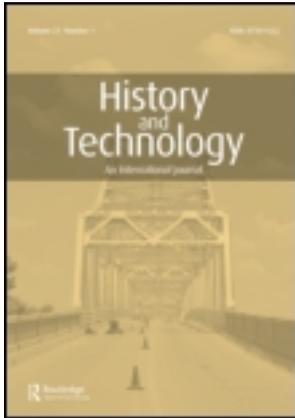


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## Extraterrestrial encounters: UFOs, science and the quest for transcendence, 1947–1972

Alexander C.T. Geppert\*

Beginning in 1947, with the first waves of UFO sightings, and continuing in the subsequent decades, debates on the existence and *gestalt* of extraterrestrial life gained unprecedented prominence. Initially an American phenomenon, flying saucer reports quickly became global in scope. Contemporaneous with efforts to legitimize the possibility of spaceflight in the years before Sputnik, the UFO phenomenon generated as much sensation in Europe as in the USA. In the public imagination, UFOs were frequently conflated with technoscientific approaches to space exploration. As innumerable reports of sightings led to a transnational movement driven by both proponents and critics, controversial protagonists such as ‘contactee’ George Adamski became prominent media celebrities. Incipient space experts including Willy Ley, Arthur C. Clarke, and Wernher von Braun sought to debunk what they considered a great swindle, or, following C.G. Jung, a modern myth evolving in real-time. Yet they failed to develop a response to the epistemic-ontological challenge posed by one wave of UFO sightings after another. Studying a phenomenon whose very existence has been non-consensual since its genesis presents a particular challenge for historians. Posing complex questions of fact and fiction, knowing and believing, and science and religion, this article analyzes the postwar UFO phenomenon as part of a broader astroculture and identifies transcendental and occult traditions within imagined encounters with extraterrestrial beings.

**Keywords:** UFOs; outer space; extraterrestrial life; astroculture; transcendence; evidence; Europe

What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth?

Winston Churchill, 1952.

On February 18, 1954, I met a man from another world.

Cedric Allingham, *Flying Saucer from Mars*, 1955.<sup>1</sup>

Seldom can historians observe the making of a ‘modern myth’ in real time, over the course of several decades; the emergence of the UFO phenomenon immediately after the Second World War constitutes such a case.<sup>2</sup> On Tuesday, June 24, 1947, Kenneth Arnold (1915–1984), an American businessman piloting his private plane, reported nine shiny ‘saucer-like’ aircraft flying in formation at immense speed from Mount Rainier to Mount Adams in Washington State. Confused by his observation, the next day Arnold contacted

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the journalist William C. Bequette (1917–2011), who not only published the story on the front page of the local newspaper, the *East Oregonian*, but also notified Associated Press. ‘Nine bright saucer-like objects flying at “incredible” speed at 10,000 feet altitude were reported here today by Kenneth Arnold, Boise, Idaho, pilot, who said he could not hazard a guess as to what they were,’ their ensuing dispatch began. Almost instantly, additional articles and further sightings by separate observers in multiple locations led to widespread speculation as to the character and meaning of the disks seen in the skies. Within a month flying saucers had been reported by people in 40 states. *Life* magazine sketched the situation five years later: ‘For the public ... the saucers provided the biggest game of hey-diddle-diddle in history. Any man, woman or child with talent enough to see spots before his eyes could get his name in a newspaper.’<sup>3</sup>

Arnold’s original description of his brief, yet disturbing encounter and the dispatch to which it led had an enduring legacy, if only for the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*). A new category of referent, and associated meanings, was created: Ever since, such ‘things seen in the skies’ have been described as ‘flying saucers,’ not only in English but also in French (*soucoupes volantes*), German (*fliegende Untertassen*) and Spanish (*platillos voladores*), or as ‘flying discs’ as in Italian (*dischi volanti*). The more technical and (at least initially) less-evocative term ‘Unidentified Flying Object’ (UFO) was introduced in 1950 by Edward J. Ruppelt (1923–1960), who served as head of the US Air Force UFO investigation group from 1951 to 1953, the purpose of which was to defuse public fascination with the new mystery, but to no avail.<sup>4</sup> Later alternatives, similarly motivated, such as ‘Unidentified Airborne Object’ (UAO), ‘Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon’ (UAP) or ‘*engins spatiaux de provenance inconnue*’ (ESPI) also failed. To date, both original terms, ‘flying saucers’ and ‘UFOs,’ continue to be used synonymously in public discourse, their different meanings conflated. For historical actors, though, especially the former notion came to imply the idea of agency and active control, and, typically, advanced extraterrestrial technology. A UFO, in contrast, took on a more generic connotation as a ‘moving aerial or celestial phenomenon, detected visually or by radar but whose nature is not immediately understood.’<sup>5</sup> In the summer of 1947, however, these terms were yet to take shape. Arnold’s report and the ensuing global clamor ushered in the ‘era of the flying saucer,’ or, as others would have it, ‘the haunted decade.’<sup>6</sup> The emergence of this new phenomenon, and its curious nomenclature, coincided with the outbreak of the Cold War and prevalent fears of nuclear armageddon.<sup>7</sup> UFOs continue to excite believers and aggravate skeptics, and, as I argue in this article, constitute an integral part of the history of spaceflight before and after Sputnik, as well as Western astroculture.

By their very characteristics and the reactions they have incited, UFOs unsettle traditional historical analysis. The subject necessitates a careful self-positioning as to what counts as facts and how they are situated culturally. Although the phenomenon has given rise to a global, socioculturally heterogeneous and still active UFO movement, scholars in the humanities have generally shied away from comprehending the genesis, development and societal impact of such an unconventional subject, one that constantly oscillates between fact and fiction, knowing and believing, and science and religion. The topic is as fleeting, glistening and controversial as UFOs themselves. The handful of previous academic studies, mainly authored by sociologists, anthropologists and scholars of religion, is characterized by an almost exclusive focus on the USA. As non-historical studies, they tend to lack historical depth, awareness of geography and contextualization.<sup>8</sup> Historians themselves, for whatever reasons, have been even slower to engage with the topic, despite its historical dimension and the fundamental questions posed by its sudden rise, widespread popularity and, since the summer of 1947, unbroken persistence as a

contested, cultural phenomenon. The unclear ontological status of UFOs – ‘Are Flying Saucers Real?’ astronomer J. Allen Hynek bluntly asked in the title of one of his publications – may explain some professional restraint and the widespread belief in the subject’s inherent illegitimacy.<sup>9</sup> Political scientists Alexander Wendt and Raymond Duvall argue that there may be an actively reproduced social taboo on taking UFOs seriously. According to their analysis, inquiring into the nature of UFOs constitutes a threat to the ‘ongoing historical project to constitute sovereignty in anthropocentric terms.’ The mere act of inquiry invokes the taboo. ‘The UFO can be “known” only,’ Wendt and Duvall deduce, ‘by *not* asking what it is.’<sup>10</sup> For historians, then, the sole possibility is to do what they typically do in such situations: to cautiously circumnavigate this blind spot or *Leerstelle*.<sup>11</sup> A direct confrontation would only perpetuate the discursive deadlock between believers and skeptics, proselytizers and debunkers, and amateurs and scientists reached within a few years after the 1947 incident and persisting to date.

The resulting shortage of academic literature – here understood as that without active investment in the object of its investigation – is in stark disproportion to the sheer mass of source material that is available and steeped in controversy. In Western Europe, several specialized UFO journals were established in the 1950s and early 1960s, and a reliable and fully annotated bibliography, covering the four decades after 1947, lists no fewer than 1093 English publications in book format alone.<sup>12</sup> Almost all of them, however, were written in order to intervene in contemporaneous controversies and are therefore often partisan. Believers and debunkers alike frequently based their accounts on the same anecdotal and oft-repeated evidence; pursued overt, often conspiracy-theory driven agendas; and usually chose to attack either each other or address themselves, rather than operate within and relate to larger intellectual debates.<sup>13</sup>

For what reason have UFOs proved academically so perilous? Is it apt to describe them as a ‘*sociological untouchable*’? What, then, are historians to ‘do’ with the ‘rumours of round objects that flash through the troposphere and stratosphere,’ as C.G. Jung sketched the situation in 1958?<sup>14</sup> The present essay attempts to meet such a challenge, charting a viable path along which to historicize UFOs. As the 1947 founding myth and subsequent US-government investigations to solve the riddle, culminating in Congressional Hearings in April 1966 and July 1968, are far better known than most other aspects of UFO history, this article sets itself three alternative objectives.<sup>15</sup>

First, it intends to internationalize the history of the UFO phenomenon. Neither the phenomenon as such nor the controversies and movement it engendered were as confined and exceptional to the USA as most of the existing academic literature seems to imply.

Second, this article comprehends and analyzes UFOs as an integral part of what I describe by the term ‘astroculture.’<sup>16</sup> If the overall aim is to design a comprehensive, ‘alternative’ state-of-the-art cultural history of the Space Age, then not only UFOs and contact claims, but the entire range of its supposedly obscure and sometimes-labeled ‘pseudo-scientific’ features such as space mirrors, space stations and space colonies should be seen from the vantage of historical actors, with all their varied beliefs, interests, and actions, and integrated into the analysis.<sup>17</sup> This article considers UFOs in relation to astroculture by focusing on the quarter-century after the 1947 Arnold sighting until about 1972–1973. This was the time when the international UFO controversy changed tack. The last important wave of sightings occurred in 1973 (until the large Belgian UFO wave of 1989–1991), and debates on extraterrestrial encounters were given a new twist with the rise of alien abduction claims and narratives first reported in 1966.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the first phase of space exploration, the classical Space Age, came to an end, with the last

astronaut leaving the Moon on December 14, 1972. In the West, post-Apollo disillusionment and waning public enthusiasm for human initiatives in outer space, whether physical or in the imagination, were associated with the end of the postwar economic boom and a general crisis of confidence in the future, on Earth or in space.<sup>19</sup>

Third, this article asks what issues, especially those contrasting with professional technoscience, were at stake in the periodic international controversies on UFOs. Curiously enough, the two major technoscientific projects of the twentieth century – the exploration and use of outer space, and the exploration and use of nuclear power – intersected at the fringes of institutionalized knowledge. But postwar UFOs also brought to the fore a distinct issue relating to the boundary between science and belief: the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH), which according to sociologist Brenda Denzler served as the ‘central organizing concept for ufology.’<sup>20</sup> Having profited from the rise and professionalization of science, ufology, in short, gave an easy answer to an eternal question with which conventional science continued to struggle: Are we alone in the universe? Some believed that, in the future-saturated Space Age, the age-long wait for an answer had finally come to an end. At last, ‘they’ were here.

### The global invention of the flying saucer

UFOs were an American invention that soon turned into a global, particularly West-European phenomenon. Their popularity was just as sensational in Europe as in their country of origin, and some of the movement’s protagonists became equally prominent expert-celebrities in other national contexts, in particular the Polish-American ufologist George Adamski (1891–1965) and the astronomer J. Allen Hynek (1910–1986), to name but two, each representing diametrically opposite positions of belief. Only a fortnight after Kenneth Arnold’s contentious encounter in June 1947, the *Times* of London reported that ‘disk-like objects, nicknamed “flying saucers,”’ had been seen ‘travelling through the air at great speed, singly or in groups’ in various parts of the USA and Canada. Soon after, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* pointed to the phenomenon’s global character in the first UFO article it ever published: ‘Each continent has its own saucers,’ its headline read: ‘They were seen in Denmark, in the Balearic Islands and in Australia, in Italy, France and Ireland.’ In early 1950, when more and more articles began to appear, the situation had worsened, rather than improved, at least according to *Der Spiegel*, which now reported that ‘From Uruguay to Turkey, from Mexico to Austria, there was an epidemic of flying discs.’ *Die Zeit* found that they had caused ‘confusion, doubt, panic and hysteria’ in the ‘entire Western part of our globe,’ and the *New York Times* considered it noteworthy that ‘saucer stories [had] popped up in such widely scattered points as Turkey, Argentina, Germany, China and Chile.’ According to contemporaneous estimates, by the mid-1950s UFOs had been sighted in 70 different countries, by the end of the decade over every country in the world.<sup>21</sup>

There is little reliable, non-anecdotal and statistically sound evidence as regards the precise geographical and chronological distribution of such sightings worldwide. French ufologist Jacques Vallée (1939–) counts four particularly large UFO waves, so-called flaps, in 1947, 1952, 1954 and 1964, with a ‘silent decade’ between the latter two. For the USA, historian David Jacobs has identified four peaks after the beginning of the modern debate in the summer of 1947, that is in 1952, 1957, 1965–1967 and in 1973. Sociologist Denzler draws attention to a similar, but again slightly different chronology of intensified sightings: in 1954 and three longer ones, in 1956–1958, 1965–1968 and 1973–1974. Others have emphasized a particularly momentous pan-European flap on July

18, 1967.<sup>22</sup> In Great Britain alone, altogether 2463 sightings were reported to the authorities between January 1, 1959 and December 31, 1974, with particular peaks in 1967 and 1971. When asked in Parliament to comment on the unusual number of reports of unidentified flying objects received in 1967, Secretary of State for Air Merlyn Rees explained that they simply reflected a wave of public interest in UFOs, rather than vice versa.<sup>23</sup> Statistically, it is impossible to correlate these peaks unambiguously with significant societal events, such as war tensions or atomic tests, or spaceflight accomplishments, such as the launching of the first artificial satellites in the fall/winter of 1957–1958, the first photographs of the Martian surface (Mariner 4, 1965) or the six Apollo Moon landings between July 1969 and December 1972. Available data is too insubstantial and unreliable for valid statistical analysis, with the assumed direction of causation being unclear in the first place: Did UFO sightings lead to reports – or did reports generate sightings? Contemporaneous critics and observers were well aware of this problem, but helpless to resolve it.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 1 details major UFO waves worldwide between 1947 and 1973; most reports were made in the blackened regions and encircled areas. A concentration along the coasts of North America, in Japan and, in particular, Western Europe is striking – *mutatis mutandis* urban, densely populated and industrialized regions rather than the rural countryside. Periodic reports of UFO sightings in Eastern Europe, especially the Soviet Union, rumored since the late 1940s and with a particular wave in 1966, were neither known nor widely debated in the West, particularly not prior to this map's origination in 1975. Early on, UFOs were discussed in the West as secret weapons potentially emanating from the Eastern Bloc, whereas UFOs in Communist countries themselves hardly played a significant role in the Western skirmishes.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, UFOs were not sighted in the USA alone; within weeks they proved a genuinely global phenomenon. They also occurred relatively early when weighed against the sequence of events suggested by standard histories of the Space Age: two years *after* the end of World War II and the outset of the Cold War, yet more than a decade *before* Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite launched in October 1957.<sup>26</sup> Because of the series of atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Bikini Atoll begun in 1945, the threat of nuclear war overshadowed all attempts of geopolitical reorganization but it did not, paradoxically, shake confidence in the desirability and feasibility of large-scale technoscientific projects such as the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Belief in scenarios of an imminent human expansion into outer space – commonly discussed using imperial-expansionist terms such as 'exploration,' 'exploitation,' 'conquest' and 'colonization' – formed an integral part of such widely shared faith in the powers of technology. Physically, outer space was empty of human presence during this decade, yet in the cultural imagination it was more cluttered and inhabited than ever before. With gigantic space mirrors, nuclear wonder weapons and constantly manned space stations circling the Earth in public print discussion, this was the heyday of astroculture. In other words, the UFO phenomenon arose at the very beginning of what has sometimes been hailed as the 'Golden Age of Spaceflight,' and must be considered an integral element of a comprehensive, all-encompassing astroculture. Classifying UFOs and the heated, long-term and never-ending controversies they engendered as 'pseudoscientific,' peripheral or petty is to miss their historical import.

The 'saucer racket' (*Untertassenrummel*) constituted the postwar equivalent of the interwar 'rocket racket' (*Raketenummel*), the first trans-European space fads from the mid-1920s through the early 1930s.<sup>27</sup> Space enthusiasm was fostered by a small number of influential amateur societies, established in the prewar period, such as the legendary

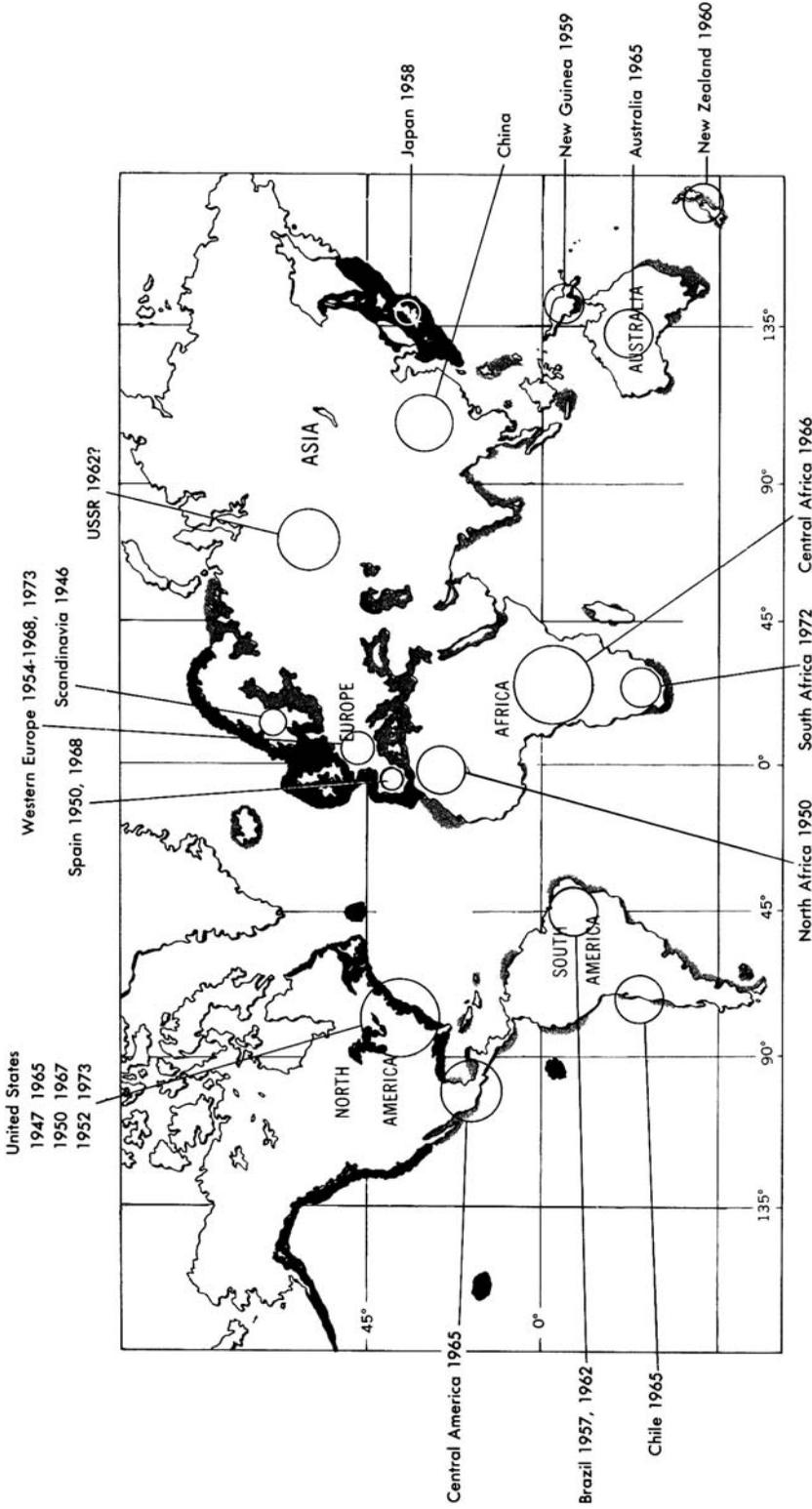


Figure 1. Originally captioned 'The global nature of the UFO phenomenon,' this 1975 map charts major waves of UFO sightings from 1947 through 1973. Source: Hynek and Vallée, *Edge of Reality*, xvi.

Verein für Raumschiffahrt (VfR) in 1927 and the British Interplanetary Society (BIS) in 1933. Members included physicist and school teacher Hermann Oberth (1894–1989), science popularizer Willy Ley (1906–1969), rocket engineer Wernher von Braun (1912–1977) and science fiction author and techno-prophet Arthur C. Clarke (1917–2008), to name but a few of approximately 100 space *personae* of significance. Aiming to establish space exploration as a legitimate enterprise, worthy of public and political support, they made outer space imaginable, socially respectable and, effectively, a central element of European cosmopolitanism. World War II proved a significant catalyst in this process as it palpably demonstrated the power and potential of rockets – as weapons. With regard to the new experts themselves, it simultaneously disrupted and accelerated a process of internationalization. Eventually, the war led to the rise of a space international, a loose confederation of organizations and individuals through which ideas and promotional efforts circulated. When the first UFO sightings were reported in 1947, these space experts promptly sought to combat what they considered utterly irrational claims and a severe threat to their own, only by then publicly accepted authority and cognizance in all matters space.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to appreciating its postwar geographical scope and temporal context, a third aspect of the UFO phenomenon needs to be emphasized: belief in the possible existence and *gestalt* of extraterrestrial life – usually subsumed as the so-called plurality-of-worlds debate. The question of whether humans are unique in the universe did not originate in the twentieth century, but rather stretches back to Greek philosophers, particularly Democritus and Epicurus. It has its own centuries-old history, with the latter half of the nineteenth century known as the ‘Golden Age of the discussion about plurality,’ that is, plurality of inhabitable planets and the statistical likelihood of intelligent extraterrestrial life elsewhere. Yet, if UFOs indeed constitute ‘the technological wing of the E.T. imaginary,’ as anthropologist Debora Battaglia has argued, they are not only younger, but also a more frequent target of public doubt than these largely theological-intellectual debates.<sup>29</sup> A causal connection between unclassifiable shapes observed in the skies and imminent visitations from outer space was suggested early on, not the least by Arnold himself, yet by no means taken as serious or even worthy of consideration. Alternatively, observers brought forward at least five different theories for the new, deeply unsettling phenomena, including the testing of secret weapons, Soviet missiles, weather balloons, meteors, and optical illusions.<sup>30</sup>

It was only in 1950 that the so-called extraterrestrial hypothesis began to generate enormous public controversy. Soon dominating all other interpretations and explanations, this marked the beginning of a second phase of debate. Three books were published in 1950 which tried to make a case for explaining the flying saucers as spaceships, sent from either Mars or Venus to observe planet Earth and watch its inhabitants: Donald E. Keyhoe’s *The Flying Saucers Are Real*, Frank Scully’s *Behind the Flying Saucers* and Gerald Heard’s *The Riddle of the Flying Saucers*.<sup>31</sup> Although the books were as different as their authors – Keyhoe (1897–1988) a retired Marine Corps major and aviation writer, Scully (1892–1964) an American journalist and Heard (1889–1971) a British historian and the BBC’s first science commentator – they were also widely read and discussed by an international audience. Keyhoe’s *Flying Saucers Are Real* sold half a million copies. The German translation of its sequel, *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*, published in 1953, carried the drastic, threatening and yet telling title *Der Weltraum rückt uns näher* – ‘outer space is looming’ – and was reviewed in respectable journals such as *Weltraumfahrt*, *Die Zeit*, and even the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Within half a year, six editions were sold, a ninth before January 1955.<sup>32</sup> By 1954, all three books were available in French transla-

tions. In Great Britain, it was the middle-brow *Sunday Express*, one of the largest circulating weekly papers, that first brought the idea of the saucers' extraterrestrial provenance to a wider public, by pre-publishing Heard's *Riddle of the Flying Saucers* in serialized form in the fall of 1950. Over the course of two months, under the general title 'Is Another World Watching Us?' individual articles in the series posed questions such as 'Where *ON EARTH* could Flying Saucers come from?', 'What makes flying saucers FLY?', 'Are Flying Saucers manned by insects – not men?' or 'On which of the planets could life exist?', with the paper's editor declaring that he himself was by no means 'out of sympathy' with such an idea. Heard's 'theory' that flying saucers were not secret weapons but piloted by giant bees from planet Mars or one of its moons never quite caught the public imagination, but it did add to the growth of an increasingly contentious debate.<sup>33</sup>

The internationally most widely read of the three authors proved to be Keyhoe. After studying the UFO material made available to him by the Air Force, Keyhoe drew the sensational conclusion that there could only be one simple solution to the 'mystery of the disks': patrolling beings from another planet, possibly Mars. According to Keyhoe, planet Earth had been under periodic observation for at least two centuries; surveillance had suddenly increased in 1947 because of the series of nuclear weapons tests begun in 1945 which had shaken the universe's equilibrium. The mysterious signs in the skies had to be read as harbingers of extraterrestrial ambassadors, alarmed by human wrongdoing that could be observed from more distant parts of the solar system. However, attempts to establish communication with UFO occupants was unlikely, Keyhoe claimed: 'There may be some unknown block to making contact, but it is more probable that the spacemen's plans are not complete,' he stated.<sup>34</sup>

UFOs joined mainstream culture when, in April 1952, *Life* magazine published an article suggestively entitled 'Have We Visitors From Space?' Emphasizing the extraterrestrial possibility without ever siding with it directly, the *Life* article paved the way for other respectable publications, national and international, to engage the topic.<sup>35</sup> In the early 1950s a new book genre evolved, consisting of countless volumes characterized by a multitude of variations on the same theme, each eager to outdo its competitors by presenting fresh speculations and ever vaster narratives of conspiracy. At the same time, these books generated a counter-market of works that aimed to debunk the rapidly snowballing literature as complete nonsense, an *Untertassenschwindel* (flying saucer swindle), arguing that the signs in the skies were natural phenomena that could easily be explained. This discursive tension intensified when the first scientist, Donald Menzel (1901–1976), a Harvard-based astrophysicist, entered the debate. In his 1953 book *Flying Saucers*, published by Harvard University Press, he cited mundane, that is, natural, causes of the 'apparitions,' explaining them away as mirages caused by temperature inversion. Intended as an act of scientific analysis to prove the 'unreality' of saucers, Menzel's intervention rather fueled the ongoing debate and led Keyhoe to write his equally controversial sequel, *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, a double causal claim would characterize and dominate the international skirmishes on flying saucers throughout the next two decades: first, UFO's alleged extraterrestrial provenance; and, second, that their influx had been triggered by nuclear bomb tests on planet Earth. While the former led to a revived version of the plurality-of-worlds debate in amateur and expert circles alike, the reference to the atomic bomb was yet another sign that, for these historical actors and the public, the Space and the Atomic Ages were inextricably intertwined. According to them, the development and employment of nuclear power constituted a clear threat for the rest of the universe. 'The fact that the present saucer incursion came so soon after the beginning of our Atomic Age convinces researchers

that there is a connection between the two history-making, history-shaking events,' Brinsley le Poer Trench (1911–1995), 8th Earl of Clancarty and prominent British ufologist, stated in a *Flying Saucer Review* editorial published on the tenth anniversary of Arnold's encounter.<sup>37</sup> As much as the future was predicted to take place in outer space, it seemed equally evident to le Poer Trench and other ufologists that the Space Age was threatened by humans' self-destructive tendencies, in the form of nuclear weapons.

Yet, there was one common characteristic in which proponents and critics of the extraterrestrial hypothesis did not fundamentally differ: their spatial imagination was largely limited to the solar system. Once they had decided that an 'unorthodox explanation' was better suited to interpret the available evidence than 'simple misinterpretation of natural phenomena and wish-fulfillment hallucinations' (Figure 2), ufologists usually discussed two potential points of origin of the flying saucers, either Mars or Venus, with a slight inclination toward the latter. Whether there was a correlation between frequencies of UFO sightings and the planets' variable distances to Earth became a common topic of debate, particularly during the summer of 1956 – by some reckonings a 'flap' year – when Earth and Mars were in relatively close proximity in astronomical terms.<sup>38</sup>

Ironically, the international group of space experts, the space *personae* including Clarke, Ley, von Braun and others, who, with their enhanced status in the postwar period, should have been in a position to make sense of the new phenomenon and present alternative explanations to the public, did not know how to face the epistemic challenge brought about by the ufologists. In their response to UFO reports in the 1950s, members of the rocket societies displayed and reproduced the same kind of scientific skepticism to which they themselves had been subjected before the war. After some internal controversy, the newly founded West German Gesellschaft für Weltraumforschung (GfW), the VfR's self-declared successor organization, decided to withdraw entirely from participating in the

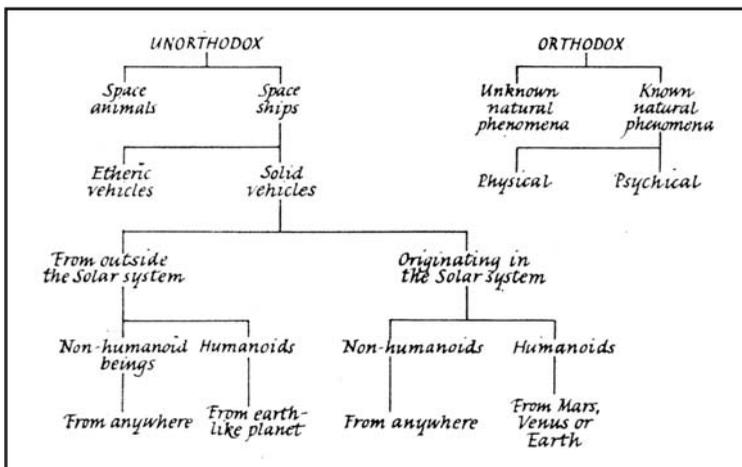


Figure 2. Diagrammatic scheme of possible explanations of UFO evidence published in the British journal *Flying Saucer Review* in 1961. Following the 'line of least resistance,' the author came to the conclusion that the most logical and therefore best interpretation of the available UFO evidence was that '(a) UFOs are space ships, [and] (b) they come from Mars or Venus or from an Earth-like planet of another sun.'

Source: Sharp, 'An Appraisal of the Present UFO Position,' 20.

public debate by abstaining from releasing any official statement.<sup>39</sup> The BIS, the GfW's British counterpart, chose a more aggressive strategy, hardly concealing its discomfort. Under Clarke's chairmanship (1946–1947; 1951–1953), a brief, yet adamantly critical reaction to the 1952 *Life* article on extraterrestrial visitors appeared in its in-house publication, the *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society*. Three more reviews of prominent UFO books followed in the first half of the 1950s. Although quick to point out that there was 'no "official" B.I.S. party-line' on the 'plague of flying saucers,' the Society declared that it

remains unconvinced that this planet is already in contact with extra-terrestrial forces – a fair statement would be to say that we retain an open mind, tinged with skepticism! This in spite of the fact that we should rather *like* to believe that spaceships were already flying in the neighbourhood of the Earth, even if they were not our own – and in spite of the fact that, of course, we would be the last to ridicule such a possibility.<sup>40</sup>

Despite their stringent efforts to debunk what they considered a very remote possibility or, worse, excesses of irrational belief in obvious quackery, internationally recognized space *personae* such as Clarke and Ley did not succeed in formulating a concise alternate standpoint that would resonate with the public to the same degree. Fearing that their own newly won respectability might be endangered should the public now associate them 'with the cranks and crackpots who were spearheading the cult,' they resorted to humorous polemics to maintain the necessary distance. 'U.F.O.s tell us absolutely nothing about intelligent life elsewhere in the universe; but they do prove how rare it is on Earth,' read one of Clarke's numerous aphorisms.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Ley for his part acknowledged deep puzzlement when describing the quick succession of one UFO book after the other as an even greater mystery than the saucers themselves: 'Unfortunately nobody has a simple answer [as to what they are] so the flying saucer books keep coming,' he noted in one of his many book reviews. Frequently peppered with UFO questions after his public lectures, Ley tried to explain that he did believe in visits from outer space, 'maybe to-morrow, maybe in a century,' while remaining convinced that the flying saucers just were not 'it': 'If they have a common cause at all they most likely represent a natural phenomenon which has escaped us so far.'<sup>42</sup> A common resolution on UFOs, planned to be released at the fifth annual congress of the International Astronautical Federation (IAF), the association of the world's space societies, held in Innsbruck in 1954, did not materialize.<sup>43</sup> With the self-made space experts at a loss to present a clear, substantive explanation, the global debate on Unidentified Airborne Objects – as Clarke insisted on calling them – entered a third, even more spectacular phase.

## Contact

In the years immediately following Arnold's encounter, from 1947 through 1953, the UFO controversy grew and differentiated. The first and most radical transformation was the double shift from seeing strange things in the skies to ascribing them an out-of-space provenance, and, second, from observing and reporting to actually *encountering* the extraterrestrial other, as the infamous 'contactees' of the 1950s and 1960s claimed to have done. Over the course of these six short years, UFOs had invaded popular culture, most notably music and feature film, to such an extent that a critic in 1952 lamented how outer space had already 'come of age.'<sup>44</sup> A year before, Ella Fitzgerald had sung of 'Two Little Men in a Flying Saucer,' and two figurative science fiction films were released,

both capitalizing on the visitors-from-space theme, albeit from opposite perspectives. Together, Robert Wise's jolting *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and Howard Hawks' horror-prone *The Thing from Another World* effectively created a distinct subgenre of science fiction films, the saucer movie. In 1953, these films were followed by George Pál's *War of the Worlds*, Jack Arnold's *It Came from Outer Space* and William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders from Mars*. Fred F. Sears' *Earth vs. Flying Saucers*, a 1956 saucer movie that thematized the global character of the alien mania like no other, even claimed to be a filmic adaptation of Keyhoe's bestseller *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*. Although all Hollywood-made, they were widely shown and discussed elsewhere, particularly in Western Europe, as evidenced by comprehensive press reviews.<sup>45</sup>

What conditions had to be fulfilled to transform belief into knowledge? If the debate on the UFOs' reality had, from its beginnings in 1947, revolved around questions of witness credibility and material evidence, the distance between claims asserted and proof presented now widened more than ever. After Arnold's encounter and the establishment of the ETH's discursive dominance after 1950, the year 1953 marked the beginning of a third phase in the already convoluted transnational UFO skirmishes. A similarly radical and highly controversial shift would only re-occur in 1966, when contact stories were given a new twist with the rise of 'alien abduction' claims and strongly sexualized space narratives.<sup>46</sup>

Much to the disdain of Keyhoe, Hynek and others who considered themselves 'empirical' ufologists, as they sought to legitimate ufology by basing it on hard evidence and controlled observation, an increasing number of so-called contactees rose to stardom during the 1950s and 1960s. They claimed to have had face-to-face contact, personal communication and direct interaction with beings from another planet, a so-called 'close encounter of the fourth kind' (CEIV).<sup>47</sup> Soon, their 'contactee stories' comprised a best-selling subgenre within the already flourishing UFO literature. The Polish-American author George Adamski (Figure 3, nos. 183 and 184) became the preeminent star contactee and international media celebrity. Propagating spectacular space travelogues in best-sellers such as *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (1953), co-authored with the British author and musician Desmond Leslie (1921–2001), and its 1956 sequel *Inside the Space Ships*, Adamski soon gained a worldwide following.<sup>48</sup> His legion included Queen Juliana of the Netherlands (1909–2004), previously rumored to be under the spell of a faith healer. On the occasion of a trans-European lecture tour organized by a British UFO association during the summer of 1959, Adamski was even granted a private, scandal-ridden audience at Palace Soestdijk, her summer residence, before speaking to a gathering of 1200 about a recent 12-hour trip to Venus. Adamski's subsequent reading tour through Europe came to a sudden halt on May 29, 1959 when students in Zurich organized protests, accusing him of fraud. Adamski, on his part, accused the Europeans of not being sufficiently *welt-raumbewußt* (space-minded) before returning to the USA.<sup>49</sup>

In his publications, lectures and media appearances, Adamski went to great lengths to describe his extraterrestrial encounters. During a UFO-hunt in the Californian desert on November 20, 1952, he claimed to have made personal contact with a man from another world, a 'space brother.' In the sequel, *Inside the Space Ships*, he told of subsequent excursions through the solar system on board alien Orthon's 'Scout Ship,' a flying saucer. During their rides Adamski was not only introduced to other interplanetary travelers from Venus, Mars and even Saturn, but his hosts also showed him the dark side of the Moon, still unseen and unexplored, only to find it vegetated and inhabited.<sup>50</sup> Entirely unperturbed by his repeated extraterrestrial encounters, Adamski described them as short, slender and convinced vegetarians, perfectly capable of conversing in English. Asked to

## VIII. PLANETARIER



Figure 3. Tableau of various ‘extraterrestrials’ (*Planetarier*), some complete with their mundane contactee partners, as compiled by German publisher Karl Veit (1907–2001) in 1961. Image no. 184 is a photograph of the Polish-American UFO-celebrity George Adamski (1891–1965) standing next to a painting of Venusian ‘Orthon,’ also to be seen on image no. 183 (full body drawing together with two footprints). No. 190 is the photograph of a ‘Martian’ that the infamous British author Cedric Allingham – possibly a pseudonym of popular astronomer Sir Patrick Moore – claimed to have taken after their encounter on February 18, 1954 in Lossiemouth, Scotland. Source: Veit, *Planetarier besuchen unsere Erde*, 172.

explain the aliens' human-like appearances, he referred to the two species' common origins: it had been the Venusians, Adamski explained, that had originally populated Earth, hence the resemblance – a thought that rose *in nuce* to even greater popularity in the late 1960s, when Erich von Däniken began to capitalize on it as the key idea of his so-called ancient astronaut hypothesis.<sup>51</sup> Soon similar books by other 'contactees' followed, including Truman Bethurum's *Aboard a Flying Saucer*, Daniel W. Fry's *The White Sands Incident*, Orfeo Angelucci's *Secret of the Saucers* and Howard Menger's *From Outer Space to You*.<sup>52</sup> With his first-person account of an alien encounter, Adamski not only established a model for the new genre of 'contactee narrative' but also paved the way for a powerful reintegration of esoteric thought into astroculture at large.

In Europe, similar contact claims followed on their heels. Independently of each other, two Frenchmen, Antoine Mazaud and Marius Dewilde, claimed 'to have seen and even touched' an alien on September 10, 1954, 'for the first time in Europe.'<sup>53</sup> Not only in retrospect, however, the most significant and controversial case proved that of a hitherto and otherwise unknown Cedric Allingham, who in February 1955 published *Flying Saucer from Mars*. The book caused a stir for describing the first direct encounter case reported in Great Britain, on February 18, 1954 in Lossiemouth, Scotland, and hence half a year earlier than that in France. Included in the book were six photos of the alleged UFO and one photo of the Martian, all out of focus (Figure 3, no. 190). Since the mid-1980s evidence has grown that its somewhat obscure, elusive and afterwards soon-to-disappear author was none other than the noted British astronomer, prolific writer and TV-presenter Sir Patrick Moore, well known through the BBC's astronomy show 'The Sky at Night,' continually broadcast since May 1954.<sup>54</sup>

The contactees' emergence and rise to popularity after 1953 confused an already convoluted controversy even further. Refueling the ongoing skirmishes with what competing ufologists called a 'ridicule factor,' they were accused of hampering evidence-based efforts to legitimize the subject. Thus, the contactees challenged 'authoritative' ufologists such as Keyhoe or Hynek in the same way as *their* original emergence had challenged established space experts such as Ley or Clarke who, in turn, recommended to treat Adamski's model-setting book with the 'contempt it deserves.' 'Books like *Flying Saucers Have Landed*,' Clarke incensed, 'do a real disservice by obscuring the truth and scaring away serious researchers from a field which may be of great importance.'<sup>55</sup> It is doubtful, however, whether such warnings had the intended impact on the public. As in similar other cases, the unveiling of fraud and hoaxes, and the failing of prophecies did not necessarily undermine popular belief in the reality of UFOs. Quite to the contrary, they continued to be conflated in the public mind and the media with space travel and technoscientific promise.<sup>56</sup>

## Evidence

In the premiere episode of *UFO*, the 1970 British science fiction television series about an imminent alien invasion, Commander Edward Straker, head of a secret organization established to impede the hostile takeover, poses the all-important question: 'What do we really know about UFOs?' Although he goes on to break the main problem down into three interrelated questions – 'What are they? Where do they come from? What do they want?' – Straker's query points to the one epistemic-ontological problem at the core of the UFO controversy since its very inception: the phenomenon's reality, the kind of evidence available to decide its status and, consequently, the boundaries between knowledge and belief. Can one know of UFOs – or 'only' believe in them?<sup>57</sup> In 1978, inspired by

the success of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and President Carter's alleged UFO sighting, *Der Spiegel* devoted an entire cover story, 'Die Ufos kommen – Spuk oder Wirklichkeit?' (The UFOs are arriving – spook or reality?), to this very question.<sup>58</sup>

Over the course of more than 65 years, the UFO controversy has continued to rage, yet a consensus as to the 'truth' of the phenomenon has never been reached. Although the debate has undergone three distinct transformations – in 1950, 1953 and 1966 – the fundamental questions posed – what, whence and why? – have remained identical. At the core of the controversy has been an argument about the constituents of knowledge. The role of experts – eyewitnesses or proponents – is key: their reports, as well as various forms of direct and indirect evidence such as testimonies, affidavits and observation records; frequently photographs and drawings, less so films; and, even more rarely, putative 'artifacts' of extraterrestrial origins (Figure 4). As evidence of UFO encounters was

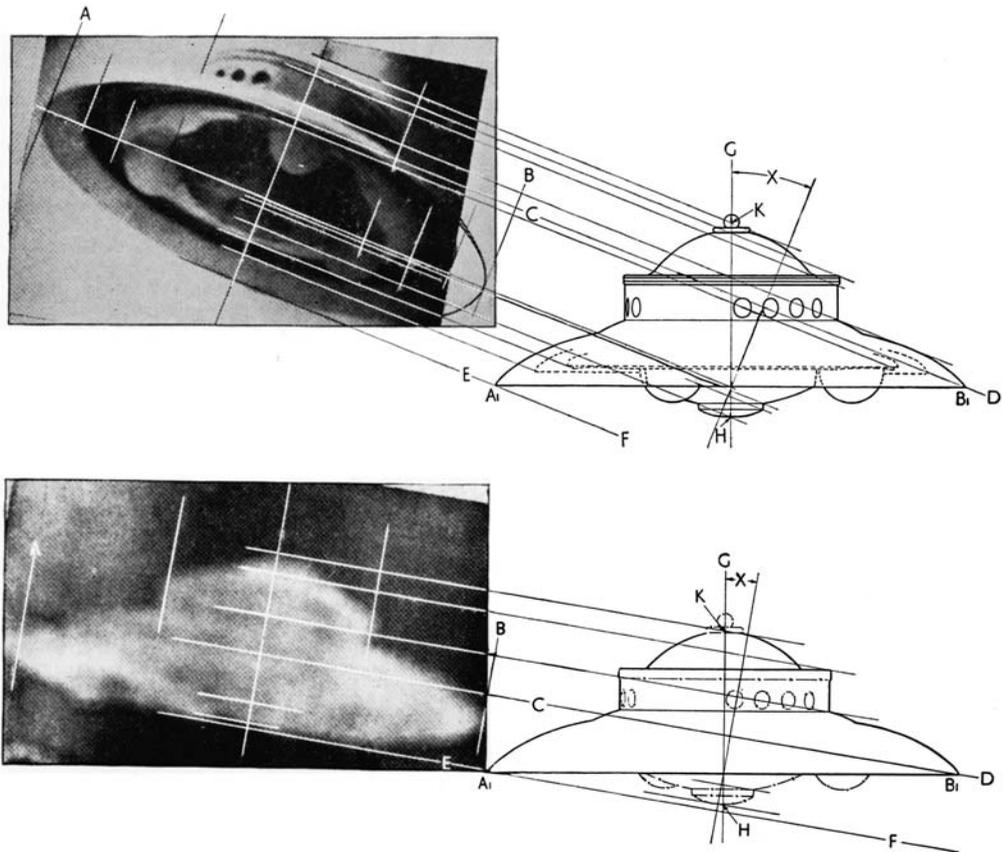


Figure 4. As a postscript to George Adamski's obituary published in July 1965, the British *Flying Saucer Review* presented its readers with a combination of photographic evidence and technical extrapolations. Comparing Adamski's iconic photograph of a Venusian 'Scout Ship' (upper left; from *Inside the Space Ships*, 1955) with another taken by Stephen Darbishire, a student from the Lake District, on February 15, 1954 (bottom left), the editors used engineering-style drawings as corroborative evidence of this UFO's existence.

Source: *Flying Saucer Review* 11, no. 4 (July–August 1965): 19.

almost exclusively case-based and largely anecdotal, non-reproducible nor falsifiable, ufologists hoped that as much could be collected as possible, even if sheer quantity could not generate verification. When such accumulation of knowledge failed to bring analytical clarity, other forms of collective verification were sought. Starting in the mid-1950s, the British Unidentified Flying Object Research Association (BUFORA) co-organized so-called 'International Flying Saucer Sighting Days' or entire 'Contact Week-ends.' On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Arnold's sighting in 1967, during the pan-European flap of that year, reportedly more than 40,000 participants from 23 countries were simultaneously on the hunt, among them 600 British activists.<sup>59</sup> In 1954, French ufologist Aimé Michel (1919–1992) introduced *orthoténie*, a statistical method to find a potential structure by linking individual sightings in different locations. One person, the argument went in both cases, could suffer from a hallucination, but if several observers witnessed the same sighting at the same time or if several sightings could be assembled to form a pattern, the phenomenon became intersubjective.<sup>60</sup> Critics, though, were hardly impressed by proof they considered far from conclusive or compelling, usually questioning the reliability of witness observations or the quality of evidence. 'To make progress,' Hynek declared on various occasions, 'we must accept the fact that the UFOs do exist – *as reports*.' 'If there are so many hundreds of cases of UFO landings,' another critic snarled during a panel discussion convened by *Playboy* magazine, 'why haven't they left behind the tiniest trace of their presence, apart from "evidence" that could have been created by any sixth grader?'<sup>61</sup>

Two further historical parallels, one synchronic and the other diachronic, can only be sketched. In 1965, biochemist and science fiction writer Isaac Asimov (1920–1992) characterized exobiology – the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI) by means of consensual science, since 1959/1960 an emergent field of research – as a science 'in search of a subject,' a 'field of study with nothing to study.'<sup>62</sup> Such a labeling could also be applied to ufology. As their respective conclusions cannot be falsified, both sought to legitimate their activities in conditional, prospective terms, pointing time and again to the revolutionary consequences that establishing contact with other life in outer space would have as the 'greatest news since civilisation began.'<sup>63</sup> That they both rely on the same age-old argumentative pattern of justification accounts for some of the hostilities between ufologists on the one hand, and proponents of SETI on the other.<sup>64</sup>

The second historical parallel arises from striking similarities with turn-of-the-century disputes about spirit rappings, ghost apparitions and the possibility of communicating with the beyond. Evidence produced in the nineteenth century to support the reality of a wide array of occult phenomena included equally fuzzy photographs and testimonies by socially respected witnesses, often choosing case-study approaches and evoking paranormal explanations. Not only the translational media employed but also the fundamental questions raised by proponents and critics in the late nineteenth century and the third quarter of the twentieth century were identical. Were the reported phenomena real? What kind of evidence was required to dispel potential doubts and attest to their existence? Both spiritualists and ufologists were driven by the same cause of surpassing existing human boundaries and transgressing mundane limitations by establishing contact with otherworldly powers, thus elevating earthbound spirituality to a new, hitherto unforeseen level of existence.<sup>65</sup>

Over the course of the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s, the diffusion of space thought in general, and the UFO skirmishes in particular, continued, with positions becoming increasingly rigid and irreconcilable. A single transgressive moment was reached in October 1960 when 'father of spaceflight' Hermann Oberth, one of the most respected space experts and von Braun's mentor, publically switched camps, to the disdain of the

other space *personae*. At the ‘4. Internationaler UFO/IFO-Kongress,’ hosted in Wiesbaden and organized by Karl Veit (1907–2001), credulous UFO-impresario and president of the Deutsche UFO/IFO-Studiengemeinschaft (DUIST), Oberth repeated claims first made in 1954 that he was no longer willing to exclude the possibility that UFOs could indeed be of extraterrestrial origin. Having examined all existing arguments, Oberth proclaimed in front of ‘many hundreds of people who apparently believe that the Earth has been visited by emissaries from outer space,’ as *The Times* wrote, that he was now convinced that flying saucers were ‘very real,’ and carrying visitors from outer space (Figure 5).<sup>66</sup> Propagating the idea of salvation via heavenly technology, Oberth later repeated that ‘the UFOs are a kind of sentinel, here simply to observe and report; because a humankind which is as gifted as inventors and researchers as we are, yet has remained politically and morally on our stage of development, constitutes a threat to the entire cosmos.’ Although only pleading the scientist’s duty not to foreclose any alternative explanation *a priori*, the shift of allegiance of such a historic figure and renowned space *persona* was alternatively considered an embarrassment, a publicity stunt or an obscure curiosity, yet did nothing to reconcile epistemic disputes and raise ufology’s respectability neither with the scientific community nor the public. Deliberating a plethora of paranormal explanations while unaware of the concomitant rise of SETI, Oberth was breaking ranks at just the wrong moment.<sup>67</sup>



Figure 5. Hermann Oberth (1894–1989), the oft-hailed ‘father of spaceflight,’ holding a model of a UFO and explaining its working principle at an international ufology-congress in Wiesbaden, Germany, in October 1960. The woman circled in the audience claimed to have been to Venus. Source: Rheinbacher and Stahn, ‘Der Mann vom anderen Stern,’ 12–13.

### Astroculture, technoscience and transcendence

To this day, innumerable UFO sightings and ensuing debates continue to oscillate between science and religion, knowing and believing, evidence and transcendence, apocalypse and utopia, and doom and salvation, apparently neither to be resolved nor ever to reach a conclusive ending. To repeat the question raised at the beginning: How are such ‘rumours of round objects that flash through the troposphere and stratosphere’ and the extensive debates surrounding them to be read and analyzed?<sup>68</sup> Where do UFOs belong historiographically, how are they to be integrated into mainstream twentieth-century history and what can historians learn from these putatively fringe phenomena? In conclusion, the present article offers an interrelated argument about the relationship between astroculture, technoscience and transcendence from 1947 to the early 1970s.

With its rise in large-scale technologies, ubiquitous demonstrations of the power of the military and widespread fear of alien invasion, the Cold War seems to suggest itself as an obvious explanation for the sudden appearance of flying saucers. However, while the threat of the atomic bomb and fears of imminent self-destruction played a central role in contemporaneous explanations, evoking a bipolar Cold War context and employing the notion of Cold War *angst* is a necessary, yet by no means sufficient condition for comprehensive historicization. Flying saucers and their occupants did not constitute a ‘significant index of Cold War paranoia,’ as commonly suggested.<sup>69</sup> Rather, the global phenomenon of UFO sightings emerged a decade prior to Sputnik, during the heyday of astroculture, and was from the outset intimately bound up with what contemporary observers termed the Space Age. The Cold War triggered and intensified older and more-encompassing fantasies of spatial invasion and conquest of extraterrestrial territories but does not fully explain their profound sociocultural relevance and resonance at this time.

In retrospect, similarities, not differences between the various groups of ‘doers’ and activists in this field prevailed – be they ‘rocket scientists,’ UFO believers or, after 1960, the proponents of SETI – in defiance of all skirmishes, controversies and hostilities. While the international space movement of the 1950s propagated, but also depended on constructing and selling credible but imaginative scenarios of the near future, ufologists were simultaneously engaged in creating similar utopias, yet claimed that their visions were occurring in the present. According to them, the presence of UFOs signaled that space had already arrived. Aiming to make sense out of the infinite void that surrounds Earth, ultimately, in both cases the same quest for transcendence can be ascertained, the will to overcome the present condition and find salvation either in or from outer space, that is the heavens. Believed by many to be harbingers of such salvation, in the unknowable UFO, debates on technoscience and transcendence intersected as they did nowhere else.<sup>70</sup>

Historicizing such a Space Age, in all its promises and failures, thus promises to shed new light on the technoscientific modernity of an allegedly secularized century that held fast to the possibility of redemption in the skies. By translocating its earthly obsessions into the infinite vastness of the universe, postwar West-European society entertained and acted upon the hope of retrieving cosmic transcendence. A modern myth, triggered by and deeply inscribed into the Space Age, the UFO is a phenomenon that historians have hardly begun to understand.

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### Feature Films

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*The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Directed by Robert Wise. 20th Century Fox, 1951.

*Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. Directed by Fred F. Sears. Columbia, 1956.

*Invaders From Mars*. Directed by William Cameron Menzies. 20th Century Fox, 1953.

*It Came From Outer Space*. Directed by Jack Arnold. Universal, 1953.

*The Thing From Another World*. Directed by Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks. RKO, 1951.

*War of the Worlds*. Directed by Byron Haskin, produced by George Pál. Paramount, 1953.

### Notes

1. Winston Churchill to Lord Cherwell, July 28, 1952, TNA PREM 11/855; Allingham, *Flying Saucer from Mars*, 11.
2. Jung, 'Ein moderner Mythos.'
3. Quoted after Lagrange, 'Ghost in the Machine,' 227; Darrach and Ginna, 'Have We Visitors from Space?', 81.
4. At least so he claimed in 1956: 'UFO is the official term that I created to replace the words "flying saucers"' (Ruppelt, *Report*, 1).
5. Clarke, 'Flying Saucers,' 97; Ailleris, 'Lure of Local SETI,' 5–6; Jacobs, *UFO Controversy*, 3–4; Sagan, 'Unidentified Flying Object,' 368. It is for this reason that I continue to use both terms as they are commonly referred to, even if – as some believe – they might be falsely over-homogenizing a multifaceted phenomenon, discredited by their close connotation with science fiction and hindering a 'serious' approach to explaining their provenance. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon, 1989, vol. 18: 807) defines a 'UFO' as 'an unidentified flying object; a "flying saucer";' and a 'flying saucer' as 'the fanciful name given to various unidentified disc- or saucer-shaped objects reported as appearing in the sky' (*ibid.*,

- vol. 5: 1121). Interestingly enough, the most reserved and least essentialist definition forms the basis of the infamous 1968 Condon Report, named after physicist Edward U. Condon (1902–1974), the director of the US Air Force-funded University of Colorado UFO Project (1966–1968). Here, the major criterion was not the inexplicable objects in the sky themselves but rather the observational reports which they stimulated, thus avoiding any interpretative presumptions or reality claims: ‘An unidentified flying object (UFO, pronounced OOFO) is ... defined as the stimulus for a report made by one or more individuals of something seen in the sky ... which the observer could not identify as having an ordinary natural origin, and which seemed to him sufficiently puzzling that he undertook to make a report of it to police, to governmental officials, to the press, or perhaps to a representative of a private organization devoted to the study of such objects’; see Condon, *Final Report of the Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*, 9–10, 481, here 9.
6. Waldron, ‘After 25 Years’; Trench, ‘Editorial.’ For Arnold’s own account, see ‘I Did See the Flying Disks!’ and *The Coming of the Saucers*, co-authored with science fiction author and editor Ray Palmer (1910–1977).
  7. With regard to a chronology of events, two further points must be made: First, the question of whether similar aerial phenomena reported prior to 1947 (for instance, ‘airships’ in the United States in 1896–1897, ‘foo fighters’ in Western Europe in 1944 and the Scandinavian ‘ghost rockets’ in 1946) could or even should have been classified retrospectively as ‘UFOs.’ This matter, while oft-discussed by ufologists themselves, lies beyond the scope of this article as I do not address questions of the phenomenon’s ‘realness.’ Second, the so-called Roswell incident, a reputed UFO crash occurring in New Mexico on July 8, 1947, just a fortnight after the Arnold sighting, is often taken to be a second foundational moment but wrongly so. ‘Roswell’ only became an ‘incident’ in 1980, with the publication of Charles Berlitz’ and William Moore’s *The Roswell Incident*, and did not invade popular culture before the early 1990s. See Saler, Ziegler and Moore, *UFO Crash at Roswell*, 16–17.
  8. See, in chronological order, Jacobs, *UFO Controversy*; Dick, *Biological Universe*, 267–320; Peebles, *Watch the Skies!*; Dean, *Aliens in America* (here 204, n46); Saler, Ziegler and Moore, *UFO Crash at Roswell*; Denzler, *Lure of the Edge* (xvii; 192, n20); and Bullard, *Myth and Mystery*. Recent edited collections include Lewis, *The Gods Have Landed*; Partridge, *UFO Religions*; and Tummyia, *Alien Worlds*. But see Lagrange’s work on France; Grünshloß, *Wenn die Götter landen*, on Germany; Clarke and Roberts, *Flying Saucerers*, on Great Britain; and Cabria García, *Entre ufólogos, creyentes y contactados*, on Spain. For a comprehensive – and in many ways exemplary – review essay of the major sociological, psychological and psychiatric approaches to the UFO phenomenon which, however, lacks any historical dimension and/or geographical focus, see Saliba, ‘UFO Contactee Phenomena.’
  9. Hynek, ‘Are Flying Saucers Real?’
  10. Wendt and Duvall, ‘Sovereignty,’ 607, 612 [my emphasis].
  11. Coined by literary scholar Wolfgang Iser in 1976, a *Leerstelle* – literally an ‘empty spot’ – is a textual gap, a vacancy which needs to be filled by the reader; see his *Akt des Lesens*, here 284–85.
  12. See, in chronological order, journals such as *Ouranos: Revue internationale pour l’étude des soucoupes volantes et problèmes connexes* (Paris, 1952–1967); *Flying Saucer Review* (London, 1955–); *Weltraumbote: Unabhängige Monatsschrift zur Verbreitung der Wahrheit über die ‘Fliegende Untertassen’ genannten ausserirdischen Raumschiffe, zum Kampf gegen die Atomspaltung und für die Vorbereitung des neuen, geistigen Zeitalters* (Zurich, 1955–1961); *Le Courrier interplanétaire: organ trimestriel de l’Union Mondiale d’Avancée Humaine* (Lausanne, 1955–1969); *UFO Nachrichten* (Wiesbaden, 1956–1988); *Phénomènes spatiaux* (Paris, 1964–1977); and *BUFORA Journal and Bulletin* (London, 1964–1989). Rasmussen, *UFO Literature*; other useful bibliographies include Beard, *Flying Saucers*; Smith, *Extraterrestrial Intelligence*; Catoe, *UFOs*; and, above all, Eberhart, *UFOs and the Extraterrestrial Contact Movement*.
  13. There are, as always, exceptions. They include, most famously, Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter’s 1956 pioneering study *When Prophecy Fails* and C.G. Jung’s brief 1958 book ‘Ein moderner Mythos.’ To a lesser extent, see also Gardner, *Fads and Fallacies*, 55–68; and Schäfer, ‘Flying Saucer Story,’ both written with an educational and somewhat polemic impetus in mind. In the summer of 1948, only a year after the Arnold sighting, Herbert Hackett, author of the first sociological analysis published, came to the conclusion that the flying

- saucer was an ‘excellent subject in that it is almost wholly a manufactured concept, lasting for a short period of time, and, so, easy to study’; Hackett, ‘The Flying Saucer,’ here 869.
14. Lagrange, ‘Close Encounters of the French Kind,’ 153 [emphasis in original]; Jung, ‘Ein moderner Mythos,’ 337: ‘jenes Gerücht von runden Körpern, die unsere Tropo- wie Stratosphäre durchstreifen.’
  15. US government-funded investigations included Project Sign (1948), Project Grudge (1949) and Project Blue Book (1951–1969), culminating with the publication of the so-called Condon Report in 1969. See Jacobs, *UFO Controversy*, 44–56, 67–68, and Dick, *Biological Universe*, 274–78, but the key text remains the controversial report itself: Condon, *Final Report of the Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*.
  16. See the introduction to this special issue of *History and Technology* and Geppert, ‘European Astrofuturism, Cosmic Provincialism,’ 6–9.
  17. The term ‘alternative history of the Space Age’ is borrowed from Benjamin, *Rocket Dreams*, 4.
  18. While ‘alien abduction’ became widely discussed only in the late 1980s, in retrospect the 1961/1966 case of Betty and Barney Hill is usually said to have constituted its starting point; Dean, *Aliens in America*, 48–50, 131.
  19. On the nexus of outer space and the limits to futuristic thought during the long 1970s, see the contributions to the symposium *Envisioning Limits: Outer Space and the End of Utopia*, Berlin, April 19–21, 2012; details at [www.limits.geschkult.fu-berlin.de](http://www.limits.geschkult.fu-berlin.de) (last accessed May 20, 2012). A publication is currently in preparation by Alexander C.T. Geppert and William R. Macauley.
  20. Denzler, *Lure of the Edge*, 80.
  21. “‘Flying Saucers’ in the Sky”; ‘Transatlantic Whizz’; ‘Transatlantisches Sausen,’ 19; ‘Untertassen,’ 33; Haffner, ‘Schluß mit dem Untertassen-Spuk?’: ‘Die Berichte über die Fliegenden Untertassen haben im ganzen, westlichen Bereich unseres Erdballs Verwirrung, Zweifel, Panik und Hysterie gestiftet.’ Nolan, ‘Those Flying Saucers’; Hynek, ‘Are Flying Saucers Real?’; Girvan, ‘Global Thinking,’ 1.
  22. Vallée, *Challenge to Science*, 90–93, 125, 143 (Figure 24); Jacobs, *UFO Controversy*, 151, 194, 200, 264; Denzler, *Lure of the Edge*, 183, n57.
  23. TNA AIR 2/18183, AIR 2/18950-60 and AIR 2/19126; *Hansard* 753 (November 9, 1967): c160W and 757 (January 22, 1968): c40W. A rudimentary analysis of the UFO-related coverage in the *Times* of London between 1947 and 1975 gives a different picture. During that period, altogether 86 relevant articles were published, an average of three per year. Peaks, however, occurred in 1953 (8 articles published), 1959 (6), 1966 (9) and 1967 (11), rather than in 1957–1958 (2) or 1973–1974 (2).
  24. For the present, at least, social scientists have been able to demonstrate so-called ‘credibility effects,’ that is, direct and significant impact of different news reports on the willingness to believe in the existence of UFOs. See Sparks, ‘Does Television News About UFOs Affect Viewers’ UFO Beliefs?’, 290–91.
  25. Ramet, ‘UFOs over Russia,’ 81, 86; Binyon, ‘Russia Has Flying Saucers Too.’
  26. The standard history of the Space Age, McDougall’s ... *the Heavens and the Earth*, does not mention the UFO phenomenon, but it is cursorily discussed in two other standard works, McCurdy’s *Space and the American Imagination*, 72–74, and Burrows’ *This New Ocean*, 140–41, the latter arguing (in the opposite direction) that it was ‘great for space because it made it alluring for ordinary people.’
  27. For this notion, see Oberth, *Wählerfibel*, 7.
  28. On the genesis of the first space fads and the establishment of transnational expert networks after 1927, see Geppert, ‘Space Personae,’ 284–85, and Bainbridge, *Spaceflight Revolution*, 36. On the rise of space experts and the fledgling field of astronautics in Great Britain during the postwar years, see the contributions by James Farry and David A. Kirby, and by William R. Macauley in this issue.
  29. The two standard works are Guthke, *Mythos der Neuzeit*, here 298 [*Last Frontier*, 339]; and Dick, *Biological Universe*. Battaglia, ‘Insiders’ Voices,’ 19.
  30. See Arnold’s ‘Are Space Visitors Here?’, 21; for a summary of alternative explanations, see Nolan, *Those Flying Saucers*.
  31. Keyhoe, *Flying Saucers Are Real*, here 70–75; Keyhoe, *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*; Scully, *Behind the Flying Saucers*; Heard, *Riddle of the Flying Saucers*. For a comparative

- review essay, see Ley, 'More About Out There'; for a devastating review of Heard's book by Sir Harold Spencer Jones, then British Astronomer Royal, see his 'Flying Saucer Myth.'
32. Jacobs, *UFO Controversy*, 101. Haas; 'Steht die Erde unter Kontrolle?'; Drews, 'Sie kommen von einem anderen Planeten.' See also Haffner, 'Schluß mit dem Untertassen-Spuk?'
  33. Heard, 'Is Another World Watching Us?' [emphasis in original]; see also the *Sunday Express* issues of October 29, November 12 and November 26, 1950. Ley, 'More About Out There'; Muirfield, 'Silence in the Press,' here 18; Clarke and Roberts, *Flying Saucers*, 21–24.
  34. Keyhoe, *Flying Saucers Are Real*, 6, 163, 204–05 (quotation). Keyhoe first made these claims in an article ('Flying Saucers Are Real') that *True* magazine published in January 1950. For his reception in West Germany, see 'Untertassen,' here 34.
  35. Darrach and Ginna, 'Have We Visitors from Space?' The article provoked an unprecedented response from *Life's* readers which was summarized a month later; see Ginna, 'Saucer Reactions.'
  36. Schäfer, 'Flying Saucer Story,' 141; Menzel, *Flying Saucers*, 272.
  37. Trench, 'Editorial.' Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 107–30.
  38. Mischo, 'Kaleidoskop der Heilserwartungen,' 29; Sharp, 'An Appraisal of the Present UFO Position,' 20, 22; Lorenzen, *Flying Saucers*, 44–46; Thirouin, 'Les observations mondiales en 1956,' 47. The distance between Earth and Mars varies between 55 and 401 million kilometers; as a consequence of their perihelic opposition – that is, Sun, Earth and Mars forming a straight line – they were only 56 million kilometers apart in September 1956.
  39. Heinz-Hermann Koelle, 'Rechenschaftsbericht über das 1. Vierteljahr 1950,' *Protokollbuch der Gesellschaft für Weltraumforschung (1948–1952)*, January 26, 1950, DTB, I.3.008VV, 1/02, 64: 'Eine offizielle Stellungnahme zu den "fliegenden Untertassen" soll nicht erfolgen.'
  40. Clarke, 'Flying Saucers,' 97; 'Flying Saucers,' 225 [both emphases in respective originals]. For the three reviews see *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* 13, no. 2 (March 1954): 119–22 [Arthur C. Clarke on Leslie/Adamski, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*]; *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* 13, no. 3 (May 1954): 186–88 [Alan E. Slater on Menzel, *Flying Saucers*]; and *Journal of the British Interplanetary Society* 15, no. 5 (September–October 1956): 289–90 [Arthur C. Clarke on Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*].
  41. Clarke, 'Memoirs of an Armchair Astronaut,' 413; Clarke, 'Review of Philip J. Klass, *UFOs Explained*'; and Clarke, 'Flying Saucers.'
  42. Ley, 'Unidentified Flying Objects'; Ley, correspondence with Kenneth H. Ford, here Ley to Ford, July 8, 1956, WLC/NASMA, 1/8. It might not have helped to strengthen their position that neither Clarke nor Ley were ready to exclude the UFOs' alleged extraterrestrial origin entirely, however unlikely such a possibility might be.
  43. *Weltraumbote* 16/17 (March/April 1957): 23.
  44. Heard, 'Is Another World Watching Us?', 1; Crowther, 'Outer Space Comes of Age,' 91.
  45. For instance, 'Science-Fiction on the Screen' or 'Utopie: Das Ding.' Out of a rich body of literature on (although almost exclusively American) science fiction films, see only Meehan, *Saucer Movies*, here 35–48; and Vizzini, 'Cold War Fears, Cold War Passions,' here 33–34.
  46. Stupple, 'Mahatmas and Space Brothers'; Denzler, *Lure of the Edge*, 34–67; Hague, 'Before Abduction.'
  47. For this famous classification system, see Hynek, *UFO Experience*, 29, 88, 110, 138, who distinguishes three different kinds of encounters: A 'close encounter of the first kind' (CEI) is defined as an encounter without interaction between the UFO and the environment or the observers; to constitute a 'close encounter of the second kind' (CEII) a physical 'mark' or visible record is required; while the third kind (CEIII) consists of those cases in which the presence of 'occupants' in or about the UFO is reported. Necessitated by the increase in abduction stories, a fourth category (CEIV) was later added to describe 'actual' contact, with face-to-face communication between human and extraterrestrial. Steven Spielberg's 1977 Hollywood blockbuster *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* directly derived its title from Hynek's classification system. Spielberg hired Hynek as a consultant and gave him a minor role in the film.
  48. Leslie and Adamski, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*; Adamski, *Inside the Space Ships*. With sales exceeding 250,000 copies, *Flying Saucers Have Landed* was translated into German, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Italian and French. See 'Talking of Flying Saucers;' and Hallet, *Le Cas Adamski, A–K*.
  49. 'Kontakte mit der Venus,' 56; 'The Queen & the Saucers'; Naumann, 'Bierdeckel statt fliegender Untertassen'; 'Auf der Venus gibt es Kühe,' 49.

50. Leslie and Adamski, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, 185; Adamski, *Inside the Space Ships*, 73–83, 160–61.
51. Leslie and Adamski, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, 194: ‘Now, for the first time I fully realised that I was in presence of a man from space – A HUMAN BEING FROM ANOTHER WORLD!’ [emphasis in original]; ‘Auf der Venus gibt es Kühe,’ 52. Däniken, *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*.
52. Bethurum, *Aboard a Flying Saucer*; Fry, *The White Sands Incident*; Angelucci, *The Secret of the Saucers*; Menger, *From Outer Space to You*. In 1969, the *Flying Saucer Review* published an entire special issue on worldwide landings of UFOs and their alleged occupants; see Bowen, *Humanoids*.
53. Michel, ‘Meeting With the Martian,’ 43; Michel, ‘The Little Men,’ 72. For an in-depth analysis of Dewilde’s account of his alien encounter, see Miller, ‘Seeing the Future of Civilization.’
54. Allingham, *Flying Saucer from Mars*. Christopher D. Allan, ‘Who invented the Martian? An Analysis of a UFO Whodunit,’ undated report, BIS, 54-D; see also Clarke and Roberts, *Flying Saucers*, 91–93. There are no traces of Moore’s involvement in this potential hoax in his autobiography although he does acknowledge the UFOs’ historical significance when discussing the occurrences of 1954: ‘So far as I was concerned, the whole chain of events began with flying saucers’; see Moore, *Autobiography*, 19. While Moore has never publically admitted to having authored the hoax, he published in 1972 a book entitled *Can You Speak Venusian?* on the various myths of the Space Age in which he did cite his putative *alter ego* Allingham (97, 100–01).
55. Clarke, ‘Review of Desmond Leslie and George Adamski, *Flying Saucers Have Landed*,’ 119, 122.
56. The *locus classicus* in this context is *When Prophecy Fails*, Festinger’s 1956 case study, one of the few in-depth analyses of an individual UFO cult, that led to the development of the theory of cognitive dissonance.
57. *UFO*, created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, pilot episode, ‘Identified,’ first aired on September 16, 1970. In 1964, Brinsley le Poer Trench had named an almost identical set of three ‘w’-questions – ‘1. Where do they come from? 2. Who crews them? 3. Why are they coming?’ – as the three most important questions in UFO research; see his ‘The Three W’s.’ It seems plausible that the series’ producers, Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, had familiarized themselves with the state of the art in contemporaneous British ufology before production began in 1969, as they did on other occasions.
58. ‘So wurde die Weltöffentlichkeit getäuscht,’ cover illustration.
59. TNA AIR 2/18116; British Unidentified Flying Object Research Association, *Guide to the UFO Phenomenon*, 3–6; ‘Uforia by Bufora at Night.’
60. Michel, *Mystérieux objets célestes*; on Michel see in particular Miller, ‘Seeing the Future of Civilization,’ here 253–56. Jacobs, ‘UFOs and the Search for Scientific Legitimacy,’ 229.
61. Hynek quoted after Salisbury, ‘Scientist and the UFO,’ 16; ‘Playboy Panel: UFOs,’ 85.
62. Asimov, ‘A Science in Search of a Subject,’ 52. Basalla, *Civilized Life in the Universe*, 135–39.
63. Peter Masefield, ‘By 1970 a Link with Men of Other Worlds,’ *Sunday Express* (January 10, 1960); quoted after Muirfield, ‘Silence in the Press,’ 18. Masefield (1914–2006) was president of the Royal Aeronautical Society at the time.
64. Cryptozoology, the search for elusive animals whose existence is not consensually acknowledged (Bigfoot/Sasquatch; Yeti; the Monster of Loch Ness etc.), shares many of the same characteristics and used a milder version of the same argument for self-legitimization during its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. Notably, Willy Ley published in this field as well and actively engaged in extensive correspondence with both scientists and the general public, apparently with considerably less professional doubt and skepticism than in the case of UFOs. See Regal, *Searching for Sasquatch*, 27–29, 131–56.
65. Within a little more than a decade, scholarly interest in the history of the occult, nineteenth-century spiritism and Western esotericism has moved from the fringes to mainstream historiography. See only the contributions in Geppert and Braidt, *Orte des Okkulten*, in lieu of a much more comprehensive body of literature.
66. See Oberth, ‘Flying Saucers Come from a Distant World,’ 5; ‘Gibt es UFOs?’, 100; and his 1966 book *Katechismus der Uraniden*. ‘Es gibt fliegende Untertassen’; *Vorstandssitzungen*

- der Gesellschaft für Weltraumforschung, 1948–1955, August 5, 1954, DTB, I.3.008VV, 1/04; ‘Ambassador from Mars.’
67. Oberth, ‘Wir werden beobachtet,’ 28: ‘Allem Anschein nach sind die UFOs eine Art Wachtposten, die bloß beobachten und berichten sollen, denn eine Menschheit, die geistig über unsere Erfinder- und Forschergabe verfügt, aber politisch und moralisch auf unserer Stufe stehengeblieben ist, stellt eine Gefahr für den ganzen Kosmos dar.’ Oberth, ‘Gibt es UFOs?’, 101. Oberth’s claims were reported by newspapers as varied as *BILD* (‘Saison der Untertassen’), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (‘“Liebesstrahlen” auf dem Ufo-Kongreß’) and *The Times* (‘Ambassador from Mars’; ‘Spatial Etiquette’).
68. Jung, ‘Ein moderner Mythos,’ 337.
69. Hague, ‘Before Abduction,’ 440; see also Lagrange, ‘Ghost in the Machine,’ 226–30.
70. On transcendence within astroculture, see only Bjørnvig, ‘Transcendence of Gravity,’ and Noble, *Religion of Technology*, 115–42.

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