

Contactees traditionally have made ufologists uncomfortable. In the 1950s the antics of such flamboyant figures as Adamski, George Van Tassel, Daniel Fry, and others drove serious-minded researchers into a frenzy. The latter saw the former as little other than con artists who were unscrupulously fleecing the gullible. That may have been part of the truth, but it was not all of it. The rest included social, psychological, religious, and even paranormal elements to which the contactees' harshest critics paid no attention. As the UFO phenomenon (or in any case the ufologists' perception of it) grew in complexity, and new and very different contactees appeared on the scene, ufologists were forced to take a fresh new look at an old but continuing problem. In what follows sociologist David Stuppel, psychiatrist Berthold Eric Schwarz, CEIII specialist Ted Bloecher, and religious historian J. Gordon Melton examine contactees from their own particular vantage points.

Visiting with Space People: A Symposium on the Contactee Phenomenon

David Stuppel:

Let's begin with a definition.

In contactee parlance a "Space Brother" is *not* an entity who drops by and gives nonsense information such as described in John Keel's *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* or Jacques Vallée's *The Invisible College*. Rather, a Space Brother is a being who visits a contactee and imparts some special knowledge to him; by using that information the contactee can then go forth and help humanity.

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compiled and edited by

Curtis G. Fuller

and the editors of

FATE Magazine—

Mary Margaret Fuller,

Jerome Clark,

Betty Lou White

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Because he has this special knowledge, the contactee becomes a special person. He is the link between the extranormal force (the space people) and the people he wishes to address. Now this relationship that connects the Space Brothers, the contactee, and the rest of us is an inherently unstable one because it depends on the contactee, and if the contactee moves out of the picture for some reason or other, the whole system breaks down.

Such a breakdown might occur within a contactee cult itself. Usually such groups grow up around a single contactee but often, as time goes by, another person within a group may claim contacts of his own. In fact this sort of thing happens quite often. From what I have learned in my own investigation, most contactees start out as non-contactee members of these groups, then learn their craft in this situation.

An excellent description of the kind of war that can erupt between two opposing contactees within a group appears in a book well known to us sociologists, *When Prophecy Fails*, by Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter. *Prophecy* deals with a woman named Mrs. Keech who experienced certain revelations from the space people and who gathered a group around her, only in due course to be challenged by a member who became a contactee herself.

The problem of instability can arise not just at the group level but also at the national level, where the problem of information from special sources is extremely important. The right to give moral advice is a practice that is jealously guarded in any society; after all, it's not just anybody who can rise up and determine what the rules for living shall be. So if you look at the history of societies, especially industrial societies, you'll see that only the priests and the shamans—in other words, individuals who occupy clearly defined religious positions—are given this right; this happens because these special religious figures not only have special channels to the supernatural but also hold special working relationships with those in power. And the religious figures function to serve power.

One way they do this is by mystifying power—and therefore guaranteeing its perpetuation. For instance, the

idea of the divine right of kings suggests that, indeed, the gods smile on the kings and approve of their domination over people. And beyond that, this essentially religious intelligentsia also guarantees a particular way of viewing the world, a particular intellectual model.

What happens in modern society, in which the church isn't so important? How can power justify itself? In this social, religious, and political context people such as contactees who claim a special access to special information are a potentially revolutionary force.

The best example I can give from the contactee tradition is a man named Guy Ballard, who, with his wife, Edna, started the I AM movement in the 1930s. The Ballards, essentially theosophists, channeled various different ascended masters; among these, although they weren't the most prominent, were certain Venusians called "The Lord of the Flame." One was a fellow named Senanda, who, they said, was Jesus Christ.

Guy and Edna Ballard claimed to have special access to these supernatural forces and used them to command their followers—they maintained they had over a million of them—in various demented ways. Ballard created something that began to resemble a paramilitary organization.

He absorbed many of American fascist William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirts into his following. Ballard wanted to become President of the United States. Obviously he never accomplished his goal—he died in 1939—but in his time he scared a lot of people, in the same way that many of us are scared by the Reverend Moon, because he commanded the same kind of fanatical allegiance.

If you look at the contactee groups today, you'll see that most of the stable, larger ones are actually neo-I AM groups, with some sort of tie to the Ballards' organization. They are not, however, revolutionary in nature; to the contrary, they're generally quite conservative. Their message tells people to turn within, to become part of the cosmos, to give up the active life.

So, although we don't have any clear revolutionary potential at the moment, the possibility is there. I think specifically of Uri Geller, who excites a lot of people, who

claims exotic powers, who supposedly has contacted space people, and who may have the ability to do what Guy Ballard only hoped to do.

Berthold Eric Schwarz:

I'm going to discuss briefly the psychic and psychiatric aspects of the contactee situation. These interest me because I am, after all, a psychiatrist, a parapsychologist, and a ufologist.

A contact is not just an isolated event in an individual's life but something that must be viewed in the larger context of his past history and his postcontact experiences, attitudes, and behavior. That leads, naturally, to the first and most obvious question: What type of people are contactees? Are they kooks?

Not necessarily. They come from all walks of life. They are Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, atheists, Republicans and Democrats—the whole spectrum of humanity. But if you look at them more carefully, you begin to detect certain interesting patterns in their personalities.

Many of them have what we psychiatrists call dissociative personalities, in some cases even multiple personalities. They are susceptible to trance states, which makes them, by the way, unusually good hypnotic subjects. Sometimes they come from troubled family situations: husband-wife conflict, sibling rivalry, or whatever. A lot of anxiety, hostility, and insecurity simmers just below the surface. Many are loners, rugged individualists. Yet they manage to lead normal, responsible lives, holding down jobs, heading families, refraining from antisocial conduct.

But often that changes when they have their UFO sighting—and they blow up like an erupting volcano. Did their psychological problems cause them to imagine the experience—or did a real experience cause the problems to surface?

We simply don't know. We do know that after this supposed experience percipients may undergo alternating states of consciousness, slipping in and out of trance states, during which they may channel messages from oddly

named entities. I remember the case of a longtime contactee who told me that his first contact was in 1924, when "Retsim came through." "Retsim," though the man didn't seem to realize it, is "Mister" spelled backward.

So far as content is concerned, these messages are pure garbage. Still, whatever their cause, whatever their source, they "come through."

Another thing that happens is the unleashing of psi phenomena around the percipient. Perhaps it's to be expected, since trancelike states are conducive to the production of ESP and psychokinesis. So we have episodes of telepathy, clairvoyance, synchronicity, levitation, and poltergeist and out-of-the-body phenomena.

What does all this add up to? There are no final answers; the work in these areas, as we all know, is just beginning. But I'd like to suggest a possible frame of reference in which we might view this question.

Maybe the UFO experience is a way for these people to fulfill themselves. They're living ordinary humdrum lives, really not getting anywhere, struggling to contain a growing inner tension. Suddenly the UFO comes along; contact with its occupants is established and that's just the beginning because there are other wonders down the pike. Sometimes it turns out that the UFO contact successfully serves the percipient's need; other times it turns out that it does not and the person ends up even worse off than he was before—such as the contactee who tried on four occasions, unsuccessfully, thank God—to kill his wife.

The original, triggering experience, the UFO sighting, could have been any one of a number of things, from a real "objective" encounter to some sort of psychic projection to pure hallucination. Whatever it might be, it affects certain kinds of people in certain kinds of ways, and they go on to believe they are in contact with beings from outer space.

Ted Bloecher:

I got involved in ufology back in the 1950s when I helped form Civilian Saucer Intelligence in New York. Early on we devised some hard-and-fast rules when it came

to dealing with contactees and contact stories. So far as we were concerned, there were the good guys and there were the bad guys. The good guys were the UFO beings who didn't speak in English and who were small and non-human. The bad guys were the tall blond ones who were human, delivered benevolent messages, and appointed selected Earthlings to speak in their behalf.

We established this rigid rule because our firsthand involvement with George Adamski left us with a distinctively unpleasant taste in our mouths.

Around the time of CSI's creation George Adamski's book *Flying Saucers Have Landed* came out. We were looking for speakers, so we asked Adamski if he would like to lecture for us. He said he would and he agreed to speak in April 1954 for a modest honorarium and a chance to plug his book.

On the day of the talk he arrived in town bright and early. Our secretary went down to the British Book Center, which had arranged the meeting for us, to take Adamski down to the hall where he would speak. But then, to our considerable chagrin, Adamski suddenly announced that he couldn't meet with us that evening; he had to take the train back to California because the government urgently wanted him to get in touch with the Space Brothers. It seems atomic tests had so badly polluted the atmosphere that only the space people had the means to clean up the mess.

We were of course taken aback. But our secretary had the presence of mind to point out that with his honorarium and the expense money he could still do the lecture, then fly back and arrive home in plenty of time. That saved the day, evidently because Adamski couldn't think of an excuse to counter the suggestion. We had the unmistakable impression that he had concocted the story on the spot to get out of speaking to what he belatedly realized would be a skeptical audience.

This particular episode was not the only reason we had our doubts about the contactees, of course. We also saw that they inevitably hit the lecture trail, wrote books about their claims, and generally exploited their supposed

experiences. Furthermore, in their stories the contact experiences were never traumatic; the contactees were never frightened by what was happening to them. By way of contrast, people who reported experiences with humanoid, non-English-speaking entities were almost invariably terrified, confused, and perplexed—just as one would expect them to be if their reports were true.

From our point of view two types of claims were being made. One type of claimant had a *contact*: a verbal exchange with a humanlike extraterrestrial; the other, the one who sighted a humanoid but didn't talk with it, had an *encounter*. We were willing to consider the second type, but we rejected virtually out of hand the former.

In the 1960s the classic contactees seemed to fade into the background. They were still there, of course, but they no longer occupied the prominent position they once had held. A new development was taking place—one which broke down the established rules and which presented us with a whole new series of problems and possibilities.

To begin with, there was the Gary Wilcox story.

Wilcox, a young Newark Valley, New York, farmer, saw a shiny object on top of a hill on his land. When he approached it, he discovered that it was an oval-shaped object. He was touching it when suddenly, as he would state in an affidavit, "two small men about four feet high came out from under the . . . object." They were dressed in what looked like white coveralls. For the next two hours, according to Wilcox's account, they talked with him about such matters as agriculture, fertilizer, and the hazards of space travel. They told him they were from Mars.

Oddly enough, Wilcox's experience took place on the morning of April 24, 1964. Later that same day policeman Lonnie Zamora was to have a much more widely publicized encounter when he saw an oval-shaped object land near Socorro, New Mexico, and briefly glimpsed two small humanoids wearing white coveralls.

Gary Wilcox did not hit the lecture trail. He did not write a book. He made no effort to exploit his story and in fact lapsed back into obscurity as soon as possible. In

short, he violated our hard-and-fast rule that all contact messages were morally uplifting occult nonsense. If there was nonsense in the information the beings imparted to Wilcox—and surely there was, since we know Mars is not inhabited—at least it was a kind of nonsense we'd never heard before.

Then things got even more confusing. On November 2, 1966, Woodrow Derenberger of West Virginia had a perfectly straightforward encounter along a well-traveled interstate highway; there were even other witnesses to the UFO and its occupant. NICAP, with which I was then employed, conducted a thorough investigation, and the report stood up. But then Derenberger began to do exactly what the 1950s contactees did—he hit the lecture trail, wrote a book, and exploited his story. His claims grew increasingly unbelievable. He was meeting spacemen every day—in his kitchen, on his lawn, everywhere. In other words, the initial story, which had a high degree of credibility, broke down because of subsequent events.

Other stories by other initially credible claimants met a similar fate. Something new was going on here. It was almost as if the witnesses were being programmed to discredit themselves. In April 1967 Carroll Watts of Wellington, Texas, supposedly had several encounters, including an onboard experience with a physical examination. But then suddenly he went off the deep end, and the escalation of the claims went so high that finally no one could take them seriously any longer.

So by the end of the 1960s we had a new type of contact situation which was distinctly different from what we had observed in the 1950s.

In the last couple of years my skepticism of the more exotic claims has not exactly been broken, but it's certainly been shaken. Now I find myself listening to people with a straight face and suspending judgment. I no longer can retreat into the security of hard-and-fast rules.

I'm not so concerned that I have to have an immediate answer to every question because I'm not sure we really know what the questions are. Until we can work that one, I'll listen to outrageous claims up to a certain

point; I'll make some preliminary judgments but I won't hold myself to them if further information comes along to change the picture.

J. Gordon Melton:

So what does the Virgin Mary have to do with UFO studies?

A great deal, in my opinion. If you bear with me for a few minutes, I think you will see what I mean.

Our adventure into the world of the Virgin Mary begins in the little northern Italian town of San Damiano, where beginning in 1964 Rosa Quattrini claimed weekly contacts with the Blessed Virgin. In her first experience Rosa saw the Virgin floating in the air over a tree. Mary talked to her, calling herself the Mother of Love, and said she had chosen Rosa as her messenger to warn people of impending cataclysms which could be averted only if people returned to the Church.

Rosa was an ecstatic type—that is, she would go into trance when she talked with the Virgin. People would gather around but only she could see Mary. Finally, when Rosa asked for a sign, the Virgin promised to provide one in 1967. On October 16 of that year it came when an onlooker photographed the Virgin floating in a brilliant light above the tree where Rosa had been seeing her. In time other pictures would be taken.

Rosa's contacts with the Virgin have also continued. San Damiano has become a shrine to which pilgrims flock. Her weekly messages from the Virgin are typed, transcribed, translated, and circulated throughout the world. I receive a bundle of them every month.

Next we turn to La Salette, France, where on September 19, 1846, Maximin Giraud, eleven, and Melanie Mathieu, fourteen, who were supposed to be tending a herd of cattle, fell asleep on the job and, when they woke up in the middle of the afternoon, discovered to their alarm that the cows had wandered off and were nowhere in sight. So the two set out to look for them.

Suddenly Melanie saw an intense green circular light

which was descending slowly. It was so bright that it almost blinded her. She called it to Maximin's attention and as the two stared at it, the light parted and in the center of that light a woman appeared. The woman was weeping.

The children were understandably frightened but finally they concluded she wasn't going to harm them, so they walked up to her. The woman, who had been sitting, rose to her feet and assured them they had nothing to fear. Then she gave them a message.

The message was not a happy one. It predicted famine—correctly, as it turned out, since the following year the great potato famine struck all of Western Europe, particularly Ireland. She also told them that many infant deaths would occur because of the famine. Finally, she delivered a secret message which today only the pope and a couple of close advisers know. Its content has never been revealed.

News of the event spread rapidly. Although this was the first and only time the lady appeared at La Salette, pilgrims soon were descending on the site. The local priests, the local police, a number of prominent churchmen, and finally the Papal Commission investigated the incident. In due course the Church announced it was satisfied that this had been a true visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary—one of the few such episodes to win the Church's endorsement.

The third place I would like to take you is Zeitoun, Egypt, a suburb of Cairo, in the early morning hours of April 3, 1968. Two workmen saw what appeared to be a nun dressed in white about to jump off the large dome of the newly completed Church of St. Mary, affiliated with the Coptic Orthodox Catholic Church. Other people gathered to watch what they assumed would be an imminent suicide. Finally the priest emerged and when he saw what was happening, he knew immediately it was no ordinary woman up there—it was the Virgin Mary.

For three years, at least three times a week, the figure appeared suddenly either on top of the cathedral or else in the garden adjacent to the cathedral. As many as ten thousand people saw it at various times—Jews, Moslems, Christians of all denominations. The apparition would sometimes last for as long as six hours. It would walk about and wave to the crowd. Sometimes it would be accom-

panied by flashes of light, loud noises, and strange birdlike shapes which darted about at a rapid rate of speed without flapping their wings.

Mary was dressed in a nunlike costume. On several occasions she floated up into the air and disappeared into the full moon. Many people claimed miraculous healings associated with the Virgin's appearances.

These three incidents are representative of some of the over six hundred Virgin Mary sightings which catalogers have compiled since 1830. These, by the way, are not the most spectacular, but because of the photographs they are among the most credible. The most spectacular one, of course, is the celebrated episode in Fatima, Portugal, where a huge crowd of rain-soaked pilgrims saw the clouds part and a bright sunlike object appear to dry everybody out; angel hair fell from the sky and messages were given. Everybody for fifty miles around saw the "sun dance." The same thing occurred at Garabandal, Spain, in the early 1960s. And then of course there are the well-known happenings in Lourdes, France.

By now the relation of the Marian contacts to the UFO contacts should be obvious. But in case it's not, let's spell it out.

The contactee pattern is quite simple. There is first of all an initial contact. This initial contact is characterized by such things as the altered state of consciousness of the individual contacted. He may wake up in the middle of the night feeling drawn to the contact site or, like the two little French children, he may have his daily routine interrupted by the exotic visitor.

Second, there are the messages. Often they are admonitions which warn us to stop war, nuclear proliferation, or pollution. Sometimes they concern new scientific "knowledge." For example, in 1952 George Van Tassel was told how to build a rejuvenation machine. Ever since then he's been putting all his money and all his followers' money into work on the device.

And there is always the information about where the entities come from. I can imagine a debate at the Vatican Council comparable to our UFO debates—that is, was Mary really an extraterrestrial traveler coming here from

heaven or was she an extradimensional being created by the psychic morass of the times?

A rationale for the contact is always provided. *Why me?* the contactee always wonders. *Why was I chosen to be contacted?* The answers to these questions are similar, whether they are given by the Virgin or by a Space Brother.

Then, of course, there are all the paranormal events that accompany the contact—communication by telepathy being the main characteristic that runs through all the material. But there are also healing, levitation, dematerialization, and astral travel. There are also channeled messages, volumes and volumes and volumes of them.

Finally there is the organization. One discovery I've made about the early flying-saucer contactees is that over half of them went on to found their own religious cult. Everybody from Adamski to Fry to Bethurum had his own little group, whether it was the Sanctuary of Thought, the George Adamski Foundation, Understanding, Inc., the Aetherius Society. Some thirty-five to forty of these groups still exist. Some are putting out fancy literature which is attracting a relatively wide audience.

One difference is that Roman Catholics and other members of liturgical churches tend to see the Virgin more, whereas saucer contactees are spread all over the theological spectrum. Still, appearances of the Virgin are by no means limited to Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox people, or Coptics. I have records of about three dozen protestant ministers who are willing to state that they have had visions of the Virgin. We also have the testimony of Ramakrishna, the founder of the Vedanta Society, who had a famous Marian vision.

What can we conclude from all of this?

I think we can safely point to a strange coincidence between the form of the event as it occurs in a saucer-contactee situation and as it occurs in the Blessed Virgin Mary context. That suggests that as Blessed Virgin Mary apparitions are clearly psychic and religious in nature, the contactee phenomenon has a religious visionary component and that future comparisons of UFOs with such things as apparitions, mystical ecstatic phenomena, spirit-

ualist and theosophical claims, and shamanism would be a fruitful line of research.

At this point such comparisons as we have made between the Virgin and the UFO phenomenon—and between the fairy-faith and the UFO phenomenon such as Vallée has made in his *Passport to Magonia*—are merely suggestive. Neither the UFOs nor the Marian sightings have been subjected to the kind of statistical quantification required to establish a secure connection. Such suggestions will of course add strength to the hypothesis that parapsychological components are a key element of the UFO phenomenon and that any treatment that ignores this element is missing a good share of the point. Neither can we ignore the contactee, who is integral to the whole UFO phenomenon.

Jacques Vallée has pointed out the basic levels of the UFO problem. Each level has a reality all its own, he says. Some, however, have argued that by moving the emphasis from the physical level to the psychological and sociological aspects of the UFO phenomenon, we are losing an objective reference to UFOs themselves.

I believe such a complaint is based on a misunderstanding of what such a shift does. The psychological level on which the contactee operates in the UFO context involves more than just the subjective states, the hallucinations and the phobias and fears of the claimant. After one has dealt with that very important aspect of the phenomenon, there still remains a residue of repeated strange paranormal occurrences. These effects must have a cause.

What I'm trying to say is that after you analyze the UFO phenomenon and say, "Gee whiz, that's just a Jungian archetype sitting up there in the sky and the person is having an experience with the archetype"—after you've said that, whether it's true or not, you still have to deal with such troublesome occurrences as terminally ill people getting well, objects levitating and materializing, and pictures being taken of things that are not easy to explain. These elements are all part of this psychological aspect of the problem.

When we speak of "UFOs as Mind Phenomena," we are referring to a number of things, all relating to the mental aspects of the UFO problem. These include such basic questions as the psychological processes involved in the perception and reporting of UFO experiences. In other words, do people see what they think they see? When they tell others about it, do they report their experiences honestly?

On the other end of the spectrum is the question of the parapsychological parameters of the UFO experience. Most ufologists concede that psychic phenomena play a role in the overall UFO phenomenon. For example, witnesses may report that a "mental impulse" caused them suddenly to step outside, where they saw their UFO, and frequently CEIII claimants say that UFO beings communicated with them using telepathy. But beyond that matters get murkier, and ufologists disagree sharply on whether UFOs have psychic aspects or whether they are intrinsically psychic—that is, whether they are more akin to apparitions than to machines.

The mind-phenomena symposium was held the afternoon and morning before the International UFO Congress officially opened at 1:30 P.M. on June 24, 1977. Nearly all the speakers at the public congress attended; so did several nonspeakers who were interested in the questions to be discussed. Among the latter were Jule Eisenbud, M.D., psychiatrist and associate professor of medicine at the University of Colorado Medical School, and Harold Sherman, noted author of books on psychic phenomena.

J. Gordon Melton, Ph.D., chaired the meeting, which resulted in a lively debate on one of the most troubling—and fascinating—aspects of the UFO mystery.