Furthermore, the study of religions often strikes me, at least, as heavy on theory and light on method. At the extreme, we scholars of religions simply discount method as being either boring or a deluded striving for absolute truth. Now, I certainly prefer interesting claims to methodological precision that has nothing to say, but such preferences can also lead to a culture of bold assertion and rhetorical display in which evidence and argument come up short. At several points Burris's account lacks the specific evidence needed to provide general claims with some warrant, not only anecdotal examples to lend plausibility but especially the kind of carefully tabulated and assessed evidence that one comes to expect in historical studies, along with diagrams, charts, statistical tables, and maps. Since many of Burris's claims rest upon the physical positioning of displays, the absence of maps of the Crystal Palace and the Columbian Exposition grounds is very surprising. As for argument, Burris never really grappled with the fallacy of *post hoc, ergo property hoc,* that is, the confusion of temporal succession with causality, or with the problem of how to identify necessary or sufficient conditions amid the mass of historical context. And what are we to make of a claim like this: "Evolutionary thought in general—and social evolutionism specifically—could never have gained ascendancy as quickly as they did without shining examples such as the Great Exhibition and the ensuing international expositions of how the idea might be useful in making sense of a frighteningly diverse human world" (p. 70)? Bold? Insightful? Perhaps, but I suspect that reasonably astute history undergraduates might immediately identify it as a bald counterfactual and simply dismiss it. As a result of these failings, Burris's account of the conditions that made a field of religion possible is interesting and suggestive but not yet compelling.

A final note: Burris occasionally threatens to abandon a historical concern with the field of religion for a normative advocacy of that field as an instrument of universal salvation (e.g., p. 62). At the end, he finally does so. "Using the World's Parliament of Religions as a guide, one of the critical tasks for the field of religion in the future is to develop a means by which the religious categories that are used to explore interreligious relationships can avoid becoming defined excessively by the cultural and political climate out of which they emerge. When this is accomplished, the unique voice of 'religion' might be heard" (p. 178). For those for whom "the field of religion" doubles as their own personal religion, hearing the voice of religion is no doubt a pressing concern. The rest of us, religious and nonreligious alike, will be satisfied if, despite inevitable contextual limitations, religious categories allow us to go about our scholarly tasks.

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The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs. By BRENDA DENZLER. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. Pp. xviii+295. $35.00 (cloth).

What is the object of UFO belief? No artifact survives, no alien signature, nothing but the interiority of UFO believers and their reports of that condition.

Of what else is this so if not religious belief? The author of this book suggests that scholarly study of "the role of religion" in UFO belief has improperly concentrated on "contactees or their disciples" (p. xiv).[1] Taking as her subject "the tension between science and religion as explanatory frameworks within the UFO community" (p. xv), Denzler wants readers to suppose that most ufologists have taken "great pains to distance themselves from religious-sounding claims about UFOs and to reiterate the essentially scientific nature of the UFO problem" (p. xv). But what about the objects, structures, and habits of assent formation in UFO belief?

Self-identified as a "participant-observer" (p. xvi), Denzler first offers in this revised dissertation two chapters of history somewhat biased toward ufology's self-narration.[2] Chapter three relates ufology's attempted assimilation to science and subsequent disappointment at its rejection by the scientific establishment. Chapter 4, "Ufology and the Imaginal," describes a Corbinesque tertium quid—nonreligious yet "outside of science"—where ufology can be real discourse about real things. Her fifth chapter, "Ufology, God-Talk, and Theology," would have been informed by the discourse surrounding the argument from experience.[3] On the basis of her own surveys, her afterword generates a UFOs-of-the-gaps ufology.

While one scholar-ufologist writing on alien abduction belief pretends that "what matters here is not the ultimate nature of the reports," for UFO believers this most certainly is what matters.[4] This mattering should concern scholars of that believing. As one writer has it, "it is the reports, not the phenomena themselves, that are mysterious."[5] Patronizing attitudes toward UFO believers aside,[6] they *do* believe. Despite the assertions of many ufologists, critics have long considered UFO belief proper to the study of religion.[7] Indeed, that Duke's Department of Religious Studies accepted this dissertation betrays the author's reliance upon that

[1] Citing Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956). Nevertheless, ahead of the abduction era and early in anything one might call the era of contact, a Harvard astrophysicist had already treated what anyone might reasonably call the religious aspect of UFO belief. See Donald H. Menzel, *Flying Saucers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953). Denzler curiously asserts (p. 10) that an even earlier 1952 *Time* magazine article published an article based on Menzel's 1953 book.

[2] Compare Curtis Peebles, *Watch the Skies: A Chronicle of the Flying Saucer Myth* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994).

[3] Inexplicably excerpted in *Skeptic* 9, no. 3 (2002): 50–59.

[4] Thomas E. Bullard, "UFO Abduction Reports: The Supernatural Kidnap Narrative Returns in Technological Guise," *Journal of American Folklore* 102 (1989): 148.

[5] John A. Saliba, referring to an observation of ufology critic Philip J. Klass, in "Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena," in *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds,* ed. James R. Lewis (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 43.

[6] For instance, see Jodi Dean, *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), who argues that it is the liberative value of their beliefs that matters and not their coherence (or incoherence).

[7] Benson Saler, Charles A. Ziegler, and Charles B. Moore, *UFO Crash at Roswell: The Genesis of a Modern Myth* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); papers collected in Lewis, ed., *The Gods Have Landed;* Jonathan Z. Smith, "Close Encounters of Diverse Kinds," in *Religion and Cultural Studies,* ed. Susan L. Mizruchi (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 3–21; James R. Lewis, ed., *Odd Gods: New Religions and the Cult Controversy* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2001), pp. 352–72.

disposition. For the most part, however, this book does not much draw upon the intellectual resources of the academic study of religion. Although the author constantly refers to "belief," she nonetheless neglects to cite or engage, for instance, Benson Saler's cogent remarks on belief and the UFO myth.[8] UFO belief touches religious belief insofar as "ufology" in the main constitutes a loosely connected set of beliefs and dispositions regarding nonobvious, superhuman beings.

Most people are habitual believers. It is one thing to participate by living in proximity to a different culture, the better to observe, but another to imagine that one exchanges cultures by touring other "imaginal" assents in the cultural inventory. So one wonders whether this study really constitutes cogent participant observation. Insofar as she observes, she is not participating, and likewise, insofar as she participates, her observations hardly represent a theoretical account. That religious studies has grown accustomed to participants posing as observers hardly diminishes this chronic incongruity. Here it seems that the author assumes the position of an observer claiming the cultural capital of professional academic status while hoping to retain the friendly regard of her informants (and coadherents?), the extent of exchange with whom this book obscures. While her somewhat indiscriminate bibliography is enormous (and quite useful on that account), she neglects to cite her own paper, "Who Are We?" which reports the *MUFON UFO Journal* survey results to which she repeatedly refers.[9]

Denzler's surveying indicates that ufologists appeal to "personal experience" for corroboration (pp. 32–33), yet she neglects philosophical discourse on the argument from experience. With some confusing usage, she offers this account of ufology.

> The larger UFO myth . . . entered American consciousness as spontaneous personal experiences whose apparently real-world tangibility caused them to be reported as fact, retold as story, and eventually embraced as a veritable cultural myth. Its emergence as a modern myth, combined with the psychological and spiritual impact reported by many who had a UFO experience, helped to nudge the entire subject toward the realm of religion. But if you wanted to understand a real-world event, you turned to science, not to religion, because religion in the West was no longer the Great Legitimator, the arbiter of Truth and determiner of Reality. Being reported first as factual, real-world encounters, UFO phenomena were predisposed to being studied first from a materialistic rather than a metaphysical point of view. Thus the status of UFO reports as factual claims also accounts in part for the early rejection of religion as an interpretive framework for UFO studies. (P. 104)

Her curious concept of "myth" and mock-sarcastic characterization of science aside, this represents a rather unnuanced understanding of "religion." One need not mistake ufologists' caricature of others' belief for a cogent analysis of religious believing (unless one finds it advantageous to adopt that caricature). It shows a peculiar understanding to suppose that religious adherents relate their history as not "real." And it begs a fundamental question to insinuate that a "psychological . . . impact"—without which UFO belief would never have emerged—might have contributed to assimilating UFO belief to religion (and falsely so, we are given to understand).

[8] "Roswell and Religion," in Saler et al., pp. 115–49.

[9] Brenda Denzler, "Who Are We?" *MUFON UFO Journal* 349 (1997): 9–14, cited in Dean, p. 205, n. 47.

Though she ignores "Raelian" UFO religion, Denzler's description evokes their dictum, "Science replaces Religion." The UFO experiences she describes (e.g., p. 63) suggest James on (mystical) religious experience (whom she unfortunately neglects). The most successful abductee does, after all, title his best-selling alien abduction report *Communion*. While Denzler properly insists upon distinguishing among varieties of UFO belief, her caricature of scholarship as exclusively concerned with contactees, if true, could easily be accounted for by the ufological ascendance of "experiencers" bemoaned by percipients. Although Denzler as ufologian implicitly exploits the ideological critique of science that she presumes appropriate to UFO belief 's rejection by the scientific community, "scientific" ufologists swim upstream not so much against the scientific establishment as against the wider ufological community itself.

One might expect this book to concern itself with ufology's appeal to reports.[10] Eyewitness reportage is notoriously faulty, yet ufologists—as believers always have—ask that others credit their reports. It would thus be difficult meaningfully to differentiate UFO belief from other instances of (religious) believing. One philosopher of science is right to suggest that, were he writing today, Hume's critique would be one not of miracles, but of UFO reports.[11] A set of beliefs and dispositions regarding nonobvious, superhuman beings, ufology explains the absence of noncontroversial evidence by referring to the conspiracy aligned against the recognition of extraterrestrials. "Some are convinced that eyewitness testimony is reliable, that people do not make things up, that hallucinations or hoaxes on such a scale are impossible, and that there must be a long-standing, high-level government conspiracy to keep the truth from the rest of us."[12] Denzler gives curiously short shrift to the ufological conspiracism integral to this sort of assent formation.[13]

Despite their beliefs' tension with science, ufologists ironically simulate science, habitually asserting that they arrive at their beliefs and validate them with scrupulously methodical scientific inquiry. Yet ufologists spend their "scientific" labors upon the fantastic. Of the "elaborate concern with demonstration" among conspiracist paranoias, Richard Hofstadter has observed that "one should not be misled by the fantastic conclusions that are so characteristic of this political style into imagining that it is not . . . argued out along factual lines. The very fantastic character of its conclusions leads to heroic strivings for 'evidence' to prove that the unbelievable is the only thing that can be believed."[14] Despite rhetoric about having to step "outside of science," ufologists scrupulously cultivate the appearance of

[10] See C. A. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[11] John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument against Miracles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 59.

[12] Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark* (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 82.

[13] For example, Jenny Randles, *The UFO Conspiracy: The First Forty Years* (New York: Blandford, 1987).

[14] Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1965), pp. 35–36. It turns out that they are not only not "unbelievable," but also unfalsifiable. See Charles A. Ziegler, "Analysis of the Roswell Myth: A Traditional Folk Motif Clothed in Modern Garb," in Saler et al. (n. 7 above), pp. 30–73.

science. Why does Denzler not reflect critically on the meaning of that cultivation? In the parodically scientific work of ufology, "The plausibility the paranoid style has for those who find it plausible lies . . . in this appearance of the most careful, conscientious, and seemingly coherent application to detail, the laborious accumulation of what can be taken as convincing evidence for the most fantastic conclusions, the careful preparation for the leap from the undeniable to the unbelievable."[15] Even in Denzler's sympathetic representation it remains clear that, like the new creationists of intelligent design theory, ufologists desire the credentials they despise. They would themselves staff the educational and governmental institutions from which they have hardly obtained the time of day. Meanwhile, established science's failure to accept them apparently does little to shake ufologists' confidence, insofar as "the paranoid tendency is aroused by a confrontation of opposed interests which are . . . totally irreconcilable. . . . Feeling that they have no access to political bargaining or the making of decisions, they find their original conception of the world as omnipotent, sinister, and malicious fully confirmed."[16] Its rejection by science has become UFO belief 's powerfully self-fulfilling prophecy.

Gathering together much pertinent material, this book wants an analytical-critical point of view. Committed to "scientific" ufology, its analysis fails to distinguish between the level of believer account and that of social-scientific explanation. While imagining allies for ufological colleagues in the postmodern critique of science, where it concerns UFO beliefs, Denzler exercises no hermeneutic of suspicion of her own. Nevertheless, she has provided an impetus and bibliography for others critically to examine the varieties of UFO experience.

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Voices of the Magi: Enchanted Journeys in Southeast Brazil. By SUZEL ANA REILY. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp. xvii+266, 19 halftones, 6 musical examples. $40.00 (cloth); $21.00 (paper).

Suzel Ana Reily's rich musical ethnography of the *folia de reis,* a popular Catholic procession to honor the Three Kings, complements existing literature on Brazilian popular religion and music, much of which is dedicated to charismatic Protestant and Afro-Brazilian practice. *Folias* reenact the original journey of the Three Kings to visit the Christ child. According to devotees, in exchange for their gifts, the kings received musical instruments from Christ's mother so that they might return to their native lands offering praise to the newborn savior. Reily documents the ethnographic material thoroughly and demonstrates an exquisite eye for detailed analysis; however, some of the most intriguing and original theoretical discussion in the book is left underdeveloped.

[15] Hofstadter, pp. 37–38.
[16] Ibid., p. 39.