards life. Of course, there are a number of important differences, notably the unequal emphasis placed upon knowledge gained in non-demonstrable ways (intuition or affiatus) and in the amount of significance attached to the 'self', but these differences seem to encourage a predominantly ambivalent attitude towards science among metaphysical seekers rather than a rejection of it.

It would seem from the above description of differences between the 'frontier scientist' and the 'metaphysical seeker' that the question of what determines who will become seriously interested in subjects embraced by the cultic milieu will depend upon whether they become part of a marginal science movement or the metaphysical subculture. However, there are similariti between these different aspects of the cultic milieu which enable generalisatic to be made: they are all heterodox, providing alternatives to orthodox science and religion; they are all represented in popular literature; and they can all be engaged in on a number of levels, from the most superficial to the fully-committed. Let me examine these points in more detail.

Firstly then, there is the question of who is most likely to be interested in heterodox views. Research on the beliefs of adolescents shows that they are more likely to accept the reality of many phenomena rejected by science or condemned by religion than are adults (Martin and Pluck, 1977; Buzz Magazine, 1978), and my survey of BUFORA members suggested that most had been interested in UFOs since their teens. Also it is mainly young people who are science fiction fans (Berger, 1977), the ones most likely to play fantasy role-playing games (Hine, 1982), and probably the ouija board (Quarantelli and Weigert, 1975). This is perhaps not too surprising given

the fact that fantasy is encouraged during childhood (e.g. Father Xmas, the 'tooth fairy', etc.), but condemned (or at least circumscribed) for the adult, leaving the adolescent the problem of adjustment. Also, the teenage years are characteristically a time for exploration and experiment, for meditation on 'the meaning of life' and the nature of the universe.

Thus it is common for heterodox topics to be of interest to teenagers: why then do most of them lose this interest as they mature? The common-sense answer is that for most the demands of family life take over. The responsibilities of marriage, work and children, leave little time to worry about UFOs or 'the meaning of life'. For a few others, further education reinterprets these phenomena (and provides answers to some existential questions) in terms of the various disciplines of orthodox science. In sociological terms, the majority are socialised into acting out typical social roles. One suggestion, then, is that those who are least involved in orthodox social roles are the most likely to remain interested in heterodox subjects and so enter the cultic milieu: the single, those in non-demanding employment, and those who have not attended higher education institutions. These are able to retain the 'open' and exploratory attitude which is a major feature of life in the cultic milieu. How valid is this suggestion?

It is certainly the case that there appeared to be a rather high proportion of single people involved in UFO research, Loch Ness Monster hunting, the science fiction subculture and some contactee cults (see Parts Two and Three); however, this may be due solely to the large proportion of young people engaged in these activities. Anyway, many BUFORA respondents were married - 48% of them - and 45% of respondents in Stupple and Bashti's (1977) survey of subscribers to the Saucerian Press, leading them to comment that readers were "reasonably well-integrated into society". Marital status statistics for other areas of the cultic milieu seem to be in short supply. If we compare this tendency towards single status with the membership of other voluntary associations, though, it looks a little more significant; according to Hausknecht (1962) and Smith and Freedman (1972), it is the married who are most likely to be members of voluntary organisations. Hausknecht, in fact, found that his data suggested that "as individuals assumed career and family responsibilities there was an increase in the rate of membership in voluntary organisations". This finding would lead us to expect a higher number of married people than in the general population

and so the relatively low incidence of married people in UFO groups does look quite interesting.

As far as further education is concerned, whilst it is true that only a minority of BUFORA respondents indicated that they had a degree or professional qualification, it was a large minority (40%). Also, members of other areas of the cultic milieu seem to be rather well-educated. Lynch (1978) for instance, found that virtually all members of the occult group he studied were high school graduates and 23% had obtained, or were in the process of obtaining, a master's degree. Hartman (1976) remarked that respondents in her study of the occult magazine Gnostica were "definitely not representative of the US population as far as educational and occupational background is concerned". Only 13% had obtained less than a high school education, while 63% had done at least some college work. However, it is probably unwise to compare US and British data in this way, given the differences between the two educational systems. Also, if we again compare these findings with the membership of voluntary associations rather than the general population, we find that the high educational level is to be expected; voluntary association joiners usually have a high education level, a high income level, and a white collar job.

In comparison with members of voluntary associations, then, those in UFO groups (and many cults) are unusual in two main respects: they tend to be younger (see Part Two), and they are more likely to be single; but, as far as education and occupation are concerned, they are probably not untypical. In other words, unlike other voluntary associations, many groups within the cultic milieu appear to attract those as yet uncommitted to (adult) family life. However, marriage is only one aspect of socialisation into orthodox social roles and it is difficult to make inferences about commitment to employment from the data available. In any case, membership of the cultic milieu might be more easily associated with some orthodox social roles and types of employment than others. Those occupations in which investigation forms a major part (such as in reporting and some types of police work) could be in harmony with marginal science research which seems to be primarily concerned with investigation. Similarly, artistic pursuits which emphasise self-expression (such as some areas of the entertainments industry or radical therapies) would not be in conflict with the seeker's concern with self-development. Also, although these topics

are heterodox, they are not illegal or subject to heavy social sanctions and many organisations are world-affirming rather than world-rejecting, resulting in little tension with the wider society.

Another factor which must be taken into consideration is that the studies referred to include participants who are at various stages of socialisation into the cultic milieu and this may confuse the issue. Possibly, a high level of commitment to some area of the cultic milieu is dependent upon a lack of participation in orthodox social roles, whereas a leisure or consumer commitment (i.e. serious but not active, such as reading about UFOs, but not investigating them; attending lectures on theosophy, but not attempting spiritual exercises) is not.

From the above discussion it seems that the hypothesis that those least involved in social roles will be the most likely to remain interested in heterodox subjects, is only supported by the data in an equivocal way. So are there other factors which might encourage the maintenance of commitment to heterodox subjects? Three other factors can be abstracted from my research on UFO groups: personal experience of 'the unexplained'; the taking of a participant in the cultic milieu as a 'significant other'; and a response to attitudes of adults and peers.

Firstly, although only 19% of BUFORA respondents said that they had become interested in UFOs because they had seen one, 61% actually claimed they had seen a UFO, which means that at least some members must have had a UFO experience shortly after becoming interested. Similarly, 40% of members of the occult group studied by Lynch (1978) described a personal psychic or mystical experience which occurred prior to their joining the group. In fact Lynch regarded the reading of a book on occultism combined with first hand experience of 'non-ordinary realities' as two vital stages in commitment to the occult. Arguably, then, for some adolescents, commitment to an area of the cultic milieu will be reinforced by a personal 'extraordinary' experience.

Secondly, contact with others interested in the subject was not a vital factor for members of UFO research groups, but there was some indication that it was important for those in contactee cults (six out of the eight contactee cult members interviewed said they had become interested through contact with a Spiritualist). Also, according to Lynch (1978),

"meeting the right people at the right time and in the right place" was important in commitment to the occult. However, it seems to me that it is not necessary for someone to be physically present in order that they may be taken as a 'significant other'. During discussion of the importance of books to members of the cultic milieu, I quoted Riesman (1965) who remarked that printed books helped people break way from their family circle, linking them into "noncontiguous associations of true believers", and also Arthur Morgan's remark that for those growing up in small towns, the library "was like foster parents". This implies that books can be agents of socialisation in some cases. The champions of heterodox subjects could become 'significant others' for some of those interested, a process which is probably most likely to occur when other important figures are absent, or during a time when the wider culture encourages youthful rebellion.[5] This explanation is clearly limited in that it begs the question of how the champions themselves came to hold their views, but, insofar as these extraordinary individuals can be regarded as special cases, the explanation does not merely shift the problem back one stage.

Thirdly, the adolescent who becomes interested in heterodox subjects may draw a variety of different responses from family and friends and some of these may be reinforcing. They may find, for instance, that their new knowledge is respected by teachers and parents. This is most likely to happen in the case of the less occult subjects which can be regarded as a hobby by adults, although a number of those I spoke to said that even an interest in witchcraft and astrology was sanctioned by teachers and they were encouraged to complete school projects on these subjects when they requested it.

On the other hand, adults may react in alarm to an adolescent's interest in a heterodox subject and they may actively discourage them from pursuing it, either through the presentation of a scientific viewpoint which de-mystifies the subject, through a warning inspired by a religious belief, or by encouraging them to take up another hobby.

Where peer groups are concerned, a serious interest in most areas of the cultic milieu tends to set an adolescent apart because the majority are only casually interested. Young people may be more likely to believe in 'unexplained phenomena' than adults and more inquisitive about themselves and the nature of the universe, but the majority do not pursue their interest in a serious fashion. Not all adolescents will enjoy the feeling

of isolation from peers which their interest brings them and so some may find the attitudes of friends discouraging.

Of course, the process of social facilitation will not be the same for everyone: some young people will gain their reinforcement from inspiring awe or by shocking others, which an interest in subjects such as magic or witchcraft can sometimes produce. Clearly, this means that each case of commitment will be the result of a complex process involving psychological and sociological factors, but can any general sociological determinants be identified?

A number of more general socio-cultural patterns become apparent when the other two factors which are common to all topics encompassed by the cultic milieu, apart from heterodoxy, are examined; that is, their representation in popular literature and the fact that they can be engaged in on a number of levels.

The fact that information about marginal sciences and alternative religions is available in popular paperbacks is an important one, because it limits who will make use of it. Not all adolescents are encouraged to read. Many of those from working class homes, for instance, have no quiet place in which to read, and their families may not be able to afford the books necessary for a serious interest in the cultic milieu (Douglas, 1967). Those in the middle and upper-middle classes, on the other hand, will probably have parents who are concerned about the books they read and will be discouraged from appropriating 'low' culture and guided into more high-brow subjects. Those who read popular culture books, then, are likely to be the offspring of lower-middle class parents who encourage their children to read but leave them to follow their own inclinations. It could also be argued that the lower-middle class are the most likely to feel the need for alternative ways to gain control of their lives, because they have internalised the emphasis on self-determination which is characteristic of the middle classes, whilst being in the least favourable position (among the middle classes) of realising their aims.

There is a certain amount of data to support the suggestion that it is mainly those from the lower-middle class who are involved in the cultic milieu. The survey of BUFORA members showed that many were in the lower-middle class (51% in socio-economic classes three and four), as did Stupple and Dashti's

(1977) survey of subscribers to the Sauerian Press, Buckner's (1965) study of a UFO cult, and Nelson's (1969) study of the Spiritualist Movement. However, some occult groups and new religious movements seem to recruit more middle and upper-middle class members (Lynch, 1978; Barker, 1983) and so it would be unwise to make this point too strongly.[e] Rather, it is the opportunity and propensity to engage in unsupervised reading which is the important factor in maintaining a serious commitment to some area of the cultic milieu.

Turning now to the fact that topics within the cultic milieu can be engaged in on a number of different levels: in what way does this affect potential recruits? Firstly, it gives the individual who initially comes into contact with one of these topics the sensation that the subject is 'bottomless', that it is supported by a vast body of knowledge and an endless number of unfathomed mysteries. The impression given is that it is possible to go on exploring the field for ever. Unlike other leisure pursuits (and the predominantly part-time membership of most groups within the milieu means that they are largely a leisure pursuit even for the highly committed), this means that there are no clearly defined limits to these subjects and no clear aims. The emphasis is upon endless growth which will cause (almost) unimaginable self-development or upon the pursuit of knowledge which will result in a revolution in our current ways of perceiving the world. Clearly, not everyone will feel attracted towards a subject which places so much emphasis upon individual motivation whilst being so unstructured.

Secondly, the different levels of involvement produce a feeling of growth and development in the individual as they pass through them because it is possible to see a distance between the committed and the 'dabblers', thus providing a sense of status. The status is related to the predominantly serious nature of these topics (unlike most leisure pursuits which are primarily non-serious) which relates growth to an increase in knowledge, experience and wisdom. Again, not everyone will feel the need to engage in a leisure pursuit which promises to confer this kind of status.

The above two points imply that the development of a self-identity, which is not linked to orthodox social roles, is a part of motivation to involvement in the cultic milieu. It seems reasonable to assume that it is those who value individual achievement, but who see no possibility of fulfilling this achievement in the acting out of orthodox social roles, who

would find involvement attractive. There could be a number of reasons for this, including disillusionment with society which will include a lack of commitment to social goals (whilst leaving intact the desire for an identity linked to individual achievement).

At this point, we are returned once more to the suggestion that lack of involvement in other social roles is a crucial factor in the development of a serious interest in the cultic milieu. Following from the above deliberations, we can see that it could well be the lack of commitment to orthodox social roles which is the key feature. The existence of different levels of involvement means that part-time engagement in cultic activities is facilitated and thus participation in normal social roles is not prevented. Yet involvement, however superficial, once commitment to a subject has developed, is sufficient to maintain a self-identity which is connected to cultic involvement rather than orthodox social activities, due to the highly individualistic and self-motivated nature of the pursuit. This suggestion is supported by the fact that the orientation towards growth and change and the experimental and investigative attitude towards life which seems to be characteristic of most members of the cultic milieu is as much likely to encourage the individual to 'try on' social roles, as it is to discourage them. Lifton's (1970) 'Protean man' and Orr and Nichelson's (1970) 'expansive man', which members appear to resemble, are not social drop-outs or misfits. Instead, they are suburbanites who have adapted to the flux and change of their life by becoming flexible. Perhaps membership of the cultic milieu is one way of developing a stable self-identity in this situation of social flux and uncertainty.

Let me now summarise the above discussion on recruitment to the cultic milieu. The cultic milieu is currently not some bizarre cultural underground divorced from everyday social life, but a legitimate part of popular culture. The heterodox subjects which form the central concern of those who take part in this subculture are common topics for leisure industry products. This means that it is not interest in these topics which is unusual, but commitment to them.

The process of commitment to the cultic milieu is most likely to begin in adolescence when an exploratory attitude towards many heterodox subjects is typically part of the growth from childhood to adult. The majority of these individuals will find that their interest is limited by various factors in their personality and environment. For instance, they may be prevented

from pursuing their interest by a disinclination or inability to read, they may be discouraged from reading 'rubbishy' books by their parents, or they may dislike the response they receive from adults or peers. The nature of these limiting factors appears to make those in the lower-middle class the most likely to pursue an interest in heterodox subjects.

Some factors will encourage the maintenance of this interest. For instance, a few individuals will have (or will have already had) an experience which they consider to be strange and inexplicable, one of a mystical, psychic or UFO nature. Some will be so impressed by an existing member of the cultic milieu (historical or current) that they will consider them to be a significant part of their life. Others will find the responses of family, teachers and friends to be reinforcing, probably because their new knowledge gains them respect and status (through a feedback loop which increases their feeling of individual uniqueness and self-determination). The development of a self-identity which is not connected to orthodox social roles is likely to be more important to members of some sectors of society than to others.

Of the few individuals who develop a serious interest in some area of the cultic milieu, some will pursue this interest alone, whereas others will join an organisation which brings them into contact with 'like minds'. Acceptance of the various beliefs associated with different areas of the milieu is not dependent upon their contact with others. The reading collectivity, in which followers of a particular heterodox topic are linked by a common source of information, is a fundamental aspect of the cultic milieu and is also the main route into organisations within the milieu.

Movement to the organisational level of involvement is likely to be dependent upon the amount of time and money available. Demanding social roles (such as a professional career or a large family) will preclude an active involvement in most groups within the milieu, although some organisations cater for the 'passive' participant (who merely wishes to read or attend the occasional lecture). During their 'career' in the cultic milieu, individuals will probably move between the levels of involvement as the demands of their social life vary, although the development of cultic friendships will probably encourage greater involvement, making it likely that some circumstances (such as divorce or unemployment) may lead towards

complete involvement in a particular organisation.

Finally, although it is useful to consider the cultic milieu as a whole in order to construct a general account of the process of recruitment, it is important to remember that it is not an homogenous entity. There are considerable differences between the various areas of it, particularly between alternative religions and marginal sciences.[f] The former appear to have achieved a far greater degree of integration with each other than the latter, although attempts to integrate the various marginal sciences are occurring. Also, groups which attempt to combine science and mystical religion continue to emerge, encouraging the overlap between these areas of the milieu.

There is one final theoretical issue upon which it is possible to comment in the light of my research on the UFO movement. This is the effect of the cultic milieu upon marginal science in general. During the examination of the scientific status of ufology, a number of factors working against the scientific study of UFOs were uncovered. These were largely the result of the popular nature of UFO research, its support by a UFO social movement, and its association with other areas of the cultic milieu. It is likely that similar factors will affect other marginal sciences and so it is worth examining them in more detail.

Firstly, the popular nature of most marginal science subjects means that they are subject to the demands of the general population. Not only does this mean that marginal science writers are frequently put under pressure to sensationalise their work, but also those books which sell (and make money for their authors, encouraging more of the same) may well reflect the pre-occupations of the public rather than the concerns of research. For example, a number of writers have had difficulty in getting publishers for sceptical books about the paranormal.[g] This is probably because the

public mostly want to be entertained (although it may also reflect other kinds of needs), but those who are attempting to research marginal science topics frequently find themselves forced to rely on these books because of a lack of other material. They are also forced to rely to a certain extent upon the public for funding and encouragement and this can influence the nature of the research carried out.[h] In addition, the involvement of the public in an issue tends to arouse a hostile response from the scientific community;[i] adding fuel to existing tensions between marginal science researchers and scientists.

Secondly, the fact that some marginal science subjects are supported by a social movement means that recruits are likely to be concerned with other issues besides scientific research. For instance, the UFO research movement was mobilised around a generalised belief which focused anxiety upon governments and science. Since this belief is founded upon a certain suspicion and hostility towards science, it means that at the heart of the UFO research culture there lies a mistrust of science, a situation which is not conducive to the scientific investigation of UFOs. Apart from that, where the social movement comprises mainly non-scientists, as it does in ufology, scientific research is hindered because participants have not learned the many informal and formal assumptions which are usually gained during scientific training. The lack of training means that virtually anyone can become a researcher and there is no clear role model for them to follow. All this results in low standards and confusion.

Thirdly, the overlapping communication networks within the cultic milieu ensure that marginal sciences are continually brought into contact with other areas of the milieu, particularly with the metaphysical subculture. This not only facilitates the exchange of ideas and personnel, but it also encourages the union of mysticism and science in new approaches to heterodox topics. In addition, the 'epistemological individualism' characteristic of cultic beliefs is not conducive to the kind of consensus usually encouraged in science.

Finally, it is important to note that the above circumstances are largely inescapable due to the power of exclusion which orthodox science possesses. That is, the elite structure of scientific disciplines enables them to reject aspiring sciences through a number of activities associated with their control of access to 'respectable' journals, 'serious' media outlets and the like. For example, in their analysis of parapsychology's

attempts to become an accepted science, Collins and Pinch (1979) describe a number of ways in which scientists enforced their rejection of the subject. The most significant of these was in the breakdown of the usual scientific practice of keeping the 'constitutive' and 'contingent' forums separate; that is, of keeping actions seen to be based on universal premises separate from those seen as incidental to the constitution of knowledge. Collins and Pinch interpret these boundary crossings as representing a tactic of the orthodox scientists to expose the fact that parapsychology should not be treated in the same way as a science. Such tactics would appear to make it more difficult for aspiring sciences to become 'more scientific' by preventing them from leaving their popular social base for the advantages of the elite structure of orthodox scientific disciplines. Of course, it is this very practice of exclusion which preserves the elite status of science and so maintains the advantages of this status. There would appear to be no easy solution to the problem of the 'pseudo-science trap'.

Yet whether we consider it to be a 'pseudo science' or not, I hope my research has shown that this term should not be used as an excuse to dismiss ufology in the same breath as belief in visitation by extra-terrestrial entities. The two social phenomena cannot be equated. Only by studying the different ways in which this fecund symbol, the UFO, has been appropriated, can we come to an understanding of the diverse social movement which has developed around it.

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Footnotes

a) Due to what was considered to be the danger of foreign invasion following a mock 'UFO scare' jamming communications. See Jacobs (1975).

b) In that not only has much science fiction moved away from its early fascination with technological achievement towards a more critical appraisal of science and technology, but also the genre has become increasingly pre-occupied with mystical and magical themes, in which charismatic power is more important than achievement (Bainbridge, 1976).

c) Suggested to me by Dr. Colin Campbell during discussions about the nature of recruitment to the cultic milieu.

d) Such as occurred particularly during the late 1960s with the 'counter-culture'. Of course, rebellious youth groups existed before then, but they were predominantly working class and reading was not part of their sub-cultural education.

e) Although where this information is based upon the social class of participants it could be misleading. Hartman (1976) found that many subscribers to the occult magazine Gnostica were "exceptionally upwardly mobile".

f) It is possible that fringe medicine and unorthodox political groups are even more distinctive; in fact, it is not yet clear to what extent these activities overlap with the metaphysical and marginal science areas of the cultic milieu.

g) Alcock (1981) cites a number of examples, including that of psychologist, Barry Singer, who reported that the editor of Prentice-Hall had told him that pro-paranormal books sold better than anti-paranormal books.

h) As Allison (1979) describes in connection with parapsychology and public interest in life after death.

i) As was the case with the publication of Immanuel Velikovsky's first book: Worlds in Collision, in 1950.

# APPENDIX A

## DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH METHODS USED

The aim of the research was to understand and describe what it was like to belong to a UFO group and yet to be able to make generalisations about membership so that this information could be placed within a wider social context. To this end methodological procedures directed at gathering both qualitative and quantitative data were used; also it was hoped that by using a number of procedures, some of the shortcomings of each of them might be overcome.

Before the research described here was undertaken I had already spent eighteen months joining UFO research groups, taking part in group activities, and interviewing five members of these groups, for an undergraduate project, and so I was already partly familiar with the UFO movement. Also I was not a stranger to subjects within the cultic milieu, having subscribed to occult magazines for some years.

However, this research began with a content analysis of publications produced by UFO organisations. This procedure basically consisted of; firstly, listing the different topics covered in the publications; secondly, constructing category headings from this list; thirdly, assessing the amount of space devoted to each category in the different magazines; and finally, examining each category in detail, listing examples of material contained therein.

This was followed by a number of interviews with members of different UFO groups with the aim of assessing the relevance of issues uncovered in the content analysis and gathering qualitative information about the way participants interpreted material produced in the publications. To achieve this aim interviews were semi-structured; that is, focused around a number of issues which I thought were interesting and relevant in the light of my content analysis, participant observation, and sociological background, but open to information which participants thought important. These eighteen interviews were of varying length depending upon the time available, the circumstances, and the articulateness of the interviewee. Material was recorded by me in writing (having been a reporter I was used to this method), either at the time or immediately afterwards. Although this method

had the advantage of being unobtrusive, informal and flexible, it had the disadvantage of limiting the quantity of direct quotations recorded. Given that my aim in using interviews as a research method was to gather material enabling interpretation, rather than discourse analysis or the like, however, this did not seem to be a serious problem.

Following the interviews a questionnaire was constructed with the aim of finding the extent to which information obtained by content analysis and interviews could be generalised. I was well aware of the problems created by using questionnaires to gather data about complex issues such as beliefs and opinions, but had to use some questions from Gallup despite their vague nature, in order that comparisons with the general population could be attempted. As far as it was possible to do so, though, categories which were meaningful to participants were constructed. A pilot study was carried out using about fifteen of these initial questionnaires and in the light of comments (about ambiguity etc) made by those completing them, a revised version was constructed. As contactee cults had been the subject of a number of sociological studies, the object was to gather information about those in research groups and so arrangements were made to distribute the questionnaire to members of a large national UFO research group: the British UFO Research Association distributed copies to their members ( about 550 at the time) with the September 1981 issue of their journal. Two hundred and eighteen replies from Britain were received in time and these were analysed with the aid of the university computer.

My intention was then to interview the members of a local UFO group in order to compare them with those in BUFORA and also to gather further information about researchers, but unfortunately time was running short and so instead an open-ended questionnaire was constructed and sent to all seventeen members of this group. Nine completed questionnaires were received

In addition, information about why people leave UFO research

groups was obtained by writing to a list of lapsed subscribers to Northern UFO News ( 37 were written to and 25 replies were received), and information about the origin and membership of other British groups was obtained by writing to a large number of addresses. Also six members of a local amateur astronomical society were interviewed as a kind of 'control group' (loosely speaking) in order that comparisons could be made with those interested in a similar space subject.

Finally, I should mention that my role during participant observation was initially that of 'novice ufologist' although when asked about my interest, I made it clear that I was conducting sociological research on the UFO movement. This disclosure usually produced a certain amount of anxiety in participants ( and so I waited until asked), but this anxiety seemed to be alleviated when I explained that it was my dissatisfaction with previous sociological research on the UFO movement which prompted my research and that I intended to present a more complete picture; following this I appeared to be treated as a novice ufologist once again. Gradually I became known as the 'sociological ufologist' and was accepted as a participant with yet another point of view.

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APPENDIX B

LIST OF UFO PUBLICATIONS USED DURING THE ANALYSIS

Aetherius Society Newsletter (and Cosmic Voice) : 757, Fulham Road, London, SW6 5UU.

Awareness: Contact (UK), 48, Crown Road, Wheatley, Oxon.

Axminster Light Centre Newsletter (and pamphlets): 'Veronica Cote', 66, Willhayes Park, North Street, Axminster, Devon, EX13 5QW.

Bufora Journal (and Bulletin): 6, Cairn Avenue, London, W.5.

Earthlink : 16, Raydons Road, Dagenham, Essex, RM9 5JR.

Flying Saucer Review: FSR Publications Ltd., West Malling, Maidstone, Kent, ME19 6JE.

Foresight: 29, Beaufort Avenue, Hodge Hill, Birmingham, B34 6AD.

Helios News: 8, The Ridgeway, Northop Hall, Clwyd, North Wales, CH7 6JR.

Interplanetary News: ISTRA., 21, Hargwyne Street, Stockwell, London, SW9 9QR.

Investigation: 21, Stuart Close North, Walton, Stone, Staffs. ST15 0JU.

Irish UFO News : 19, Cairnshill Avenue, Belfast, BT8 4NR.

Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena: BUFORA, 6, Cairn Avenue, London, W.5.

Kingdom Voice (newsletter and cassettes): Riverside Cottage, Bridgend, Harpford, Sidmouth, Devon, EX10 0NG.

Lantern: BSIG, 3, Dunwich Way, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 4RE.

Magonia (formerly Mufob): 64, Alric Avenue, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 4JW.

MAPIT Skywatch: 92, Hillcrest Road, Offerton, Stockport, Cheshire, SK2 5SE.

Mersey News: MIGAP, 133, Hinchley Road, Islands Brow, St.Helens, Merseyside, WA11 9JX.

Northern UFO News (and Northern Ufologist): NUFON, 6, Whitethroat Walk, Birchwood, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 6PQ.

Occult World: 91, Lytham Road, Blackburn, Lancs.

Pegasus: BIGAP, 149, Mytchett Road, Mytchett, Camberley, Surrey.

Quest (UFO): UFO International, 160, Courtney Road, Kingswood, Bristol, BS15 2RN.

Skywatch Gazette: Skywatch Aerial Phenomena Investigation Club, 22, Willows Avenue, Pinehurst, Swindon, Wilts.

The Atlantean: 42, St.George's Street, Cheltenham, GL50 4AF.

The Probe Report: 16, Marigold Walk, Ashton, Bristol, BS3 2PD.

UFO Insight: Federation UFO Research, 170, Henry Street, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 4BQ.

UFO News Bulletin: BFSB, 116, Westerleigh Road, Downend, Bristol, BS16 6UX.

UFO Research Review: NUFOIS, 443, Meadow Lane, Nottingham, NG2 3GB.

UFOs- A Serious Study: Skyscan, 80, Comer Road, St.John's Wood, Worcs.

Viewpoint Aquarius: Fish Tanks Ltd, 49, Blandford Street, London,W1H 3AF.

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