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say that uses popular entertainment as a window into a national mentality.

It is unfortunate that the other essays in the volume do not approach the critical significance and cultural insight of the three contributors I have chosen here. I feel that one can attribute the success of the three essays reviewed directly to the authors' ability to root their popular cultural studies firmly in a well-defined sociohistorical context. This separates the insightful, analytical study from the merely descriptive one.

**Watch the Skies! A Chronicle of the Flying Saucer Myth.** By Curtis Peebles. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994. Pp. x + 368, introduction, glossary, notes, index. \$29.95)

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When I was very young, my sister and I had episodes of what my mother defined as "cosmic angst." I worried that an atomic bomb would drop on my neighborhood. My sister worried that she would be kidnapped in the night by aliens. With our imagined catastrophic scenarios, we embodied as young children what Curtis Peebles in *Watch the Skies! A Chronicle of the Flying Saucer Myth* argues are classic responses to societal concern. Specifically, Peebles regards the popularity of stories of UFO sightings to the related and well-developed flying saucer myth as a reaction to and an outlet for worries over the direction of American and world politics, social decay, and a general feeling of powerlessness. It would be tempting to believe that only the marginal—those existing at the extremes of social behavior and ideology—follow the flying saucer myth. To the contrary, Peebles points out, very diverse elements of American society have become active participants in the definition and development of this phenomenon, for indeed, "the idea of disk-shaped alien spaceships becomes the symbol for hopes and fears about the world" (p. 291). Peebles's background as an aerospace historian led him naturally to the disputed events and claims

of unidentified objects and flying saucer sightings. Through critical examination of the majority of sightings, "contacts," and human abductions in a chronological fashion, beginning with the upsurge in the sightings following World War II, Peebles explains, using scientific research and evidence, the probable causes of sightings and encounters. Simultaneously, Peebles strives to account for the progressive development of the basic tenants and belief involved in this phenomenon by detailing the process by which certain narrative elements of these sightings systematically became fundamental to subsequent versions of the myth. Dividing his work into sections that deal with the periods of abundant sightings, the growth of governmental studies and the subsequent accusations of governmental cover-up, and the resulting establishment of "scientific" organizations by private citizens to record and propagate belief in alien visitations, Peebles creates a logical and coherent understanding of the process by which the belief in saucers, and eventually, alien encounters, grew. Significantly, by revealing how purportedly "true" narratives of alien Earth bases, fly-bys, and encounters which were published in pulp magazines provided the basic material and details for later first person reports, Peebles indicates the source of the raw material of the stock narrative and the details in variation. Furthermore, he indicates how the popularity of the flying saucer myth in film, books, and television serves as a source for new shape, detail, and narrative elements that are in turn quickly cycled back into the saucer myth as factual evidence for alien visitation. This approach provides the reader with a clear picture of the similar contexts, sources, and content for each version and a solid history of saucer beliefs and narratives in the 20th century.

The problems facing Peebles are the same that must be addressed in any work that deals with a belief system or systems. The flying saucer myth has many ardent followers who will view *Watch the Skies!* as an attack on the very fabric of their belief system and as an attempt to disrupt the fundamentals of their worldview by what they will regard as contrived and biased

evidence. By emphasizing the sources for and the forces behind the development of this myth, Pebbles does bring into question the crucial evidence supporting his belief system and, in the process, “debunks” the very examples that have served as cornerstones for the myth.

While Pebbles accomplishes his task of providing a historical survey, scientific explanations, and detailed reports and interpretations of sightings and reported alien contacts in the 20th century, he is less successful in his attempt to explain this phenomenon as “a mirror to the events of postwar America—the paranoia of the 1950s, the social turmoil of the 1960s, the ‘me generation’ of the 1970s, and the nihilism of the 1980s and early 1990s” (p. x). He fails in his attempt to fully associate the systematic shaping and redefining of the saucer myth with the changing political atmosphere and altering social conditions. Furthermore, while he maintains that the fervor of believers and the progressive refinement and elaboration of this myth rests with unmet emotional and psychological needs, the arguments and evidence are insufficient. Although lacking substantiation for these arguments, *Watch the Skies!* does much to elucidate how these beliefs became and remain current in American society, altering and diversifying according to and in response to these elusive emotional needs.

**Keepers of the Secret Chants: The Poetics or Ritual Power in an Amazonian Society.** By Jonathan D. Hill. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1993. Pp. ix + 245, acknowledgments, glossary, 21 illustrations, notes, index. \$40.00)

ELIZABETH HIGGS

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Jonathan Hill’s fieldwork among the Wakeunai or Curripaco group of Arawak in western Venezuela Amazonia in 1980–81 and 1984–85 focused on curing rituals. In what he calls discourse-centered ethnography, Hill explores *malikai*, a musical art that includes spoken, chanted, and sung speech.

He enlarges on themes already developed in *Native South American Discourse* and *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past*.

Hill’s research priorities were reinforced by indigenous concerns to have *malikai* recorded and studied to preserve it for future generations as a performance tradition central to the social regeneration of their culture. Because Northern Arawaken-speaking peoples have received less attention than others in the region, this ethnography contributes significantly to the study of Amazonian cultures.

The Arawaken Wakeunai shaman heals by making musical journeys through the underworld to retrieve the patient’s body-soul that may have been lost or stolen by spirits. Shamans also perform *malikai* chants of spirit naming during childbirth rituals and men’s and women’s initiation rituals.

*Malikai* is meant to integrate individuals into a hierarchical system of mythic ancestors and human descendants. According to Hill, it unites the processes of “musicalization” and “mythification.” The most powerful kind of ritual discourse is “musicalization,” in which a shaman transposes “mythic speech into . . . spoken, chanted, and sung speech” (p. 202). A less-powerful ritual discourse is “mythification,” in which he transforms “the powerful sounds of language music into mythic speech” (p. 21). These two processes complement each other and “refer to the mutual interaction of the musicality of speech and the classificatory power of language” (p. 21).

Hernan Yusrinu, the headman of the village of Gavilan who was in his eighties at the time of the research, was Hill’s key informant. Hernan provided Hill with field recordings of an entire myth cycle of nine narratives that are performed during male initiations: (1) the origin of women’s menstruation, (2) the conception and birth of Kuwai (the monstrous primordial human born out of incest whose musical voice and instruments opened up the world), (3) the powerful sound that opened up the world, (4) Kuwai eats three boys, (5) Kalimatú (the wasp-person sent to lure Kuwai to the village that is the center of the Wakeunai