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# UFOs in the Age of Information

by Steve Mizrach

"The theory of space and time is a cultural artifact made possible by the invention of graph paper. If we had invented the digital computer before graph paper, we might have a very different theory of information today... What modern computer scientists have realized is that ordering by space and time is the worst possible way to store data... If there is no time dimension as we usually assume there is, we may be traversing incidents by association; modern computers retrieve information associatively... If we live in the associative universe of the software scientist rather than the Cartesian sequential universe of the space-time physicist, then miracles are no longer irrational events... at a time when we are beginning to suspect that **computer-based network communication may create altered states conducive to psychic functioning** [my emphasis], a new type of physical experiment is becoming possible...

"These experiments would aim at probing the reality of information-handling by the brain through associative constructs. **The SRI experiments with Swann and Price** [my emphasis] suggest that remote-viewing is based on an addressing scheme. Is it possible to promote coincidences and peculiar effects **by systematically creating physical structures serving as information singularities?** Consciousness could be defined as the process by which informational associations are retrieved and traversed."

-- Jacques Vallee, Messengers of Deception

"A perturbation in the reality field in which a spontaneous self-monitoring negentropic vortex is formed, tending progressively to subsume and incorporate its environment into arrangements of information. Characterized by quasi-consciousness, purpose, intelligence, growth, and an armillary coherence."

How the "Great Soviet Dictionary" defines VALIS (the Vast Active Living Intelligence System), according to Philip K. Dick in the novel Valis.

## Introduction

I begin this examination of the evolution of the UFO phenomenon with these quotes from Jacques Vallee (who is at once a UFO researcher and a computer network scientist) and Philip K. Dick (a science-fiction writer who might have been a contactee (of sorts)). In this quote, Vallee offers an incredible new way of thinking about *parapsychological* phenomena and synchronicity, perhaps even cosmology itself. But I want to particularly focus on a key concept that Vallee stresses here and

elsewhere in his work: that UFOs focus as a kind of cybernetic "**control system**", and that the UFO might be an "**information singularity**" of a particular kind.

Following his 1974 Valis "experience" Dick believed himself to be either the victim of a Soviet psychotronic experiment ("psychotronics" being the understanding of the external electronic control of human perception and behavior) or in contact with an alien satellite placed an orbit by *beings* from Sirius. His quote suggests a similar way of looking at the UFO as a kind of psychotronic information technology. Paradoxically, it's the growth of global communication technologies that is allowing us to probe and test this hypothesis.

## **UFOs Take to the Net**

The Internet has facilitated an explosive outgrowth of popular interest in the UFO phenomenon. Largely because of its free-wheeling, uncensored nature, people interested in UFOs and other unusual phenomena took to the Internet from early on. UFO newsgroups, websites, email lists, BBSes, e-zines, and chat areas continually mill over the newest sightings, rumors, debates, debunkings, and innuendos. People -- who might never have joined a UFO club read a UFO newsletter or picked up a UFO book -- are now casually coming across UFO photos and discussion. UFO and paranormal information is quickly becoming one of the largest growth areas of the Net with new guides and indices and meta-organizations appearing all the time.

But do all the UFOlogists -- new and old -- really know the origins of the technology they are using? The Internet was originally developed by DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), a creature of the Pentagon designed to preserve tactical C<sup>3</sup>I capabilities following a nuclear strike. DARPA are the same folks who have brought us (some think) ELF psychotronic "nonlethal warfare", "black project" stealth aircraft, cyborg soldiers, and military *psi* research. Although the Internet is now a civilian entity, it started out as a military network and the military has never lost interest in it.

A recent study by the Pentagon highlighted the use of the Internet by "activist" groups and suggested thorough analysis of the ways which the Net could be used for propaganda, disinformation, and "information warfare" against hostile enemies. The report praised in particular the ways in which UFO researchers used the Net, noting the proliferation of attention to the "secret" Area-51 base in Nevada. While criticizing the security leak it represented, the report also suggested that military commanders could learn a "thing or two" from antiwar activists and UFO researchers who use the Net so effectively.

Elsewhere, I've warned that some sectors of the military-intelligence complex may have begun using UFOs as a form of psychological warfare, either through the use of bogus UFO reports and rumors as covers for other kinds of covert activity or the testing of how cults and other groups react to the release of controlled information. The advantage of the Internet for the military is precisely its strength. Since it's unregulated and uncontrolled by any external authority, it becomes a key media outlet for disinformation. The truth may be out there. But so may be a lot of half-truths.

However, where the Internet may offer another "handle" on the UFO phenomenon lies in the curious fact that as it becomes a global network, undermining "national security" by cross-cutting international boundaries, it may enable UFO researchers to look at the phenomenon cross-culturally and across time. And what they may find is something different from the paranoid mythology of crashed saucers, *Gray* treaties, underground bases, and *alien* invasions which is proliferating on the Internet.

## UFOs Gone Global

What the Internet and the "information age" is making possible -- for the first time -- is an international effort to look at the phenomenon cross-culturally. American researchers are coming into contact with UFO reports from South America, the Soviet Union, and Asia where the encounters tend to be different from the typical "*Gray* abduction" encounter described by U.S. experiencers. They are becoming exposed to the European theories, which tend to look at UFO phenomena from a more folkloric and metaphorical perspective. They are discovering that in other countries, UFO reports often go far back before Kenneth Arnold's 1947 sighting.

For the first time, we have data that enable us to look at how the UFO experience may be patterned by each culture's individual temperament. We can examine how UFO encounters may fit into a continuum of other kinds of paranormal and transpersonal experiences, ranging from Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) to aboriginal shamanic initiations to Celtic fairy kidnappings to African spirit possession. The idea is quickly taking hold that **the UFO experience** -- while not purely "subjective" in nature (because it definitely involves some kind of external object) -- **involves a kind of Altered State of Consciousness (ASC).**

Because we now have access to global UFO data, the study of UFO spatial patterns ("window areas") can be correlated with other global patterns such as the "World Grid" some earth mysteries researchers suggest may cover the Globe. Also, the temporal patterns -- the U.S. "flaps" and "waves" or clusters of UFO encounters in certain years -- can be compared with the patterns in other countries. The preliminary evidence seems to suggest that the temporal patterns are not merely artifacts of Western electronic media, which in the past had not penetrated other parts of the Globe evenly. But they -- like other kinds of *paranormal* experiences -- do seem to correlate with changes in the Earth's geomagnetic field.

The Internet allows us to look at UFO reports across space and time, possibly even allowing us to discover a third kind of patterning -- associational or informational linkages to particular keywords, kinds of places, or other "Name Games" which Fortean researchers often delight in. These "Name Games" have led some UFO researchers to consider ways in which the phenomenon may have links to another global cybernetic system -- Lovelock's "Gaia", the biospheric meta-system which seems to maintain the Earth's climate within tight boundaries.

The temporal patterns may link within certain other cyclical phenomena -- human socio-cultural cycles included. We can no longer overlook the way in which UFO and *paranormal* outbreaks seem to mirror upheavals in the social world. Reports seem to increase during periods of massive social change (as seems to be happening in Russia right now), which leads to the inevitable theory of "mass hysteria". But there is another perspective -- one which might see these cycles becoming "phase-locked" through various external mechanisms or driven through external "strange attractors".

## The Cultural Construction of the UFO

Whereas many people in the First World tend to interpret the UFO as a "mechanism" (i.e., an *extraterrestrial* spaceship), people in the Third World or Fourth World tend to see it in other contexts. They often interpret UFO beings as gods, spirits, angels, devas, or faeries. Simplistically and paternalistically, Western researchers assume that they are not "smart" enough to realize they are dealing with what we -- in a technologically-advanced society -- know to be material "nuts and bolts" objects. But some UFOlogists are coming around to the realization that the "alien" view may be a product of our own unique folklore and culture. Growing up on a diet of science-fiction, Americans are predisposed to assume anything they don't understand must come from outer space.

Some in the UFO research community are carefully deconstructing the boundaries between UFO experiences and other kinds of events, ranging from religious visions (such as Fatima) to earlier reports of strange objects in the sky (the 1896-97 "Great Airship" wave, etc.) Although many researchers want to conveniently date the beginning of the UFO phenomenon to 1947, it seems like UFO-like encounters have existed throughout History and that the *extraterrestrial* interpretation of researchers grew out of the context of American culture at that time. The UFO seems to have displayed -- for a long time -- a "reflective" property, strangely mirroring or anticipating the expectations or beliefs of the society where it is encountered.

One thing that this is forcing the researcher to do is to focus more heavily on the percipient and less on the percept. Part-and-parcel of the "new ufology" is a realization that not only do some UFO witnesses have multiple "close encounters" but they also often have a life history full of other kinds of strange parapsychological, *paranormal*, or unusual experiences ranging from *poltergeist*-type phenomena to interference with electronic equipment. UFO encounters sometimes seem to trigger outbreaks of these unusual phenomena or awakenings of psychic potentials. But often they follow strange experiences (such as precognitive dreams or hearing strange noises) as well.

The information age has made humankind aware that these types of experiences can be found in just about any culture. But how they are dealt with varies from society to society. Some cultures reward and value precious contacts with the Otherworld. In Western society, we often greet such experiences with diagnoses of mental illness or worse. One thing that appears to be clear is that these types of encounters seem to proliferate in cultures that are more accepting of them. But it may not be the case that they are more frequent. It may simply be that people in those societies are more willing to describe and discuss unusual experiences with their peers. The cultural impact on UFO experiences appears to be clear. But how influential it is requires further exploration.

Though a global understanding of the UFO phenomenon shows this inherent cultural malleability of the experience. By this, I don't mean to suggest that there aren't universals. We need to separate the experience from the cultural interpretations that people overlay onto it. However, what makes this problematic is that the phenomenon itself seems to help reinforce those interpretations -- even responds to them in some paradoxical way. We need to go beyond the manifestations to the inner workings of the phenomenon. And intrinsically, it seems to be a **control system** of some kind.

## The UFO as a Control System

The "UFO" (whatever it may be) appears to have the ability to alter consciousness, perception, and to some degree -- maybe even space and time itself. Like Dick's VALIS, it appears to be an "information singularity" which seems to draw bits-and-pieces of reality around it into a new order. Physical reality is distorted in various ways (cattle mutilations, crop circles, "implants", percipient physiological changes, subsidiary poltergeist phenomena, etc.) in its wake. But it doesn't appear to be any true "accidental tourist". Its transits through our reality seem deliberate, almost contrived, focused on some sort of interaction with us.

Half-baked predictions are told to contactees, abductees, and alien "channelers" about impending cataclysms, "Earth changes", and transitions in human evolution. The peculiar mix of truth and fiction, insight and bullshit, and wisdom and stupidity found in these messages led UFOlogist John Keel to dub them broadcasts from some "Great Phonograph in the Sky" stuck in some worn celestial groove. Like Keel, we need to stop focusing so much on the content of these messages and start looking at the mechanisms of the messengers.

Information is given to UFO experiences but as carefully controlled information -- maybe disinformation. The key to disinformation is to mix truth with deception so that it's hard to distinguish one from the other. But there's just enough truth to keep the person coming back for more. People are told about fabulous new devices and technologies which will save the human race but never seem to work properly. People are promised evidence and "smoking guns" to prove the existence of UFOs which then never materialize completely. People are given explanations of the motives and origins of the UFO-nauts, which seems at once profound and yet also ridiculously absurd.

The paradoxical nature of this information seems to point to some deeper truth than vast *extraterrestrial* conspiracies. It points to the role of the human consciousness in organizing complex and contradictory information into a coherent whole. It points to a reality which is socially constructed through communication and interaction between human beings with different semantic structures for organizing their perceptions. It points to the dramatic ways in which science and technology seem to be transforming fundamental concepts of epistemology and ontology. The medium is the massage.

Vallee suggests the UFO functions as a kind of "thermostat" -- a regulator which helps navigate our society back toward the subtle and the invisible after it's become too focused on the gross and the visible. It functions as a kind of auto-responsive control system, utilizing feedback to challenge ossified paradigms, memetic structures, and belief systems. But the use of subtle control mechanisms cannot have been lost on the men of DARPA, who may be interested in the UFO technology for more overt kinds of psychological control.

## **Paranoia as Control Mechanism**

In the media and popular culture as well as the UFO press, talk of UFO invasion and colonization seems to be growing. What are these sinister *Grays* up to after all, with their genetic sampling, cattle mutilating, and secret underground bases? Although *alien* invasions have been a staple of movies since "War of the Worlds", "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", and Hollywood 50s' saucer flicks, it seems like the hostile-*alien*-invasion meme has returned with a vengeance in the 1990s. We've gone from the "lovable *alien*" flicks of the 1980s ("Starman", "ET", "Close Encounters") to paranoid masterpieces such as "Independence Day" and TV shows such as the "X-Files" and "Dark Skies", where anyone -- even your neighbor -- can be a pawn of the *aliens'* sinister master plan.

Even video games like "Area-51" or Disney rides like the "Extra-TERRORestrial Encounter" help feed this mythology into public consciousness. In twilight areas of the alternative media, militia groups and UFO groups start sounding like mirror images of each other, protesting of black helicopters, surveillance, electronic harassment, Men- in-Black, and "New World Orders" on the move. White supremacist groups have gotten into the game, offering their own vision of superhuman blond Aryan Pleiadeans here to save us from swarthy intergalactic bankers and parasites. "Race mixture", it turns out, is just another strategy by the bad aliens to weaken the strain and prepare us for invasion.

Was the Gulf War syndrome an *extraterrestrial* virus found on the Tunguska meteorite? Did Majestic-12 kill JFK? Was the NASA Mars Explorer scuttled to avoid people finding out the truth about the Cydonia artifacts? These and other questions seem to swirl around the UFO field today, fact and fiction blending seamlessly together, easily outdoing the mild speculations of earlier UFO researchers regarding Air Force whitewashes and cover-ups. As the military has learned throughout history, fear is a great mobilizer of people and an excellent preparer for war. Even if the enemies are imaginary or their deeds exaggerated.

In an era where the Cold War is ending, how can the U.S. military forces maintain their incredible portion of the national pie? Many UFOlogists have mentioned Ronald Reagan's quip that the next great

battle be against an enemy from space. People are finding less-and-less that they can unite to fight against. Inhuman things from space might fill the bill quite nicely. Nuclear weapons and SDI can find a new secondary justification for warding off rogue asteroids from space -- maybe even evil *Grays* out to turn us into protein soup. However, I don't think this new paranoid phase in the U.S. is all deliberately contrived by the military-multimedia complex.

What I think has happened is that the military's obsession with secrecy, discipline, and strength has permeated our entire society, a natural result of living under a culture of "national security" for so long. Rather than some Big Brother watching us, we've all started watching each other through our camcorders, radio scanners, and amateur spy equipment. The UFO myths permeating the Internet are part and parcel of a larger, stranger xenophobia which seems to be taking hold in popular consciousness. Fear robs people of their reason and closes their minds against the unknown. It activates the most instinctual parts of the human mind -- those concerned with personal survival.

## **UFology at a Crossroads**

So there are 2 simultaneous trends in the "noosphere" of UFology at the moment. Ultimately, they point to 2 different ways of looking at information.

There's the paranoiac view of information, which is that you have to learn as much as possible about the Other while minimizing what they can find out about you. Information is a weapon, a strategic resource, a commodity -- your best defense against a potentially hostile enemy. Deception is essential.

The other is the pronoiac view of information, which might be summed up as the idea that information is negotiated between equals in open dialogue and increases in value when it's shared and is open-ended, leading to more questions and more dialogue rather than rigid answers and aggressive conflict.

I think all sides of UFology are coming around to the point-of-view of looking at the UFO as a symbol or signifier -- an information carrier. Since Jung, many UFOlogists have looked at UFOs as manifestations or projections of deep unconscious needs or collective archetypes. And whatever else the UFO might "really" be, it does seem to resonate with some of our deepest hopes and fears. Salvation from the stars. O conquest by the unknown. In some curious way, the UFO relates to the human mind as an information transceiver and maybe even to the nature of information itself in organizing and structuring reality.

The Internet is offering a new realm of openness and possibility for UFO researchers. They can compare the ways in which UFO phenomena compare with other kinds of *paranormal* experiences. They can learn from the "skeptics" about the importance of verification and the use of primary sources. They can attempt a new synthetic approach instead of looking for "nuts-and-bolts". Yet some seem to be using it for a new sort of closure and insularity, using it to hurl invectives of suspicion, mistrust, and innuendo. They're trying to "circle the wagon train" against enemies real and imagined to their theories of aliens on ice and genetic hybridization. They are using it to spread fear and confusion.

Although deception may be integral to the UFO phenomenon, it may be the kind used by Zen masters. Literal-mindedness, attachment to concreteness, obsessive focus on the letter rather than the spirit of truth. And fundamentalist dogmatism prevent people from thinking. The Trickster figure in many cultures pulls the wool over peoples' eyes and plays tricks on them, because it's the only way to start tugging at the lenses of their consensus reality. Clowns in many cultures are sacred figures because their antics and games help people to loosen their grip on "sacred cows" that prevent them from grasping

the truth. The Trickster is no angel and he isn't always beneficent. And he often causes people a lot of grief and pain. But he is necessary.

Vallee's quote suggests that a new understanding of the Universe as a cybernetic-information system, with the critical role of the percipient in that system may help solve numerous problems in the *paranormal* and other scientific fields. Like him, I think UFOs may be one of the key manifestations of such a system. As an "information singularity", they may be drawing us into a new arrangement of information. One that goes beyond a simple true/false, either/or, 'excluded middle' binary dichotomy and embraces irony, paradox, and reversal as elements rather than aberrations. The mechanistic viewpoint -- which sees everything as either matter or energy -- is beginning to run into several dead-ends. The transition to an "information age" may ultimately mean a realization that the World is made of information in various forms.

"... particles of energy left over from that explosion first took charge of this mudball and they've been in charge ever since. H.P. Lovecraft called them the Elders. They have been leading us around by our collective noses for aeons. But now, for some reason that is not yet clear, a merging is taking place. The Elders are slowly revealing themselves to us. What was once forbidden knowledge is now becoming known to millions. Even our scientists, those poor backward slob... are recognizing the presence of these forces. The Industrial Age is coming to a close and science is rediscovering magick. Our civilization which took centuries to build is now coming apart...

"But is it the End Time? Or is there a new beginning somewhere in the near future?"

-- *John Keel*, "New Age of the Gods" from Disneyland of the Gods

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