



Transcending the Observer Effect in Ufology

by Michael Miley

As I range through the literature of alien encounter, or interview those who feel they've been abducted, or profile the camps of materialists versus spiritualists, or examine the negative arguments of the skeptics, I'm reminded of the "observer effect" in quantum physics, where the mere act of observing a subatomic "property" seems somehow to miraculously bring it into being. Perhaps we can't find a "final" answer to the UFO/alien mystery because the experience is altered in the very act of our observing it. Thus, everything turns on the perspective of the observer, on what he or she brings to the events or to their subsequent interpretation. This rather unsatisfying conclusion leaves us a bit stranded among competing observers until we probe a bit deeper: just who is experiencing or interpreting the encounter and just how clear is their looking glass?

In our jaded, post-modern world, we seem to be lost on the shifting plateaus of relativity, where deconstructionists atomize the "text" of paranormal human experience (while denying the reality of the experience itself), and where no perspective appears more privileged than any other, since we've apparently lost the will or criteria for

ranking or judging our experiences in a way that everyone can agree upon. And so ufology is given over to tribal squabbling, with different camps arguing passionately for their particular beliefs. This squabbling includes the anxious supporters of modern science, UFO believers and skeptics alike, who are sometimes belligerent champions of "objectivity" and who love to pound the drums of the material world and the scientific method as the ultimate arbiters for all kinds of truth. Unfortunately, this kind of naive scientism is just another form of religious fundamentalism, the propaganda of mere apology, born of

a subtle reductionism and unworthy of thoughtful people everywhere.

The good news, however, is that a truer "aperspectival" approach than mere scientism has appeared, and mystical philosophers like Sri Aurobindo, Jean Gebser and Ken Wilber are pointing the way. What these thinkers have in common is a spiritual involutionary/evolutionary model for the "Great Nest of Being" in which we find ourselves. This vision is a modernization of the "Perennial Philosophy" that shows how the Spirit involves itself in Matter, how consciousness evolves over time, and how the world seen by the human mind is ultimately the world it is capable of seeing. This is

extremely pertinent for a proper understanding of the UFO experience, and particularly for its paranormal aspects.

In Wilber's "four quadrant model" of this aperspectival approach, all human knowledge of the Kosmos (Wilber's spelling for a "spiritualized" Cosmos) can be charted against a temporal and *spatial* positioning of the subject (See Figure 1, The Four Quadrants). The *temporal* dimension of the model explains (among many other things), how human culture evolves over time through archaic, magical, mythic, rational and suprarational phases; while the *spatial* dimen-

Ken Wilber on the cover of his book "A Brief History of Everything"

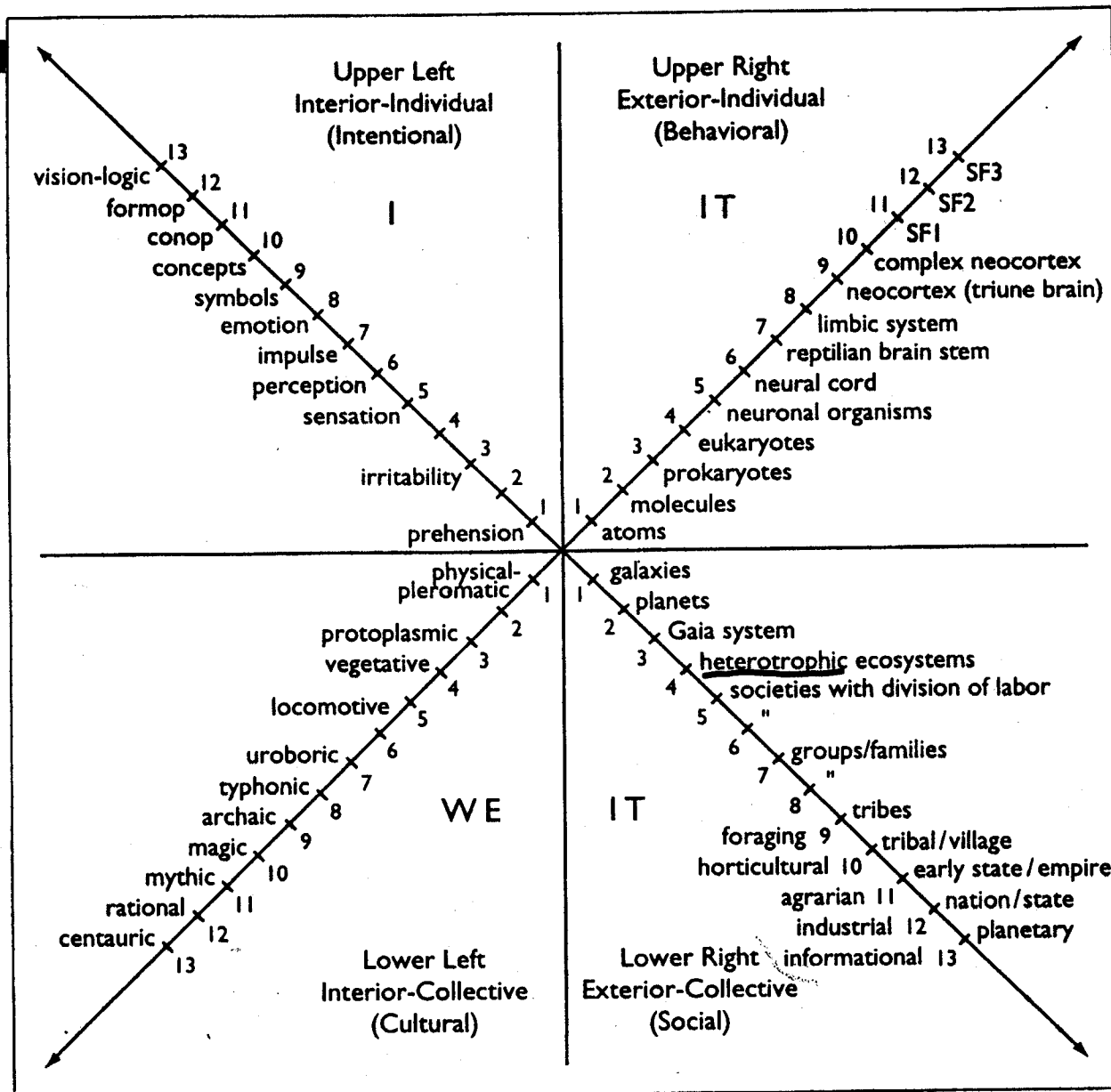


Figure 1.

The Four Quadrants. Ken Wilber's quadrant system provides an aperspectival means to map all human experience and knowledge through "orienting generalizations" about Kosmic evolution, seen from the interior and exterior vantagepoints of I, We and It. (From *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution*, by Ken Wilber, Shambhala Publications, Boston, MA. 1995.)

sion of the model explains how the kinds of knowledge we obtain of the world are contingent upon whether we take an interior (I, We) or an exterior (It) vantage point. An aperspectival model, therefore, embraces what's true in all perspectives, while refusing to be bound by any of them. Moreover, Wilber's quadrant system gives us a handy tool by which we can rank the utility of different worldviews, through a process of judging their span or depth. Worldviews that are more ubiquitous have greater span by definition, since more individuals partake of them. By contrast, worldviews that take more details of the world into account are said

to have greater depth and are ultimately more meaningful than those with greater span.

So how is this pertinent to ufology? The *temporal* factors in ufologi-

cal research describe an "observer effect" that's contingent upon the historically determined perceptual, psychological and cognitive capacity of the person having the alien

experience—or for that matter, anyone doing ufological research. Our experience of the world is ultimately influenced by the world-view that seems psychologically and cognitively self-evident to us. But what's self-evident to a native of Australia is markedly less self-evident to a technologist at MIT—and *vice versa*. Each has historically and developmentally determined "cognitive boundaries" that shape and delimit the world he or she is capable of seeing. Thus, the world-view of the scientist is no less prejudiced than the worldview of the shaman, but in different, historical-

have had the experience. However, a scientific ufology will *also* investigate the alien experience from the outside in, as an object for study, because science is in the business of investigating "Its."

That said, the status of standing outside of a UFO experience doesn't automatically convey a superior vantage point for its comprehension, contrary to what the typical scientific ufologist believes, simply because the typical researcher is just as bound as the experiencer (perhaps more so) by his own subjective limitations. Indeed, it's my contention that

from within consciousness itself, as subjects of the very experience, and not as an object of a scientific investigation. But it will be a different, more highly-evolved human subject that will do the comprehending.

Here's where things get really interesting. It's the contention of the spiritual evolutionary philosophers I've mentioned above that human consciousness is evolving over time and that the various "sciences of consciousness" (empirical methods for spiritual and psychological development) enable human beings to take their own evolution in hand and to accelerate it. Additionally, the UFO/alien encounter itself often seems to accentuate certain aspects of human consciousness (which is perhaps a clue to its meaning, for those who have the ears to hear.) What this means for the eventual understanding of the UFO/alien phenomenon is that, as human beings awaken to their higher cognitive and spiritual capacities, new facets of encounter that have been right under our noses all along, but which we were unable to see, will necessarily come into consciousness. And this will happen whether you view "alien beings" as projected aspects of human awareness or as independent, spiritual or extraterrestrial beings. In either case, our awareness of the content of the alien encounter experience is determined by the level of wakefulness of the person having it—and, for that matter, by the researcher researching it.

One measure of our current wakefulness (or the lack thereof) can be judged against the insight of the late great Hindu seer Ramana Maharshi. According to Maharshi, That which is not present in deep dreamless sleep is not real. This is a shocking statement, if you understand what's implied. Paradoxically, what's implied is

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ly determined ways. Furthermore, both the shaman and the scientist maintain a set of assumptions about the world that color what kinds of questions they might meaningfully pose about the universe at large—or, in our case, about the UFO experience.

The *spatial* factors in ufological research describe an "observer effect" that's contingent upon the standpoint of observation. A "subjective" stance describes the life-world, seen through our emerging consciousness. In other words, how do I actually experience the world and the things within it? (Or, how do I actually experience a UFO and the beings within it?) As an "I" among others, either a single "I" or a collective "We." Thus, any discussion of a UFO/alien encounter must necessarily take into account the sincere subjective testimonies of individuals who

"objective" science, though it's an absolutely necessary part of ufology, will never provide us with a complete answer to the alien encounter phenomenon because, by definition, it only strives to investigate it as an *object*. Moreover, the typical stance of an investigator is one that usually neglects the implications of "the observer effect" lurking in the midst of any investigation.

What cognitive limitations and prejudicial beliefs do experiencers and investigators bring to the table? Plenty. At this stage of human evolution, the observer is never neutral, never without his or her own cognitive limitations, which inherently color the things it can perceive. It's for this reason that I paradoxically believe that the final answer to the alien encounter experience will ultimately be comprehended only

that the ultimately Real is always fully aware and that any human being who loses consciousness when they go to sleep at night, whether in REM or in the dreamless state, is *not fully Real*. Thus, only fully-awakened human beings are in a position to know What's Really Going On in the world—or in any apparent “alien encounter.”

In the final analysis, the “observer effect” in ufology will only be transcended by fully awakened human beings. What ufologists and experiencers tend to forget is that understanding alien encounter, at our current historically-determined cognitive level, is rather like looking myopically through a keyhole. We see the figures in the next room walking to and fro as they happen to pass in front of the keyhole, but we can only see them in bits and pieces. A hand or limb here, a head or eyeball there. What's going on in that room is only a construct, a limited interpretation, of a collection of partially witnessed events. And our partial, piece-meal viewpoint is further delimited when we suspect that we're being manipulated by beings who are apparently far more advanced than ourselves. Indeed, we'll never understand who they are or what they're up to as long as we're limited to looking through a keyhole. What's needed is the means to open the door.

When advanced yogis go to sleep at night, they do not lose the thread of their awareness, neither in dreaming nor in deep dreamless sleep. For example, in *One Taste* (Shambhala Publications, 1999), Wilber writes in his journal of a spiritual retreat at which he was completely conscious for 11 straight days, whether his body was active or lying down “asleep.” Imagine, therefore, a human being that does not lose its awareness either during or after

Observant.

Michael Miley explains a few remaining items in his spiritual, evolutionary view of the UFO/alien phenomenon, at a talk given this year at SHIFT, in Redwood City, California.

an “alien encounter,” one that cannot be made to forget what transpired, and one that doesn't require the limited methods of recollection, interviews or hypnosis to recover its memories. Or take it a giant step further. Imagine a human being with the same kinds of abilities as the beings reported in UFO encounters. What would such a human being see as it looked into that alien mirror? Perhaps a “ufological goading” to become fully awakened human beings

is the ultimate meaning of the UFO experience.

And so, here's a *koan* for awakening beings everywhere, no matter whether they're There or Here: If you see the Buddha walking down the road, abduct him quickly! And then bring him back so he can give us a report! It might be the best thing that could happen to Them or Us. ●

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