

COMMON GROUND

10

WHY 1947?

The Coming of the UFO's

The Last Issue

Common Ground

This issue is devoted to one particular - and important - theme; the reason why the UFO phenomenon became so well-defined, and so vividly brought to the public eye, during 1947. To me, this has always seemed to be one of the key questions which, if answered satisfactorily, could help us finally to resolve the great contradiction in the collected weight of UFO evidence. The great contradiction being that, while the 'soft', circumstantial, personal evidence is massive and overwhelming, the 'hard', objective evidence remains stubbornly non-existent, leaving even the best of UFO apologists out on a precarious limb.

About all that is certain about the modern UFO mythos is a date of commencement, though maybe we're moving towards a date of termination, as well. Of course, there were reports of aerial phenomena prior to 1947, and even prior to the inception of dirigible flight. But really, we're talking about an entirely separate matter, particularly with regard to contact cases.

While a number of the best of British writers have been good enough to apply themselves to this question, I do not think that we can offer a clear conclusion. The dichotomy is just clearer than ever. But the weight of evidence as presented here is plainly towards a 'psychological' explanation, and well away from the ETH, which must prove something!

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Douglas Payne

KENNETH ARNOLD ~ The Selling of the Saucers.

UFO phenomena may have been around long before 1947 but no one was very interested. It is now commonly accepted that the genesis of the modern era must be assigned to that year and that it must be attributed to Kenneth Arnold's UFO sighting report of 24 June. Arnold bears the heavy burden of responsibility for catalysing and intensive period of UFO investigation, study and controversy which even now, almost four decades later, although relatively quiescent, is probably not yet over. Just what was it 37 years ago that made the USA, if not the world, buy the concept of UFOs and give us an enduring legacy of UFO phenomena? A proper answer to this question would require an extended psycho-sociological analysis of the times, an analysis which this writer is certainly not equipped to provide. We can, however, learn much from a look at Kenneth Arnold's sighting report itself (Steiger, 1976) and in particular one aspect of the press response to it.

First, Arnold's report was certain and it was unambiguous. He was in no doubt about what he had seen and he backed up his conviction with specific details describing the distance of the objects, their number, shape, speed and flying motion. Second, his story although unusual was entirely plausible. Thanks to the scientific, technological and military progress of the previous few years it would not be stretching a point to suggest that public, and official perceptions of what could be achieved in these areas had been revolutionised. The characteristics of the UFOs as described by Arnold were not so divorced from contemporary scientific and technological expectations as to render them unbelievable. Third, because of their mystery and their alleged performance characteristics the UFOs were potentially threatening and therefore fear-arousing. In this sense they could not be ignored until they had been explained. An explanation here would do more than just provide satisfaction for popular or academic curiosity, or even to further the cause of science, motives that time and again have proved to be inadequate in sustaining the study of anomalous phenomena. An explanation of UFOs would actually enhance national security. These characteristics of Arnold's story, certainty, clarity, plausibility, and ability to arouse fear are, of course, necessary components of what psychologists call a persuasive communication. Without these qualities the story may never have got further than its first telling.

The credibility of the man himself gave the story added appeal. It is not without reason that the character assassination of witnesses is a hallowed pastime amongst UFO sceptics - destroy the witness and you destroy the story. Kenneth Arnold, however, would appear to have been immune, or relatively so, to this form of censorship. At the time of his experience he was a solid citizen, a businessman and a law-enforcement officer. Above all he was an experienced mountain pilot and therefore not likely to have been mistaken about his observations. Also, he did not harbour outrageous interpretations of his experience. Indeed, at the time he put forward very little in the way of interpretation at all, and that was confined to explanations in terms of advanced, but earthly, technology. He seemed to be as perplexed as anybody could be and stood to gain nothing from the post sighting publicity to which he became subject. Although he suffered the periodic ridicule of the media, as have other UFO witnesses, his credibility has remained high. He even survived an association with the infamous phantasy pedlar Ray Palmer who had bedecked his first issue of *Fate* magazine with the Arnold story, involved Arnold in the notorious Maury Island affair, and co-authored a book *The Coming of the Saucers* with Arnold. As witnesses go, Kenneth Arnold had, and still has, impressive credentials.

As important as those factors undoubtedly were in persuading people to entertain the UFO hypothesis, there was one other quality that was needed for its successful marketing - a tag. A product without a brand-name can never become popular; similarly with concepts, ideas and experiences. The name, a miracle of succinctness, was accidentally supplied by Arnold himself from a description he gave of the motion of the UFOs. A press interpretation of this description juxtaposed the word 'flying'

and 'saucer' to produce a phrase that must go down in the annals of social history as giving birth, no less, to a modern phenomenon. This label has probably done more for the promotion of UFOs than any other single event since 1947. Jacobs (1975) sums it up thus:

The phrase allowed people to place seemingly inexplicable observations in a new category. Witnesses scanning the sky could now report that they had seen something identifiable: a flying saucer. Moreover, the term subtly connoted an artificially constructed piece of hardware; a saucer is not a natural object. Consequently, when a witness said at that time that he saw a flying saucer he implied by the use of the term itself that he had seen something strange and even other-worldly. The term also set a tone of ridicule for the phenomenon. The idea of saucers flying on their own volition was absurd. The term allowed people to laugh at the very notion of an unusual object in the sky without having to confront the circumstances behind the event. (p.37)

The objects which Kenneth Arnold, and many people before him, had seen were thus transformed into readily understandable, perceptible and recognisable entities. Any previous difficulties in cognizing, reporting or just talking about UFO sightings were removed at a single stroke and the whole subject acquired the status of a legitimate, although somewhat ridiculous, category of human experience. The term achieved instant success because it apparently reconciled two opposites - the actual existence of UFOs (they had been categorised) and their improbability (they were laughable). The press had, unwittingly, provided the catchphrase that may have been decisive in achieving take-off for a mass appreciation of UFOs and which was to propel the phenomenon beyond the confines of 1947.

It is clear that the Arnold case possessed attractive qualities which make it hardly surprising that public interest should have been aroused. Moreover, to the extent that any good story of an anomalous experience will generate others (eg see Jones, 1969) it is also not surprising that reports of the phenomenon became more widespread. In doing so they had the effect of confirming Arnold's report and reinforcing its validity. An inflationary spiral of popular acceptance had begun. An acceptance that left the Arnold case far behind.

Critical ufologists have vainly pointed out certain problems with the Arnold case. It was a single witness case with no corroborating evidence although Arnold himself said that he saw a DC-4 in the vicinity at the time of his sighting. Has the presence of this aircraft ever been confirmed and the potential witnesses traced? The information given by Arnold relating to the size, speed and distance of the objects was mutually contradictory (Steiger, 1976; Hynek, 1977). Arnold misidentified the mountain peaks through which the objects were flying (Sachs, 1981). The objects could have been a flight of aircraft (Storey, 1976).

It is a curious irony that the case which opened up the history of UFOs to a hitherto indifferent world can certainly be described as evidentially deficient and could possibly be classified as an IFO report. Considerations like these, however, are merely academic now.

References

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- Steiger, B. *Project Blue Book*, USA: Ballantine Books, 1976. (Contains a sighting report by Kenneth Arnold, submitted to the US Air Force)
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Peter Rogerson

The Events of 1947.

WHEN Kevin asked me to contribute a piece on the emergence of the UFO myth in 1947, I first thought of doing a detailed background study of the events of that year, and the emergence of the idea of extraterrestrial visitation as opposed to 'Russian Invasion'. A few minutes thought however convinced me that such an enterprise would require a detailed study of American primary source material: what were middle Americans thinking of in June 1947? The threatened miners strike? The four-power talks over Berlin (prominent in the London *Times*), or something quite different. Clearly, only an American researchers with vast funds could begin such a task.

What we do know is that in 1947 a wide range of peculiar experiences (and just how wide a range surprises one, when one reads Bloecher's *UFO Wave of 1947** or Gross's *History*) became linked in popular imagination. One imagines that a number of factors were at work in creating this legend: popular hopes and fears about science and technology, the drama of the international situation, the persistence of war-time images, official fears of Soviet super technology, the growth of interest in science fiction, and so on.

What Jacques Scornaux calls the 'psycho-sociological' hypothesis - about which the editors of *Magonia* and its predecessors have been speculating since 1966 - argues that the 'UFO wave' was indeed an experiential rumour rather than an actual 'invasion' from a foreign physical phenomenon. One of the essential tasks of the contemporary folklorist is surely to try to comprehend the 'why' of such rumours.

Why did hundreds of people begin radically to misperceive ordinary objects? One gets the feeling that large numbers of people suddenly began to see, say, the moon, Venus, or aircraft, for the first time. Are we dealing with an alienation from both the natural and the man-made environment, and if so does the growing 'nearness' of the UFO vision in the subsequent decades suggest a deepening alienation?

What did the idea of 'extraterrestrial visitation' mean in late 1947 and early 1948? It must be borne in mind that what we now understand as 'scientific' speculation on extraterrestrial life was wholly absent in the 1940's. Indeed, for most people ET's equated with Martians. Prominent cultural images of ET invasions in the forties were space-opera science fiction - surely an excellent mechanism for the continuance of wartime combat themes - and H. G. Wells' Martians, an apt symbol of the implacable advance of a technology which might so easily push aside human values.

For the individual percipients the 'radical misperception' in an 'eruption' of a world of drama and excitement into the humdrum of daily routine. For some perhaps it was their most exciting moment since their first high-school date! It is not surprising that percipients are unwilling to be deflated into the status of someone who has just made a foolish mistake. Even if the consequences of being a UFO reporter are somewhat negative, even that attention may be better than no attention at all.

The UFO experience, then, can exist at both the individual and collective levels, as a means by which a dramatic, even 'transcendent' visitation from Magonia can erupt or 'crash' into the world of daylight reason and common sense!

Shirley McIver

A Sociological View.

Writing in the early 1960's, Neil Smelser made one of the few published attempts by a sociologist to account for the origin of 'flying saucer' sightings:

"Recently anxieties over the potentialities of atomic warfare have led not only to predictions of world destruction, but also to many apparent misperceptions and hallucinations of 'flying saucers' believed to be omens of destruction." [1]

The context was the development of Smelser's theory of collective behaviour, in which he used UFO sightings as an example of an hysterical belief.

Fundamental to Smelser's theory is the concept of structural strain; that is, some form of social tension which provides the conditions for ambiguities to arise. In the case of UFO sightings, Smelser considered the threat of nuclear war, following the conclusion to World War II, to be a source of strain. The cold war situation in some way predisposed individuals to the sighting of ambiguous aerial objects and these caused anxiety. This anxiety was subsequently relived through the hysterical belief which redefined the ambiguous object as a 'flying saucer'.

Looking at the adequacy of Smelser's explanation for the onset of UFO sightings, from the point of view of sociological theory, it can be criticised because it does not explain how macrosocial tensions are reproduced at the microsocal level. That is, how structural strain is linked to psychic tension and how this tension is transmitted between individuals. One solution to this problem is to take the view that the media are responsible for focussing tension in a way that makes it accessible to individuals.

The year after Kenneth Arnold's sighting, Herbert Hackett expressed just such a view, writing that the media strengthened the concept of the 'flying saucer' by:

"...repetition, repetition by variations, 'scientific' evidence and speculation, photography, analogy, wit, denial, apology. Newspapers, through juxtaposition, headlining, and suggestion soon related it to other concepts, to well-established stereotypes and slogans - 'The greatest air force in the world' and universal military training to protect 'the American way of life' from 'the menace of red-Fascism...'" [2]

Although some sociologists might want to argue with Hackett over the amount of power to influence public opinion which he attributes to the media, there seems little doubt that newspapers were initially responsible for whipping up popular interest in the possible existence of strange aerial phenomena. After an analysis of newspaper coverage of UFOs between 1947 and 1966, Herbert Strentz concluded that newspapers also paid a major role in sustaining that interest [3]; but can they also be seen as important in the generation of UFO experience?

This is a much more difficult question to answer, because it involves two elements which are not easily distinguished: UFO experiences and UFO reports. The problem is that the UFO experience is only available for analysis once it has been reported and so it is difficult to separate the issue of why people report UFO experiences from that of why they have them in the first place. However, given that anomalous aerial phenomena have been reported throughout history, the question the sociologist is primarily concerned with is not that of what these 'really' are, but why they come to be interpreted in one way rather than another [4].

What seems interesting from this perspective is not why Arnold's sighting took place, but why interpretation of it and subsequent ones took the form they did; why a popular interpretation in terms of enemy manoeuvres moved rapidly to one involving extra-terrestrial entities, and more recently, psychic events, unknown natural phenomena etc.

Various explanations have been proffered (at least for the extra-terrestrial interpretation), ranging from those expressing the mythic function of reports [5], to those focusing on wish fulfilment aspects [6], to one which considers that

" . . . belief in flying saucers is consistent with the United States world view and has emerged as a collective attempt to understand ambiguous and problematic stimuli." [7]

None of these are likely to be viewed as adequate by the ufologist because they tell us more about human beings than about UFOs; but as far as I can see they also look rather empty to the sociologist, mainly because they only deal with UFO reports and general belief, and ignore other aspects of the UFO movement. These are surely important - after all, UFO groups were formed very shortly after Kenneth Arnold's sighting in 1947. UFO research groups came into existence in 1952 with the Aerial Phenomena Research Organisation, and contactee groups in 1953 with the Giant Rock Space Convention organised by George van Tassel [8]. Apart from these, there was also a number of subcultures which may have influenced UFO reports and their interpretation, such as the science fiction subculture, the metaphysical subculture and the small number of people (at that time) interested in heterodox science (such as followers of Charles Fort, Alfred Lawson and Marshall Gardner)

Looking at contactee groups, for instance, they clearly promoted certain interpretations of the UFO experience, but they also encouraged the use of UFO reports to support anti-war and universal brotherhood causes [10]. In addition they drew UFOs into the metaphysical subculture, which not only encourages and legitimates experiences of the psychic and altered state of consciousness type, but also has a large eclectic philosophical system which is happy to absorb any new material that comes its way. Indeed, in at least one instance, UFOs were the answer to the problems of a failing occult group [11].

Research groups also played a part in developing interest and ideas. For example, Ron Westrum has described three ways in which research organisations encourage the reporting of UFO experiences: they provide sympathetic ears to the person who wishes to make a report; they legitimate the witness's experience by publishing reports of other witnesses, by giving interviews to the press and in some cases by persuading the witness's primary group that such events can take place; and they provide opposition to the opinions of scientific and military experts. Furthermore, the fact that they are often the recipients of the reports they encourage, leads to a cyclic process in which "the encouragement of reports leads to more reporting, which leads to more articles advocating the reality of UFOs, which encourages more reporting, and so forth." [12]

The influence of the science fiction and heterodox science subcultures on UFO reports has not been examined to any great extent (at least not in Britain) [13], but it is highly likely that they also contributed to the apparently unprecedented number of UFO reports received after 1947.

In sum, a sociological approach to why UFO reports have been received in such quantity and variety in the second half of this century, would suggest that cold war tension created an atmosphere in which the sighting of ambiguous aerial objects aroused considerable anxiety. This was focussed by the media into the 'flying saucer' concept, after which a number of different groups and subcultures began to make use of it. In the process, the concept gained strength and became the subject of a variety of interpretations which are gradually filtering into popular consciousness. A more detailed examination of the changing nature of the concept (such as the relatively recent association with unknown natural phenomena, psychic events, and 'the unexplained' in general) awaits sociological developments in the area of contemporary cultural change.

NOTES:

1. N.J.Smelser, Theory of Collective Behaviour, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962, p.90.
2. H.Hackett, The Flying Saucer: a Manufactured Concept, in Sociology and Social Research, Vol. 32, 1948 (pp.869 - 873)
3. H.J.Strentz, A survey of Press Coverage of Unidentified Flying Objects, 1947-1966, Ph.D. Dissertation (Journalism), Northwestern University, 1970.
4. Whilst it is certainly true that sociologists have neglected even this social aspects of UFOs, I doubt if the reason is the one given by Jacques Scornaux in his article, The Rising and the Limits of a Doubt, in Magonia, no.15, April 1984. That is, because their "central dogma" is that man is an essentially rational being, whose behaviour is in most cases entirely predictable. This is the 'central dogma' of political and economic theory, but not social theory, in fact the former have been the subject of much criticism by sociologists for holding such a simplistic view of human nature. In general sociologists are criticised for seeing humanity as essentially irrational, particularly in their use of concepts like 'mass hysteria'! The reason UFOs have been neglected, I think, is purely one of 'fashion'. Collective behaviour is not a growth area as it was in the 1940's and 1950's, and so trainee sociologists are not introduced to UFOs as a problem for social analysis; other areas (such as education, unemployment, technology etc) are generally given precedence.
5. C.G.Jung, Flying Saucers, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977. V.I.Sanarov, On the Nature and Origin of Flying Saucers and Little Green Men, in Current Anthropology, Vol. 22, no. 2, 1981 (pp.163-167)
6. J.A.M.Meerlo, The Flying Saucer Syndrome and the Need for Miracles, Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 203, no. 12, 1968.
7. P.Fox, Social and Cultural Factors Influencing Belief about UFOs, in R.Haines (ed.) UFOs and the Behavioural Scientist, Scarecrow Press, 1979.
8. That is, if the information in R.D.Story (ed.) The Encyclopedia of UFOs, New English Library, 1980, is correct.
9. C.Fort, The Book of the Damned, Abacus, 1973; A.Lawson, Manlife, Humanity Publishing Company, 1923; Marshall Gardner, A Journey to the Earth's Interior, or Have the Poles Really Been Discovered, 1920. For further information on heterodox science, see Martin Gardner, Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science, Dover, 1957.
10. See the article on Gabriel Green in R.D.Story (ed.): op. cit.
11. See R.Balch, Conversion and Charisma in the Cultic Milieu: The Origins of a New Religion, paper given at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Popular Religion, at Providence, Rhode Island, 1981.
12. R.R.Westrum, UFO Reporting Dynamics, in R.Haines (ed.) op. cit.
13. Although I understand that Bertrand Meheust has done so in France, as far as the science-fiction subculture is concerned. For further information on the cultural role of heterodox science, see L.D.Henry, Unorthodox Science as a Popular Activity, in Journal of American Culture, vol. 4, no. 2, 1981 (pp.1-22)

John Grant reviews

The Rebirth of Pan: hidden faces of the American Earth Spirit. Jim Brandon. Firebird Press, 288 pp.

If you've never come across this book, you've got a treat in store.

Brandon's thesis is that absolutely every apparent physical manifestation of the paranormal is produced by an Earth Spirit - The Earth Spirit - an entity called Pan. That this is the case he regards almost as axiomatic - although he does call upon the odd piece of evidence in its support. For example, you can tell that various earth structures and wall-paintings in North America were the products of pre-human civilizations because present (or even 19th. Century) Amerindians know nothing about them: they think they were produced by the gods. Such hypotheses have tremendous repercussions on this side of the Atlantic, too, I'd reckon. I can't remember anything about paintings being done in the Altamira caves (and neither can my Mum), so clearly these were artistic efforts by a pre-human civilization.

And that pre-human civilization was not, as von Daniken and his merry men might suggest, an alien colony: it was the Earth Spirit. Other revelations abound. I'd always had this curious idea that fossils were the petrified (or whatever) remains of long-lost organisms. But, according to Brandon, all this time I've been being a dumb-o. Evolution doesn't work the way you or I might think, you see. Fossils are organisms which are only part-way through the transformation between formless tone and living creature: hang around and watch for a bit, and that petrified trilobite will suddenly jump away from its rocky host and crawl off towards the ocean. Now, every time I stick a lump of coal on the fire I feel like a murderer.

But the most elegant of Brandon's theories has to be the trailer-park (caravan-site) one. He has determined that tornadoes are manifestations of the great Earth Spirit, Pan. He has noticed that most of the great tornado disasters reported on the front pages of the newspapers are connected with trailer-parks: there is tremendous destruction of property and loss of life. Naifs like you and me might have thought that this was because the average tornado, hitting the average trailer-park, might do a lot more damage than if it hit the Barbican, for example. (Dunno, though.)

According to Brandon such reservations are foolish. Clearly tornadoes are attracted to trailer parks. Why? Well there's a very good reason, which I'll explain - if you'll permit me to teach you to suck eggs for just a moment.

Wilhelm Reich taught that there was a universal force which pervaded all space: it was, of course, orgone. Orgone is a great life-giving energy: if you want a healthy life, rush out and get your daily dose of orgone now. But Reich taught that you could do better than this: you could build yourself an orgone box. You could have a layer of wood on the outside, then a layer of metal, then another of wood, and so on. (Quite why this whole assembly worked is beyond me.) You could sit inside the box and build up vast quantities of orgone.

What does an orgone box remind you of? Right! A caravan.

So clearly Pan is attracted to caravans (orgone boxes) because they have both metallic and organic materials in their walls. But we can go further than this - and Brandon happily does. Most manifestations of Bigfoot have been to couples necking in cars up Lovers' Lanes - where the orgone build-up must have been terrific!

If you've never come across this book . . . aw, don't bother.

Jenny Randles

Psychic Parallelism in the Green Stone Affair.

A couple of years ago I wrote an introduction to one of the most controversial books published in our field during the past decade. I was criticised for it. Some friends wondered what on earth I was doing - especially as I did it for nothing! This book, The Green Stone, by Martin Keatman and Graham Phillips (Spearman) goes into a Granada paperback edition this summer, and will no doubt kick up yet more fuss.

Common Ground has made clear its editorial opinion on the band of researchers and psychics led by Keatman and Phillips. It is doubtful of their motives and behaviour. I remain rather less certain of the truth. But I did make my comments in the book's introduction for a definite purpose, which bears closer examination.

The Green Stone (of which a sequel is in preparation, I gather) is itself a 'parasequel' of my own book, Alien Contact. This work chronicles the claims of the Sunderland family from Flint, North Wales, especially their teenage daughter, Gaynor. I have spoken of these multiple, bizarre claims (involving abductions, trips to other worlds and a plethora of alleged psychic experiences) in an article featured in the first issue of Common Ground. Keatman, Phillips and Collins (who has privately published his own excellent version of the later events, titled The Sword and the Stone) became involved in the psychic investigation of the family, and it was this which blossomed into the quite amazing tale of magic, mystery and mythical quest.

Although the events of the Green Stone began and unfolded whilst I was working with the Sunderlands and the others in writing Alien Contact, at no point was I told of them. Quite a few hints were given me; sufficient in retrospect to see what was being implied. But it was in the autumn of 1981, when Andy Collins gave me the full account of what had supposedly happened.

And is now the editor of one of the best respected earth-mysteries magazines, Earthquest, and author of several well-researched books in his 'Supernaturalist' series. He is a man I have known for years and have always found both trustworthy and honest. He had divorced himself from the others and took no part in the writing of The Green Stone (although he had helped write the original draft manuscript). He explained to me that this was in no way because he felt the claims to be untrue. On the contrary, he was personally and inextricably involved with them, and was adamant about their reality. However, he interpreted them in a very different way. Whilst the authors of the book (and by implication the dozen or so researchers and psychics in the quest) were suggesting an external intelligence directing their moves and leading them on a mission vital to the Earth, Andy saw the power source more internal to themselves. He pictured a sort of supercharged psychic battery, forged from the team spirit. It was a 'superconscious' - the same sort of phenomenon that had enabled a group of paranormals in Canada to 'create', in some kind of pseudo-reality, the invented ghost of a cavalier called 'Phillip'.

I can see both sides of this argument, and had the advantage of watching the events depicted in Alien Contact unfold. But to this day I have never seen the sword or the stone, or taken part in any of the many continuing adventures of the Green Stone quest. I found it curious that despite their obvious problems in both identifying and photographing the stone, they at no time suggested that my co-author Paul Whetnall study what they had. They knew that Paul was a jeweller, with access to relevant equipment. I confess this omission did baffle me.

Personally I was willing to accept on trust that the sword and stone were real and had been found as claimed. These claims began with psychic messages given to Graham Phillips, quickly supplanted by independent snippets from others. The team coalesced, each contributing material that made little sense on its own. Rather like the famous 'Cross Correspondence' case in psychic literature, the jigsaw puzzle was put together by the leaders of the quest. From this they understood the need to find the mythical 'Meonia Stone', a mysterious green jewel with strange powers. They traced this back in legend to a warrior queen by the name of Gweveruegh.

Marion and Gaynor Sunderland (especially Gaynor) became the most powerful psychic links with the quest. Gaynor's fundamental role was underplayed in the book, because at eighteen (as she still only is) she was considered too young to face the cultism that might attach itself to her. Even so, as Marion told me during a recent chat, the two books seem to have converted their ordinary semi-detached house into a shrine. This has worried her, because she cannot turn the people away who flock there claiming they 'had to' on impulse. But generally she understands less about what is happening than they think. I have myself received quite a few letters and phone calls from all over the world, from people who have read the books and who want to visit the house, talk to Gaynor, or pass on sealed messages. I have not had this sort of response to anything else I have written.

With Marion, Gaynor, and other psychics joining Andy, Martin and Graham in their hunt, they pursue a strange sort of treasure hunt, in a race against time, following somewhat dubious historical and archaeological leads. This leads them to first a small hand-sword, which Gaynor uses to help point them to the Meonia stone. Once uncovered, this is 'charged' like a battery with psychic force, and the quest runs round the country fighting psychic battles against an evil force. The Green Stone ends with one amazing psychic war which, despite its moment and the fact that it was fought in Staffordshire, appears to have been ousted from 'News at Ten' by much more distant and far less significant petty squabbles in Africa and the Middle East. But the battle did not end the story - and the quest have continued to have adventures with the stone ever since.

Put like this the whole thing does sound completely mad. It is scarcely surprising that even the most benevolent of paranormal researchers have found this tough to swallow. Virtually no corroborating evidence has been offered for its validity. Some have pointed out the parallels with Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, where a group use a ring to fight psychic battles in a similar way. And the quest concept is very common in mythology anyhow. It is easy to regard the whole Green Stone story as an invention. Some have even accused Graham Phillips directly of making it all up, perhaps even duping his colleagues in the process. They could have a willingness to believe in their role in such an earth-saving mission.

When I raised this with Andy Collins he told me it was not feasible. He said that, quite honestly, despite his reservations, most of what the book contends happened as it claims. He personally led the quest to find the sword. He was not manipulated into doing so. I have no reason to disbelieve his version of events, he was there and I was not. Instinctively I feel that there is too much circumstantial evidence and that something seems to have happened.

Of course I cannot absolutely vouch for the truth of these claims. Nor do I know how, or why, such fantastic things would occur, if indeed they did. But I do not see how we are doing any good by simply denying the affair. Surely, as objective anomalistic researchers our task is plain. From the outside looking in we must study this incredible tale and assess its validity with logic, not emotion.

Having made my stance known I want to discuss one thing about the saga that has intrigued me beyond all others. It was certainly relevant to my lack of hostility towards the claims of the team. This concerns the link between The Green Stone and The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant.

These 'Chronicles' are a series of six interrelated books (spanning well over one million words), penned by a young American writer Stephen Donaldson. In just five years they have made him a millionaire, despite being his first writings. They have literally gripped the imagination of the world and each has soared into the best-seller charts, usually topping these for weeks on end.

The 'First Chronicles' (Lord Foul's Bane, The Illearth War and The Power that Preserves) were published together in 1978-1979, first in the USA and then (as they slowly became known) in Britain. This was just as the Green Stone quest was starting to unfold, but (and importantly) after the events in Alien Contact got underway. The 'Second Chronicles' have followed (The Wounded Land, 1980; The One Tree, 1982; and White Gold Wielder, 1983). Donaldson says he has a third trilogy within him, but he is not sure he has the enormous emotional strength the books drain out of him, as he conceives them.

The huge impact of these books (just as in a lesser way the reaction of people to the Sunderland family) demonstrates to my satisfaction that these things go beyond mere fairy-tale. Something about them strikes a chord in the pulse of mankind at this point in time. I think they resonate with a need, or belief, buried within the soul of our race.

I also find the close synchronicity of timing between the Donaldson books and the Alien Contact/Green Stone saga relevant. For whilst you might argue that The Green Stone was invented, based upon awareness of Donaldson's books, I know that Alien Contact was not. That said, I have little reason to suspect The Green Stone's origin.

In my (admittedly tinged) view I see both the fact and the fiction reflecting the same phenomenon.

Let me briefly describe the gist of the Donaldson epic for those unfamiliar. Thomas Covenant is an American writer (obviously based to some extent on Donaldson himself). But he has leprosy. He is transported (abducted actually) into a place which is called 'The Land'. This lives in idyllic peace without modern technology, and is governed by 'earthpower'. This comes from the ground and rocks, and effuses psychic/magic. The concept owes much to current earth-mystery ideals. In 'The Land' Covenant does not have his disease. Indeed he has psychic powers, channeled through his white gold wedding ring. But The Land is threatened by an evil force (Lord Foul) and he has to gather a quest together so that they can travel the land and fight this evil power with their collected good powers. In order to achieve this certain instruments are needed to help Covenant channel the force (he can only use his ring at the very end of the saga). They have to find these psychic tools in a sort of treasure hunt.

Immediately you will see the relevance of the two quests to one another. But to prove what I am setting out to argue I must demonstrate not just the emotional impact of the fact and the fiction (which I think the success and controversy amply shows), nor also the strange synchronicity of timing, but I need to make clear that the links between Donaldson's fiction and the Green Stone are so intimate and specific that a glib word like coincidence just will not do. The comparative table I now give is a means of attempting that:

GREEN STONE - 'Fact'

A group of characters come together from different backgrounds to form a quest, which then goes in search of a sword and a stone - acting as channels of the psychic abilities of the quest.

The key characters have psychic powers, focussed by the quest and not previously noticed.

THOMAS COVENANT - 'Fiction'

Identical theme, but the quest seeks the "Staff of Law" which is the psychic channel.

Ditto.

The principles of the quest have been instantly abducted from our world into another - Gaynor Sunderland simply went (with no means of transport), finding herself in a green and pleasant alien land. John Day is abducted at a place called Aveley.

In these abductions there is some doubt as to whether it is a lucid dream or reality. The abductees settle on reality.

Time spent in the alien world seems longer than the brief time actually passing on Earth.

The quest must find the channels so that they may fight a psychic battle against an evil force threatening to upset the balance of the world.

The stone is found by way of a small hand-sword or dagger which acts as a minor instrument of power.

The Meonia stone is a few inches across and deep green.

Earth forces are central to the beliefs of all quest members. This hidden power is used to charge the stone and for good.

Gaynor is viewed as a reincarnation of the warrior queen Gweveruegh, ancient wielder of the stone power. Her legend spurs the quest on.

Gaynor claims abilities to see 'shades' of the dead from many past eras at once.

Gaynor has a deep, intuitive belief she should be a doctor. This is vital to the future of the quest.

The original title of the book was The Chosen.

These are just some of the points of comparison, there really are many. At times the coincidence becomes so weird you try not to think about their implications. For instance, in the second series of Donaldson books a key character is brought in. He is a young man steeped in earth-lore and who is to take possession of the psychic channel (the staff of law) at the end of the story, so he may use it to protect The Land. In this way he mirrors the role of Gaynor Sunderland in the Green Stone story. Donaldson's character is called Sunder, and he must ward the Land.

Thomas Covenant undergoes an abduction to 'The Land', identical to that Gaynor claims. In the second trilogy Covenant is abducted with a young woman, called Linden Avery.

Covenant tries to persuade himself it is a lucid dream (earning himself the title 'Unbeliever'). He cannot do so.

Covenant and Avery spend months in The Land, but only hours pass on Earth.

Identical theme.

Loric's Krill - a small hand-sword or dagger, plays the same role.

An identical thing, known as the 'Illearth Stone' (described in the index as "Illearth stone; green stone") is central to the second book.

The Land functions on an earth force, which is vital to the beliefs and outcome of the quest.

Covenant is viewed as a reincarnation of Berek, warrior lord, ancient wielder of earth power. His legend spurs on the quest.

Covenant and Avery are helped by visions of 'shades' from many past eras of The Land.

Linden Avery, a doctor, comes into the quest with a purpose only grasped intuitively, but which is vital to the outcome of the future of the quest.

Linda is given the title 'The Chosen' by the rest of the quest.

Of course, from my involvement in the ASSAP 'Incidence of Coincidence' research I know how easy it is to get carried away by seeking out such things. But the Thomas Covenant/Green Stone parallels appear to me so marked that any objective appraisal would recognise them. But what do they mean?

It would be nice to fall back on the 'one was based on the other' theory. But Donaldson is unlikely to have heard about the Green Stone quest, and he definitely conceived and wrote his books well before it began. On the other hand we have the fact that the Alien Contact events pre-date the books, and sufficient information from independent sources that The Green Stone unfolded before the Covenant books became known in Britain. Besides which I am told flatly that the people in the quest did not know of Donaldson's stories, and I see no reason to doubt that.

So is there another answer? I think so. I believe it is something which blends well with the theory of 'Formative Causation', as outlined by ASSAP member Dr Rupert Sheldrake in his significant and controversial book, A New Science of Life, a book described by the scientific press as a prime candidate for burning!

Before the Sheldrake theory was published I had written in Alien Contact about my own observations. Whilst not 'formative causation' as such, and whilst having been noticed by others (e.g. Lyall Watson in Lifetide) I had watched the way fiction mirrors fact in a synchronistic fashion to a surprising degree. I told of my unpublished UFO novel (The Final Contact), penned in 1977 and still in existence. This has been acted out in reality so many times, and in so many small details since I wrote it I was rather concerned.

This is by no means the only time such a thing has happened. In UFOs, a British View-point (written 1976) Peter Warrington and I had first told of our meetings with Gary, a strange man who claims to be a reincarnated alien. Many researchers in the field know that Gary is still around and are aware of how deep his story really goes (to include his belief that he was once Jesus). When Patrick Tilley wrote his novel Mission, about a reincarnated alien who was once Jesus approaching two people and asking them to help him, Peter and I were staggered by the links. We started communicating with Tilley. The author had received an almost identical letter from a couple in Canada who had been approached, as we had.

At my lecture to the ASSAP AGM in Liverpool, in January 1984, I gave an example of a link between my own experiences, a story I wrote based on them, how they were set in the small Lancashire town of Bacup, and how they remarkably became duplicated in a BBC TV play in the Juliet Bravo series - about police in a fictional town called Hartley. Hartley is in fact Bacup, all the filming being done there.

It has happened often enough to totally convince me that this phenomenon is real, and I am not alone. The amazing way that the Jules Vernes novels From Earth to the Moon and Round the Moon predict the disaster to Apollo 13 a century later, is one of the best known of the countless examples listed by students of strange coincidences.

In Alien Contact I spoke of a 'bow-wave' effect, where ripples spread through the consciousness of a species. Since creative fiction involves dipping into this 'collective unconscious' (as Jung calls it), then it is hardly surprising that it touches such ripples, which may be spread out through space-time by a 'real' event. In this way the creative person has access to the unfolding facts in a non-causal way and uses them to mould his fiction. This provides the multiple synchronicities in a phenomenon we might term 'psychic parellism'.

Sheldrake's ideas stem from biological evidence. For instance, he points out how the learning of a rat can affect its whole species. If it learns to get out of a maze in an average time of, let us say, 100 seconds, then the next generation of rats will not take so long. They may only take 50 seconds. It is as if the experienced rat passes on his knowledge to all who follow. But more remarkable still is the fact that an experiment carried out after the first to a wholly isolated set of rats from the same generation (maybe on the other side of the Atlantic) will still show the learning. It seems that this passing on of knowledge occurs throughout the species, perhaps through the collective unconscious of the rat.

The implications of this biological evidence, which Shelldrake demonstrates with countless examples, should be obvious. It perhaps happens with man - hence the reason for fiction mirroring fact. One reinforces the other, because the theme has become dominant in our collective unconscious. Personally, I would love to know if the rats would take 200 seconds to get out of the maze if the first experiment were years before a concerted effort. In other words, would their scores improve shortly before the sey of maze tests began - as it would if the 'bow-wave' coupled with 'formative causation', allows for the ripple to spread backwards through time. I believe this is suggested. We may have here a unique way of using Shelldrake's ideas to test precognition.

Presumably what this means in the context of this article is that Donaldson's creative imagination was tuned into the same dominant theme within man's collective unconscious as were the Green Stone team. But did the Green Stone events really happen and thus set the theme in motion (in the way that the rats who really learn to escape the maze set the learning theme rippling through rat consciousness)? We might have to face that possibility. Or perhaps the Donaldson fiction was so emotive and powerful it created the bow-wave and the Green Stone team became so embroiled in it that they deluded themselves into a sense of reality.

I leave you to judge which explanation best fits both the facts and your own willingness to accept certain things. But either way I think the concept of 'psychic parallelism', coupled to the 'bow-wave' and 'formative causation must require investigation.

All of which brings me neatly onto answering the question Common Ground poses for this issue - why did UFOs suddenly appear in 1947? I had been studiously avoiding it so far.

Is it because the aliens got worried about our atomic tests and flew here by hyperspace to warn us? More plausibly, were the aliens here, in another dimension, and so saw the dangers we were creating for their habitation as well as our own? Atom bombs do not do nice things to the local space-time environment. Were they continued nazi experiments (we know they had some weird craft in design in 1945)? Or did the first sightings allow the world (and most specifically the media) to have an imaginative binge, from which it has never recovered?

Well, maybe. But I have no strong feelings about any of these things. However, it does now occur to me that psychic parallelism could provide the real answer. It has seemed to me that there is good reason why the stories witnesses come out with under hypnosis always look like rehearsed versions of one another - I was sat there in my car when this UFO appeared, it shot out a beam of light, all went black, suddenly I woke up in this room, there was this alien who said by telepathy 'don't be afraid', but get on this bed, I didn't want to, but I did and they gave me this medical examination before sending me back. It really is that hackneyed - and consistent. So what does it mean? Perhaps that the events are really occurring, I wondered. I just cannot accept the suggestion that birth-trauma memories would all emerge so reproductively (if you pardon the pun). A pure psychological theory stumbles in the face of this barrage of supportive stories, too. But psychic parallelism does not stumble. It makes sense of it. The event ripples through the collective unconscious and thus reinforces the dominant theme. Each time a contact occurs hypnosis will produce it more or less the same. With individual trimmings of course. But essentially the same.

Extending this to the general concept of the UFO we can conceive of the first sightings in 1947 creating a dominant theme within the cultural climate, and thus the collective unconscious. Like the mythical quest of the Donaldson/Green Stone sagas, the UFO theme was emotively powerful to mankind (who was beginning to reach out toward the new frontier of space). So the ripple went out and formative causation took over. People began to see things in the skies, and they saw them as UFOs. Probably they were mundane things, but the effect of the cultural drive of the dominant theme was powerful enough to override this and create firm conviction that they were not mundane. As with the Green Stone quest the impact might have been strong enough on some people to change their conceptions of reality. To them the UFO event was real - end of story. To us, less affected, and outside of their impact zone, it would look rather less real.

I can back this suggestion with two things. Firstly, notice how so soon after the earliest sightings (such as Arnold's flock of UFOs) there were quite a few instances of several UFOs flying together. The dominant theme still had to establish itself as a single UFO. Once it did, that is how the phenomenon crystallised. We do not get stories of flocks of UFOs nowadays.

Secondly, if this is correct then we might have expected the bow-wave effect to allow isolated examples of the dominant theme before 1947. They would seem like precognitions from our standpoint, but they are just side-effects of the ripple motion not being tied to our one-way concept of time. Ripples from a boat go all ways, most of the energy being at the point of formative causation of the dominant theme (the present), quite a bit in front (i.e. what we would call the future), but a little of this trailing behind the boat, reaching off into what would, in this sense be the past. But to someone in that past they would be precognitions of 1947! There were isolated instances of very UFO-like craft prior to 1947. Probe Report carried a good Mark Brown investigation into a November 1939 case. There are quite a few others. These do not upset the theory, they enhance it.

UFOs do not need to be real. They could just be an extreme example of 'psychic parallelism', innocently set in motion in 1947.

But then again, real events can create a parallelism too.

Robert Morrell

The 1947 Enigma.

Ufology in an unorganised sense, though it was soon to gain the trappings or organisation, hit a bemused world in 1947 following the wide media coverage of the Arnold sighting of a flight of what might be termed 'flying saucers'. The term was to enter popular vocabulary, although Ruppelt popularised the description 'UFO', and it is the derivative 'ufology' which the study of the flying saucer enigma was to adopt, and which is now in common usage. But why ufology? It has been argued that reports before 1947 do not match the number and variety after, and in large measure the available data tends to support this argument. However, the more I have researched into certain subjects investigated before 1947, the more I begin to feel that there is not quite such a dramatic increase in sighting reports, but rather the work done in the pre-1947 era was directed to other ends. What 1947 brought was essentially a breakthrough in the use of certain ideas and terminology on a much more popular level, accompanied by a rather dramatic extension of their supposed application.

Interest in reports of what might be described as enigmatic unidentified flying objects reaches back into the mists of time. But to find the explanation advanced for such observations calls for a study, at least up to the early 18th. Century, into the concepts which motivated both popular and academic thinking. One must allow for the degree of literacy, for in the period of time I have in mind there was no really popular media, and even when the industrial revolution brought a demand for at least a minimally literate working population, the cost of books and journals was often beyond the reach of many people. So there are practical reasons for the apparent lack of early UFO reports. But this does not take into consideration the fact that what we term folklore - often a strictly oral tradition - contains much which appears to relate to observations of strange flying objects.

Robert C. Girard

Why 1947 ~ In 1,000 Words or Less.

Stranger still, at least to us, are the explanations given to these events. Comets, for example, were thought of as objects thrown across space from the hands of an angry deity, and as such the harbingers of evil or disaster. The 16th. Century French scholar Jean Bodin modified the notion a little by retaining the evil element, but suggesting comets were the souls of men. Such was his academic standing that this notion was seriously believed.

Fanciful notions were also entertained regarding meteorites, although for some reason these were never looked on as bringers of evil. Other popular notions explained flying objects as 'elf-arrows' fired from fairy bows. We know these artifacts as prehistoric flint arrowheads. In recent years a gentleman from Peterborough wrote to the curator of a leading natural history museum to inform him that belemnites actually fell from the sky, and enclosed some he had picked up from the well-tended bowling green of his local Conservative Club, having appeared there after a thunderstorm. Belemnites (the internal guard from an extinct form of mollusc related to the cuttlefish) are known in folklore as 'thunderbolts'. In one of the first serious natural history studies published in Britain, Dr. Robert Plot (1640 - 1696; first Curator of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum) places them amongst stones associated with the heavens.

The 19th. Century brought more realism to the study of strange events, and it was the heyday of the local natural history and philosophical societies. Many of these bodies published journals, and although now often neglected, they provide a mine from which much interesting material can be extracted - I have found several items on strange flying objects in such journals. Whilst the authors of papers and notices concerning them conclude (usually) that they were meteorites, these explanations often do not convince. Thus it is quite possible, if not probable, that they deal with phenomena not then recognised, let alone understood. What also strikes me in certain of these reports is the reaction, when referred to, of certain witnesses. Their responses are typical of those we frequently meet in current ufological investigation.

I feel then that modern ufology represents not so much a new subject which came in following the Arnold sighting, but one which is essentially a continuation of certain 19th. Century studies. This conclusion receives added emphasis when we observe the trends in current ufological research towards finding explanations in terms of a more comprehensive range and better understanding of certain forms of natural phenomena. Now while this thesis gives ufology a continuous history it does not explain why the subject became so popular after 1947. The reasons for it doing so cannot be divorced from the conditioning of the popular mind brought about through technological advances made during the course of the last war, particularly in nuclear power, aeronautics and rocketry.

But this alone does not constitute the full picture, for thinking was also conditioned by exposure to a considerable body of science fiction, dating back to the late 19th. Century. To this must be added the persuasive influence of the film industry, not least the Flash Gordon-type childrens' serials - or were they intended for adults? One of the earliest silent films was a tale of a trip to the moon, which was of course inhabited. So the cinema can be said to have latched onto the ETH at an early date. In the 1920's, and particularly in the 1930's, S.F. had a considerable following, and a number of mass-circulation journals catered for this, while in the United States there was a considerable number of comic books which featured space fiction, the publication of which continued unabated until the war. In 1978 the French ufologists Bertrand Meheust drew attention to the fact that S.F. contained within it most, if not all, of the features we find in ufology, and he is by no means the only ufologist to have noted this.

In short, whilst the space imagery in post-1947 ufology contrasted with the more terrestrial view of earlier workers, the reasons for this are not so difficult to discern. Progress in various scientific disciplines since 1947, which has influenced serious ufologists, has caused most to turn away from the ETH which for so many years dominated ufology. It is now realised that the study of UFO events and claims represent a far more complex subject than was previously believed. Perhaps the 1980's will eventually be seen to mark yet another dramatic turning point in the study of enigmatic unidentified flying objects.

In many colleges and universities an apocryphal tale is told. It seems that a few years back, the school's philosophy professor included this question on the final examination: "WHY?" The students yelped in silent glee, for here was a sure 20-point head start towards a passing grade; all tackled the question, many a pen running dry and many an exam booklet overflowing with Philosophy in the process. Yet when the exams were returned nearly all were stunned to discover that at best they had received only four or five points for all their wisdom. Only two students earned full credit, and their answers, worth quoting here in full, were:

First student: "Because."

Second Student: "Why not?"

"Why 1947?" is the same kind of trick question, and it was indeed tempting to type the word 'Because' in the centre of an otherwise blank sheet of paper and submit it as my contribution towards resolving this issue. It is, after all, easily as good as anything that the rest of the philosophers whose work fills this issue have come up with, and highly appropriate as well. Appropriate because virtually none of us who have given any thought at all to the question should be so presumptuous as to claim that he or she has the answer. As I write these words I wonder what the other contributors will be saying. Will they speak ex-cathedra on behalf of one rationale or another? If they do, then they reveal that they have missed the whole point. Or, will they all submit wishy-washy, back-peddling pieces such as this, thereby revealing a paradox: a process in which ufologists manage to make progress toward Understanding by un-learning an entirely logical premise (The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis), by stripping away the thin skin of UFO-logical rationale and concentrating instead on the core of il-logic thus exposed!

1947 has been seized upon as a handy reference point, marking the arrival of modern UFOs in quantity. Whilst it is a convenient landmark, 1947 should not be thought of as the jumping-off point of a New Age. If we knew specifically the years, we might just as validly ask "Why did the first wave of poltergeists occur in - - -?" Or, "Why the year - - - - for the first incidence of frogs falling from the heavens?" Or, "Why - - - - to record the first wave of demons plaguing innocent humans?" It is all the same question: "WHY", followed by a few extra words. Here in the space-age we have UFOs. Past ages have their own style of phenomena, based approximately on humanity's collective threshold of mystical consciousness at any give period. There has always been an undercurrent of phenomena throughout human history, and there have always been subcultures whose loose-knit or close-knit members have tried to de-code and interpret them. Although UFOs are certainly a novel form of manifestation, they are within the limits of our collective mystical quotient and are not essentially different in origin from the 'burning shields' of Roman times, the demons of the dark and middle ages, the fairies of more recent centuries and the Fortean Falls of still more recent times. UFOs may in fact already be yielding their influence to the next wave of phenomena as the pace of our material development quickens (rendering UFOs obsolete). But as it has been for countless centuries, the basic question endures: "WHY?"

There are very likely human beings among us who do understand WHY. But they are wise enough not to reveal it, except (when asked) in **parables**. To have discovered the answer is to have investigated personally, thoroughly and painfully; to have investigated that which is not of the mundane, three-dimensional frame of reference involves direct contact with entities from other frames of reference (malevolent, disinterested or benevolent) who are responsible for presenting contemporary humanity with our phenomena. And to do that involves keeping a strict secrecy, lest the hard-won links between the human investigator (who is less knowledgeable) and the beings from other frames of reference (who are more knowledgeable) be severed, thus cutting off the individual's progress.

The literature of UFOs is at once two things: a source of raw data from which the private investigator will learn — but it is also a display of tinsel, of glittering, severed strands marking the ends to so many other individuals' progress toward Understanding. Part of the answer to "Why 1947?" may be found in UFO literature, and other parts in Fortean, cryptozoological, hollow earth and occult writings, and still other parts in the study of hypnosis. Even the daily newspapers and television programmes are goldmines of information, as is a careful study of that master parabler, Christ, in the New Testament.

Although we humans tend to band together when dealing with Things unknown, the study of ufology is best thought of as an intensely **personal** quest. There are as many answers to "Why 1947?" as there are individuals giving thought to the question. Each must discover his or her own answer. The astute observer will withhold judgement, knowing that once the answer has been found there will be no need to speak it; to speak prematurely is at best an exercise in temporizing and at worst a sudden brick wall blocking the path to Understanding.

Thanks & Apologies . . .

There is no doubt that at the head of our list of worthy benefactors comes Hilary Evans, responsible for so much of what is worthwhile in paranormal research on this side of the Atlantic. He has freely given time, advice, effort, money, and some of his best articles to CG, and I only hope that in due course he will see fit to edit a journal of his own. Many other writers have given, without payment, excellent work; names that come to mind include Jenny Randles, Mick Goss, Nigel Watson, John Grant and Paul Screeton. John Rimmer has typeset superbly and, more important, very cheap. Janice, Maurice and Caroline of ASSAP have sent on your subs accurately and usually on time, and Hugh has calmed disgruntled customers. Finally, my elder children, Shelley and Kester have learned at an early age the arts of collation and envelope-stuffing, rescuing us from the vagaries of the printing trade.

Apologies must firstly be to all of you for ceasing publication with this issue, and secondly to everyone who has sent work to CG: that I have not been able to publish: some of it was marvellous. Thirdly, to editors of other magazines whose excellent work I have not been able to publicise. And fourthly, to Paul Devereux, for seemingly raising questions about 'Earth Lights' that he has been quite unable to answer!

Nigel Watson

Mind the UFOs!

The fear of new technological developments can be regarded as the major reason for people reporting sightings of 'ghost rockets' which were seen throughout 1946 in Scandinavian countries, and to a lesser extent in parts of Europe [1].

At the close of World War II the German forces unleashed their V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets upon their enemies. These weapons, and plans for other secret rocket weapons, were, along with their creators, captured by the allies. The plunder gained by the Russians and the Americans ultimately led to the 'space race', no doubt because they had in mind the fact that:

"In future the possession of superiority in long-distance rocket artillery may well count for as much as superiority in naval or air power. The Americans have already embarked upon an ambitious programme of development and there are signs that the Russians are also impressed with the potentialities of this new technique." [2]

One of the predominant theories was that the Russians were responsible for the ghost rocket sightings. Yet, despite hundreds of sightings, lack of any tangible evidence led to the conclusion that mis-identifications of meteors, fireworks, etc., combined with post-war hysteria 'created' this wave. Even so, there remained a feeling that perhaps a few of the sightings might well have been of a genuinely unusual flying object.

The ghost-rocket wave of sightings can be seen as the immediate predecessor of the UFO sightings which swept the world after Kenneth Arnold's famous 1947 sighting of 'flying saucers'. Here we might wonder if cognition and perception are linked to the kinds of labels we give to things. For instance, the label 'ghost-rocket' categorised and ordered unusual aerial phenomena in a way which implied they were a Russian secret weapon of some kind. Whilst the term 'flying saucer' had a more 'universal' appeal, which opened up a multitude of possible explanatory frames of reference.

As Hilary Evans has noted [3,4] much early science fiction includes stories about sightings of strange aerial visitors which parallel the reports provided by UFO witnesses today. And there are many stories about humans who explore the skies in strange vehicles and visit alien beings. For example, Humphrey Repton wrote:

"I landed on the plated surface of the moon, at 7 o'clock p.m. and walked about three miles before I saw the smallest hope of finding it inhabited; at length I discovered an intelligent something..."

That passage is from his story From a Private Madhouse which was published in 1787. Indeed, between AD 165 and 175, Lucian of Samosata wrote two stories about visiting the moon, Icaromennipus and A True Story, so the exploration of space and its contents have always held an attraction for man, and is not a new phenomenon. [5] Though such fictions should be considered in the light of their intellectual and social background. [6,7]

John Keel claims that Raymond A. Palmer sensitised the American public to the idea of alien entities exploring our skies in saucer-shaped vehicles long before 1947. [8] Certainly, he promoted as fact ideas that had been featured in fictional stories.

This leads us to speculate that fiction and perceived facts linked with the sightings of ambiguous phenomena coalesce to form a unified frame of reference. Thus, one reason why the ghost-rocket wave came about was because rockets had been actually created, and in the case of the flying saucer waves it was possible for people to speculate that beings who reside 'elsewhere' had perfected rocketships that could transport them to our skies.

The flying saucer frame of reference has provided a large umbrella for a wide range of beliefs which have, according to Peter Rogerson, "effectively symbolised social anxieties" [9] and have provided a vehicle for the expression of individual worries. [10]

In the past the phantom airships which were seen throughout the world between roughly 1860 and 1914 can be said to be the main frame of reference for UFO sightings. However it was less cohesive than today's UFO myth; in Britain they tended to be regarded as German invaders, whilst in America they were generally regarded as the creation of secret inventors (or extraterrestrial visitors!). Also, weird phenomena were sometimes regarded from a religious rather than a secular viewpoint, and waves like that in Wales in 1904 and 1905 [11] were not perceived as part of a terrestrial aerial invasion, though it is interesting to note that Wales was the prime location for phantom airship sightings in 1909 and 1913.

The elegance of the flying saucer frame of reference is that it embraces and sometimes links both secular and religious outlooks of our world and its future. The flying saucer has for many been the symbol for a brave new world or for the coming end of existence as we know it. In a sense this can be seen as a projection of the fears about nuclear power which can be utilised for good or evil purposes. So it would be easy to say that in 1947, after the upheaval of war, and the creation of dreadful new weapons that could be easily constructed to deliver destruction and death to any part of the globe (e.g. rockets with nuclear warheads) it was not surprising that America became the source of this socio-psychological phenomenon.

However, it might be thought that this type of explanation is rather simplistic and ignores the fact that we are really being confronted by a unique phenomenon which cannot be dismissed by reference to the social sciences.

There is probably no ultimate answer, but I am sure that a detailed examination of 'UFO' waves of the pre-1947 period can cast a lot of light on the reasons why ambiguous aerial objects had such a pervasive influence on humanity for so many years.

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I'm not going to be so rash as to promise that, without a very generous benefactor, all the issues of COMMON GROUND are always going to be in print. However, we try to have only one unavailable at a time, and maintain a sort of 'rolling reprint' programme. If any of the issues you order are not available at once, they will be sent as soon as possible. Brief contents of the first nine issues are:

Number One Sue Blackmore on Hallucinations and Illusions, Hilary Evans taking apart the Welsh Triangle, Jenny Randles on the 'Alien Contact' family and poltergeists, and Alan Cleaver on the problem of the EVP.

Number Two Michael Goss on questions raised by the Yorkshire Ripper trial, the use of computers in storing and organising research and archive material, Glossolalia and Xenolalia, Kevin McClure on theories of interference by UFO occupants.

Number Three Paul Screeton on the myth of the Strategic Reserve of Steam Trains, the CSIOCOP controversy, the incidence of Coincidence by Jenny Randles, the Editor asking what is wrong with ouija boards, Nigel Watson on the amazing 1909 Airship scare, and G. W. Lambert on the Geography of English Ghosts.

Number Four Dr. Vernon Harrison's major article 'Credo' on Survival and Super-ESP, Janet and Colin Bord on the Bigfoot/UFO interface, John Rimmer about publicity-seeking witnesses, Alun Virgin on Ouija and possession, and Bob Gilbert making a mockery of 'Holy Blood, Holy Grail'.

Number Five Rod Sorrell on Divination and the I - Ching, Mark Moravec on Psiufo phenomena, Magda Graham on pagan occultism, and Jenny Randles reporting on the ongoing research project into coincidences.

Number Six Tony Ortzen on Katie King, Paul Screeton - Alan Garner and the Shamanistic Process, Michael Goss on Children and the Paranormal, Kevin McClure investigates the 1939 No-War prophecies, Locating Ghosts, and an update on Spiricom by Alex Macrea.

Number Seven A critical review of the evidence for the 'Earth Lights' theory, OOBES, the resurgence of physical mediumship, the Bright Idea from Nowhere, Warminster Sai Baba, and the links between Science Fiction stories and later UFO reports.

Number Eight The Layman's Guide to the Archaeological and Statistical Evidence for Leys, the Virtual Transitions of Stainton Moses by Manfred Cassirer, Jenny Randles on the Anomaly of Astrology, Earth Mysteries by Chris Ashton, the Church and Spiritualism, and Paul Murray seeing UFO entities as Warnings of the Dark Age.

Number Nine Major article by Joe Nickell - the Hangar 18 Tales, a folkloristic approach, the Earth Lights debate, the role of logic in psychic research By Dr. J. E. Best, Tony Booth on Locating Ghosts, and Hugh Pincott looking at the motivations behind ASSAP.

Hilary Evans

The World was Ready.

*Macaulay, who writes the account of St Kilda, set out with a prejudice against prejudices, and wanted to be a smart modern thinker. And yet he affirms for a truth, that when a ship arrives there, all the inhabitants are seized with a cold. The reverend Mr Christian, after ruminating a little. The cause (says he) is a natural one. The situation of St Kilda renders a North-East wind indispensably necessary before a stranger can land. The wind, not the stranger, causes an epidemic cold. Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.*

The order of precedence of chickens and eggs is often difficult to establish, and those of us who have a prejudice against prejudices, and set up as 'smart modern thinkers', are at least as liable as anyone else to confuse cause with symptom. We are so frightfully keen to discern patterns and allocate pigeonholes; we are so easily tempted to think we have tracked the river to its source, when we have found only another tributary.

The ufological events of 1947 afford a splendid example of this kind of logical pitfall.

I use the word 'events' advisedly, because though what happened may not have been what appeared to be happening, there is no question that events of a sort were taking place. The basic fact is not in dispute: commencing June 1947, there was a sudden outbreak of reports in the media from persons who claimed to have seen objects, which they were unable to identify, flying in the sky. What is more, this occurred on a massive scale: "We can safely estimate that at least some thousand sightings of unidentified objects probably occurred within the United States in midsummer 1947, the bulk of these coming within a rather sharply-defined wavecrest centred on about July 7". [1]

What is in dispute is how this outbreak is to be interpreted. The following options are available:

1. The media accounts reflected an escalation of personal reports which in turn reflected an escalation of anomalous events.
2. The media accounts reflected an escalation of personal reports which were not correlated with real events but were caused by some external factor of a social or cultural character.
3. The media accounts were a self-generated escalation, which by highlighting a few incidents on a massive scale, induced feedback from the public which may or may not have had any correlation with real events, but which generated a snowball effect.

It would be easy to evolve even more elaborate options, but there is no point in getting any deeper into academic game-playing than we have to. All that we need to recognise, at this point, is that we have a choice of inferences that may be drawn from the undoubted facts, and that it would be imprudent for us to plump for Option A until we are satisfied that it fits better than Options B or C.

If a phenomenon is more widely reported this week than it was last week, we naturally suppose that it is occurring more frequently than it was a week ago. In the summer of 1947 few doubted that this is what was happening and most people have gone on believing it ever since. It is generally assumed that in the summer of 1947 a hitherto more-or-less dormant phenomenon suddenly roused itself from its slumbers. From which it was no less natural to move on to fears that perhaps something along the lines of an invasion was being planned. This notion was reflected in much of the earlier UFO literature and in the Hollywood movies of the era. [2]

Nor did such scare pushers have to look far to account for this escalation in terms of extraterrestrial interest in our planet and its doings. A major world war had just come to an end, not with the customary whimper but with an awesome big bang. Weapons developed during that war could be harnessed to Earth's first tentative venturings into Space. Innovations in communication meant that man's message-passing could be heard from farther off: winging their way into the furthest reaches of the galaxy, to be picked up by anyone who could or who cared, was the squalid prattle twittered by mankind - diplomatic exchanges and radio sit-coms, mayday calls and stock exchange reports - bringing Earth's existence to the notice of extraterrestrial culture, if such there be.

And if such there were, it did not seem too anthropomorphic to suppose that the fact might be of interest to some, whether from a colonialist, or an anthropological or just a neighbourly point of view.

In addition, those on Earth who were concerned with the development of nuclear power projected their fears into Space, and supposed that other worlds might be alarmed by man's newly achieved ability to blow himself into oblivion, perhaps taking a part of the galaxy with him. The fears have only the flimsiest scientific plausibility, man's destructive powers still falling a long way short of those deployed by nature: but that didn't inhibit the drafting of wild scenarios which would have been spurned by the least scrupulous SF author, but which sounded plausible when presented in the form of intergalactic communications from extraterrestrial cosmic brothers and guardians. (From countless examples, one: in 1959 a Brazilian named Aguiar encountered a domed disc while riding his motorcycle, and at the close of the incident found himself clutching a piece of paper on which was written - in his own writing - the message he had supposedly been given, 'Put an absolute stop to all atomic tests for warlike purposes. The balance of the universe is threatened'. [3])

However, no invasion occurred, despite periodic forecasts that this year would actually see Them land, a staple item in the annual forecasts of Jeanne Dixon and her kind. UFO reports continued to be made, but man had yet to lay a finger on one of the objects which gave rise to them, and this chronic reluctance of the UFOs to set down and be counted eventually bothered the more sensitive ufologists into theorising along alternative lines.

The UFO Phenomenon as Media Event

From the start there had existed a school of thought which favoured the view that the flying saucer escalation had been a non-event; or rather, a media event. Herbert Strentz, who has made an in-depth analysis of newspaper coverage of the phenomenon so far as the United States is concerned [4] indicates an extraordinarily rapid build-up in newspaper coverage of the flying saucer phenomenon. Kenneth Arnold, whose experience of 24th June 1947 is universally recognised as the key event in ufological history [5], became overnight a world figure. "The news spread very rapidly and before the night was over I was receiving telephone calls from all parts of the world." [6] Two days later he stated: "Half the people I see look at me as a combination of Einstein, Flash Gordon and Screwball", and he was quoted as saying he "would like to get on one of his 1200 mph Flying Saucers and escape from the furore caused by his story."

[4]

According to the 'media event' theorists, what then ensued was a snowball effect, a common enough phenomenon in the world of mass communication. However, it is important to note the nature of the items appearing in the media. Those of us who are inclined to think of that period as one of naive simple-mindedness should take a second look at the media coverage: we find that then, just as now, widespread credulity and sensation-mongering was tempered with judicious caution and balanced evaluation. Thus on 7th July - that is within a fortnight of the alleged 'media-event' - the New York Sun quoted a psychologist, Dr Openchowski, who commented: "When a strange thing is reported it is likely to be reported seen again and again. It is a trait of human nature that people like to be in the know and to participate in observing the unusual". [4]

Few will want to argue with that. Few will deny that, both at the time and subsequently, a high proportion of UFO reports had been made by people whose experience had been wholly subjective. The psychosocial hypothesis, in its various exotic varieties, has been a red rag to those who hold to the underlying reality of the UFO phenomenon; yet really there is no cause for them to get upset. For irrespective of whether there are such things as UFOs, there is certainly such a thing as the idea of UFOs; and no less certainly there will be, as Openchowski rightly observed way back in 1947, people who will take hold of that ideal and make a do-it-yourself facsimile to serve as a peg on which to drape their personal hang-ups. [7]

So surely is this the case, that it has encouraged a certain number of theorists to adopt it as a total explanation for the entire UFO phenomenon. The most intelligent proponent of this approach is probably Michel Monnerie [8] who successfully demonstrated that a great number of cases which he had personally investigated were purely subjective, and went on to propose that this was no less true of the rest. In summary, the scenario proposed by Monnerie and his kind can be crudely expressed as follows:

A great number of people, undergoing momentary or chronic crises or personal difficulties, have a psychological need to project these concerns outwardly onto some external scapegoat. Hence, inter alia, religious faiths, supernatural beliefs, radical political ideologies, you name it. The form these projections will take vary from one age to another and from one culture to another. What happened in 1947 was that a new myth was needed to replace the religious myth which had lost its potency, and it had to be one which was in keeping with contemporary trends. It was a moment when mankind was just starting to take seriously the idea of exploring the universe, so what came naturally was a space-age myth. Extraterrestrial beings in their spacecraft were an idea whose time had come. Back in the 18th century Voltaire said of God that if he hadn't existed, man would have had to invent him: two centuries later, his compatriot Monnerie was saying, in effect, that if Arnold hadn't had his UFO sighting, someone else would have had to have it for him. Monnerie even coined a phrase for it: UFOs became 'the authorised myth'.

Once set in motion (so the psychosocial scenario goes) the myth gains strength through the snowball effect. As more and more tales are told - no matter whether they have any basis in fact - the myth puts on weight; as more and more witnesses file reports, their testimony adds credibility to that of others.

By 19th August 1947 - that is, a bare seven weeks after Arnold's sighting - 90% of the American public had heard about flying saucers. [4] Of these 92% had heard of them from the media; and of these some 47% heard about them from the press, 20% from magazines, 18% from TV and 15% from radio. Small wonder that Dr Philip Morrison, a physicist at M.I.T., said of the UFO phenomenon, "It is a social phenomenon of journalism and television"

But there are limits to the power of the media to create and foster a myth. Once on a bandwagon, yes, the media can help to give it additional speed; but the bandwagon has to be there to be jumped on. The significant aspect of Arnold's sighting is the fact that, within hours of the announcement, he was receiving phone-calls from all parts of the world. The implication has to be that, all over the world, there was a readiness to be excited by the news. It is asking too much to suppose that, throughout the world, media-men felt a common impulse to embark on a multinational construction project aimed at setting up a global myth; rather, the astonishing response must be seen as reflecting a pre-existing disposition.

For, of course, there had been UFO reports long before Arnold, though largely unreported by the media. Since then, antiquarian-minded UFO-historians have ransacked chronicles of the past for prefigurations of the present: Loren Gross in particular, shows beyond a doubt that what happened in 1947 was an escalation in reports (which may or may not have been related to an escalation in actual incidents) of something which people had been reporting for decades in very similar terms.

The making of a myth.

Such findings show that, whatever validity the psychosocial hypothesis may possess, it cannot be based on the premise that the world had suddenly discovered a socially acceptable 'authorised myth'. People had been seeing UFOs long before the UFO-myth existed. True, of course, their reports were not necessarily any more founded in reality (whatever we mean by the word) than the sightings of the post-Arnold epoch; but they do give the rebuttal to any theory which combines the media-snowball hypothesis and the psychosocial hypothesis to make up a scenario in which people reported seeing UFOs because UFOs became a socially acceptable thing for people to report seeing.

If nothing else showed such a scenario to be invalid, one blatant fact does so: the fact that public espousal of belief in the reality of UFOs thrived in spite of a widespread notion that the whole subject was ridiculous. A high proportion of media coverage was designed - consciously or unconsciously - to deride the idea of flying saucers: the general adoption of the term itself is evidence of this bias. Rather than it being socially acceptable to have a UFO sighting experience, it was almost a stigma: while some courageous witnesses suffered nothing worse than social embarrassment, a few underwent ostracism and even physical harassment. Jacobs, in his history of the controversy [10] writes:

The press went through stages in its attitude towards the 1947 sightings. At first it reported the stories fairly and impartially. But as some of the stories became more fantastic and newsmen vainly searched for proof, they added ridicule to their reports - a ridicule stimulated by the fact that no one had found a flying saucer or could offer concrete evidence that such things even existed. Many previously skeptical newsmen began to feel that nothing unusual or anomalous had existed in the sky in the first place. By the end of July newspaper reporters automatically placed any witness who claimed to see something strange in the sky in the crackpot category. Kenneth Arnold became victim to this belated ridicule and stated: 'If I saw a ten-story building flying through the air I would never say a word about it'. An Air Force investigator privately noted that Arnold was 'practically a moron in the eyes of the population'.

What resulted was what James McDonald named the 'ridicule lid' [4] which effectively inhibited a great many people from making a public 'confession' of their experience. What is striking is how many continued to do so despite the social pressures to keep quiet.

Of course we all know that some people react positively to ridicule, and strengthen their position in order to defend it against opposition. The same effect can be seen in groups, where external hostility is probably a more effective bonding agent than any internally-generated force. But with the UFO sightings of 1947 we are not concerned with groups, or even with individuals who, though separate, can feel a sense of community with like-minded persons elsewhere. The thousand and more reports made during those early weeks of the post-Arnold era were a thousand individual responses, a thousand one-off events. A thousand people were willing to face the ridicule of their fellows in order to affirm their personal conviction that they had undergone an anomalous experience. Reading through the first-hand accounts there are two phrases which occur time and time again: one is 'I used to think the whole subject was nonsense until I had my experience', the other is 'I was worried about what friends and neighbours would say, but I wanted people to know what was happening' Neither of which seems characteristic of the type of unstable personality whose existence by the hundred is required by the psychosocial media-fosteed approved-myth hypothesis.

Bloecher, the leading chronicler of the 1947 events, is inclined to blame the press: "By July 7, when cranks and practical jokers got in full swing, an aura of ridicule descended on the subject that has lingered for twenty years. For this the press must bear a heavy responsibility since it freely gave over its obligation of presenting the facts in favor of currying to the voices of irresponsibility and confusion" [1] He goes on to quote examples of how stories were distorted in order to make them seem ridiculous; choosing to forget that when a witness has seen something that has scared him out of his wits, he is not going to be too cautious in his choice of words in which to describe his experience, reporters seized on phrases which could be used to make fun of a witness and his story: "The woman in California who described an object as appearing like 'a mama hen with her baby chicks' gave newsmen a real heyday of merriment; it is probably one of the most significant reports of the entire 1947 wave".

It is impossible not to agree with Bloecher that media coverage of the UFOs did more harm than good as regards serious scientific investigation of the subject; and Strentz has shown that the contemptuous attitude was spread over the whole spectrum of the media, becoming increasingly irresponsible as it got more remote from the first-person witnesses, so that *Time*, *Newsweek* and *Life* were guilty of the most unrealistic comments of all. (I noted a similar effect when studying coverage of the West Wales 'flap' of 1979: the Fleet Street papers had a field day with the 'Little green men' aspects, while local papers did a decent and responsible job of reporting.)

What press coverage did do - for so long, that it, as it was in the interest of the newspaper - was to keep the subject alive; and to superficial study it may seem that there is a straightforward correlation between sightings and press reports which indicates a certain validity in the 'media-generated' hypothesis. However, Bloecher's follow-up investigation, conducted twenty years later, showed that there were many more sightings than ever got reported in the press: "again and again in news accounts reference is made to the hundreds of calls newspapers received, whereas only a fraction of these reports later appeared in the news accounts". Conceivably this could be explained on the basis that the media had started something which had grown to be too big for them to handle: with equal validity it could be suggested that all the press was doing was acting as the spokesman of society as a whole, and it was society as a whole that found the UFO phenomenon more than it could cope with.

Not so much a new product as a new label.

Two years ago an American psychologist, studying folklore beliefs in Newfoundland, described in public a category of experiences which he had found to be surprisingly frequent among people he studied: these experiences involved the apparent visitation of the subject, usually in his bedroom and at night, by some kind of alien presence which settles on his bed and even lies on top of him.

No sooner had Hufford started to speak publicly of this phenomenon than he was bombarded with accounts from other people who had had similar experiences, but had hitherto kept them to themselves or at most told a few near friends. None had any idea - as indeed Hufford himself had not - that this experience is widespread. It was only when he isolated it, giving it a name - he calls it 'the Old Hag' because that is the form he found most common in Newfoundland, but I prefer the more generalised 'Bedroom Invader' - that he constructed, as it were, a pigeonhole in which people could house their experience. [11]

It is reasonable to suppose that something of the sort occurred with regard to UFOs in 1947. There is no question that UFOs had been seen before Arnold's sighting; but except when a sub-group could be labelled as 'foo-fighters' or 'ghost rockets', there were no pigeonholes in which witnesses could file their experiences, and consequently they largely went unreported. The press, in turn, is shy of one-off incidents. What it likes is an on-going theme like the 'Loch Ness Monster' or the 'Abominable Snowman', to which it can refer in a kind of shorthand, careless of whether in doing so the true significance of the events is lost. "Having found a supposedly new phenomenon with no name" comments Strentz [4], "the press popularised the words 'flying saucer' as a name for strange objects in the sky." For better or for worse people now had a label for their experiences; and despite the accompanying ridicule they wanted to go on record with them.

To that extent at least, the press performed a useful function. But labelling the UFO experiences had one very unfortunate consequence, in that it caused most people to believe that there was a single phenomenon, whether 'flying saucer' or the more generalised 'unidentified flying object', responsible for all the reports. Today it is widely accepted by serious researchers that this is almost certainly not so, and that a number of phenomena, of separate nature but overlapping superficial characteristics, have been falsely lumped together. What 1947 and the media explosion joined together, it has taken ufologists more than thirty years to put asunder.

Why 1947? Because of a train of circumstances - circumstances which seem random but which would inevitably have come about, sooner or later, in some form. A specific observation was made by a witness who spoke out when others might have kept silent; by chance a newsman picked up his story and passed it along, by chance a phrase was used which caught the fancy of the headline-writers; which encouraged them to run more stories under the same headline; which generated further reports by encouraging others to relate their experiences; which provided other people with a convenient peg on which to hang their private fantasies; which in turn were reported and, since there was no way to distinguish these pseudo-reports from the true experiences, they were all lumped together; which had the result of antagonising serious opinion, which led to controversy, which... well, the rest is history.

Why 1947? Because in 1947 the world was ready. What happened was an accident that was bound to happen.

What caused the accident?

It is tempting to leave that last sentence as the punchline. Unquestionably, the answer to the question 'Why 1947' lies largely in the psychosocial domain; what made the world ready for the UFO phenomenon was to some degree a cultural question.

But nobody can read Ted Bloecher's objective review of the UFO events of the summer of 1947 without sharing his conclusion that "the 1947 wave was unquestionably genuine". The reports he quotes, many of which were to be followed up independently by James McDonald, show clearly that a high proportion of the 1947 sightings were as 'solid' as any that have ever been reported. For us today to dismiss them as psychosocial artifacts would be as irresponsible as the official mockery which met them at the time. On July 4 - a few days after Arnold's sighting - Captain Smith and First Officer Stevens of United Air Lines, who only a few minutes earlier had joked about flying

saucers ("I'll believe them when I see them", said Smith), were converted into believers when they saw a loose formation of five flat circular objects flying ahead of them. "Not believing their eyes, they called the stewardess forward. Without telling her what to look for, they directed her attention to the sky ahead of them. Looking out of the cockpit window, she exclaimed 'Why, there's a formation of those flying discs!'"

Why 1947? Ultimately, the answer has to be because in 1947 something happened, and that something was a wave of UFO sightings. What caused those sightings we have yet to discover; but though psychological and sociological factors played their part, they are not sufficient to explain away those sightings, nor can they be accounted for by dismissing them as a 'media event' though unquestionably the media played a crucial part in its handling of the stories it received. Even taking these conditioning factors into full account, we must answer the question 'Why 1947?' with the reply 'Because there was a UFO wave in 1947'. Whatever a UFO wave may be.

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Closing Remarks

This is the last issue of 'Common Ground' that will be published, by me or anyone else. The decision to cease publication was made with difficulty, and derives from a number of factors.

Firstly, increased pressures on my own time. All of us who publish magazines, in this or any other field, do so at considerable cost to social and personal life. At present, we are gradually building up a small mail-order business, in addition to the day-jobs, and it does not allow time to put in effort enough to put together a journal in a way that does justice to its contributors. Each issue requires many hours of work, and any attempt to cut corners always shows in the quality of the finished product. I do not want that to happen.

Secondly, and probably most important, there is the financial aspect. The number of subscribers to 'Common Ground' has dropped substantially over the past eighteen months - probably as much due to the overlong intervals between issues as much as anything else. We are now down to a figure of 229 paid subscriptions, whereas we really need to be close to 400 - sufficient to have a print run of 500, the magic figure where my printer drops his unit prices quite markedly. On many occasions in the past we have - usually unwisely - spent money we couldn't spare to advertise in the hope that subs would increase. With the exception of inserts included in 'Fortean Times' and the 'SPR Journal' - at a cost uneconomic to either - paid advertising has proved to be a surefire way to lose money. Anyway, the gap between our situation and viability is now too great: we cannot subsidise CG on a long-term basis.

Thirdly, and this is purely a personal opinion, possibly influenced by the other matters I've mentioned, I can't help but suspect that we may have outlived our usefulness. Or rather, that our approach is no longer relevant to what is going on in paranormal/anomaly research in the U.K.

In early 1981, when we floated the idea of a magazine, and of some new, open-membership research organisation, there was overwhelming support for the former, and absolutely none for the latter. Most of the leading names actively supported us, and have continued to do so with publicity, and with much of their best written work.

Then, there seemed to be a bright future ahead, with substantial and consistent reports of spontaneous phenomena coming in, a widespread group of apparently capable and balanced investigators, and a sense of common purpose among those of us working in many different areas of the field. The SPR was showing signs of worldliness and, praise be, something like democracy, and while I have never believed that our questions would ever accede to easy 'answers', I thought there was a very good chance of improving the standard of discussion and the sharing of experience at least to enable us to move towards what I remember someone calling 'a new paradigm in research'.

However, nothing changes - or not much, anyway. After our Prague Spring, or Solidarity, or whatever, the old men of the SPR sent in the tanks and crushed all the life out of that organisation for at least another ten years, and ASSAP was founded. But affairs that start on the rebound are seldom successful, and my views about the partners who have come out on top in that relationship are only too well-known: there is precious little of 'scientific study' there.

More disturbingly, and it may be, in retrospect, a fascinating phenomenon in itself, much of our phenomena stopped. Just stopped. Or it seemed to, anyway. Certainly, while the flow of reports did not exactly dry up, in Britain at least much of the exotic stuff disappeared. The revival in physical mediumship petered out quite unpleasantly in accusation and rumour, coinciding not a little with the departure of Alan Cleaver from 'Psychic News', which has itself settled for what is safe and acceptable, as it always used to. And this had a knock-on effect, polarising researchers into the incredibly boring at one end (I never wish to read another word about the Ganzfeld) and the ineffably silly (hello Spearman's and the 'Green Stone' extravaganza formation team) at the other. If nothing happens, it seems that we have to make something up. But it's like the 'Why 1947?' question, or asking 'who made God?' If we can't work out why 'it' came and went, or what or why it was while we were here, what have we been doing all this time?

It may just be that our subject is now extinct. That we will have to be historians in future. Indeed, if I had to guess whether or not we will ever see a revival in extensive spontaneous anomalous phenomena, I would say that we will not until there is a major international crisis, or the millennium approaches, whichever is the sooner.

On a separate insert in this issue, you will find information about my intention to revive the 'End Times Bulletin', which is really an attempt to write history as it happens, and to commentate on the reasons and motivations on what appears to be happening, and what people are choosing to believe. That seems to me like a good thing to do, because it is in the areas of belief and social conditioning that so many of us seem so often to end up. Look at the comments on the 'Why 1947?' question: we are ufologists attempting to perform the functions of professional analysts of personal and social behaviour. We seldom find any answers, but with the exceptions of Hilary Evans, and the UFO-mystic and first-rate bookseller Bob Girard, no-one is talking about UFO's, really.

The skills of investigation and analysis must be carefully preserved: and, of course, there will always be some reports to deal with. But this is a key, ideal time for retrospective work. Happily, we have already the finest example of such work I have yet come across, and the most important new book in our field since 'Operation Trojan Horse' in Hilary Evans's marvellous new book 'Visions - Apparitions - Alien Visitors' which has just been published, price £9.95 by the Aquarian Press. Subtitled 'A Comparative Study of the Entity Enigma' it is the definitive investigation of spontaneous, apparently cognescent phenomena that the author has been working up to for several years, and puts Hilary firmly at the head of innovators in the paranormal field. I only regret that we do not have time to review it properly, and only hope that it will be marketed, hard, as a mass-market paperback, under a less clumsy title. It makes a mockery of narrow theories, be they sceptical or based on pseudo-geology. It argues superbly the case for our spending the time we do on our subject.

But there is much other retrospective work to be done. The ASSAP series of books - again Hilary's brainchild, and what the SPR should have let him get on with - are all excellent, if surprisingly sceptical to the trained observer. They cover specific subjects with care and imagination. For me, one subject that cries out to be properly dealt with, above all others, is the 'investigator effect', often considered in psi research, in the context of the investigation of spontaneous phenomena. And, while I cannot undertake the task myself, there is one obvious area in which to start such work: the 'high strangeness' cases on the UFOIN files for the period 1976-1980.

This may well look like a parting shot against those who I see as being in large part responsible for what I regard as the misdirection of ASSAP. Perhaps it is. But in the light of what most of UFOIN's most prolific investigators have been seen to do since; the books and articles they have published, the people they have by choice involved themselves with, and so on, I consider that an objective, intelligent review of a number of the high strangeness cases of that period particularly involving going back to the witnesses to discuss both the reported events and the investigations, might produce some highly revealing results. It might, of course, validate the original reports, many of which appeared in, and brightened the pages of the now-agonised Flying Saucer Review, but I suspect that if properly conducted, we would actually learn vitally important lessons about the investigator effect, and about the way in which the mythos of all kinds of spontaneous events - both individually and as an element in our culture - has developed, and can do so again.

A couple of years ago, a great deal of time was valuably expended on the drawing-up of a code of conduct for investigators, and there was much talk of training. But if I can draw one conclusion from both the events of the past 3 - 4 years, and particularly from the marvellous material that has been published in the ten issues of 'Common Ground', it is that the skills we have developed are not commensurate with the tentative conclusions that we have drawn. In simple, we teach people the rudiments of astronomy, but when we write, we write that we are dealing with some of the most complex psychological and social phenomena that it is possible to imagine. If the problem is that we are positing such phenomena in a vacuum, that those with the professional skills in the psychological subjects cannot relate to our theories, it is probable that our theories are nonsense. If they do make some sense to professionals - and there is reason to believe that they do - then we are making drastic mistakes in the way that we train our 'own' people - those who come to us to fulfil their interest - and in the way that we put our subject over to the world at large. Briefly, we can no longer sell UFO magazines with UFO's on the cover, but fill them with material wholly sceptical of the objective reality of such phenomena. If we cannot interest outsiders without these little deceits, we should pursue our work quietly. If we are not entirely honest, we have no right to impress our views, in books, magazines, or any other form, to those who have no hope of working out what we really mean. If we know what we really mean in the first place.

Kevin McClure.