



TRUST NO ONE:

PARANOIA, CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND ALIEN INVASIONS

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As the millennium melts into history, we here on planet Earth are beginning to have a few rather strange preoccupations. In this article, I take up the phenomenon of alien invasion and abduction scenarios, and argue that they are best understood as part of a general pattern of post-W.W.II paranoia. Let's begin with a quick summary of contemporary, American UFO mythology.

ROSWELL AND BEYOND

UFO mythology begins with the so-called "Roswell incident." The facts of the Roswell incident are that in 1947 a UFO was widely reported to have crashed on a ranch in the town of Corona, New Mexico, just outside the town of Roswell. The ranch was near the 509th Bombardment group, located at the Roswell Army Field. Lieutenant Walter Haut issued the press release, and the story was international news. On July 8, 1947, the local newspaper, *The Roswell Daily Record* printed the headline, "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell Region. No Details of Flying Disc are Revealed"[\[1\]](#) *The London Times* of the same day carried the headline, "U.S. Army to Examine A Flying Disk."[\[2\]](#)

Major Jesse Marcel, Chief Intelligence Officer, was sent to New Mexico to investigate the scene and to collect the crash debris which was then taken to Fort Worth, Texas. At this point, a second communiqué was issued by the military; this one claiming that what had been found in New Mexico was, in fact, a weather balloon. Critics wondered how such high ranking military personnel could have mistaken a weather balloon for an alien spacecraft, and indeed, in 1980, Major Marcel went public with his claim that the balloon story had been a fabrication. The United States government has steadfastly denied Marcel's story that they covered-up information of an alien crash landing.[\[3\]](#)

In 1997, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of the Roswell incident, the army issued yet another report. This one claimed that the debris found near Roswell was part of a top-secret operation called "Project Mogul," which was designed to develop and test "balloon trains" to be used for espionage against the USSR. The army maintains that bodies alleged to have been found at the Roswell crash site and taken to be aliens, were, in fact, crash test dummies.[\[4\]](#)

Most alien related conspiracy theories begin with Roswell. Despite the government's best efforts to explain away the incident, a bothersome and rather large number of eyewitnesses claim to have seen a UFO crash landing near Roswell, to have handled its wreckage, and even to have seen the bodies of dead and living aliens at the site. One crash witness, Gerald Anderson, says he was 5 years old when he and his father came across the crash site. He claims not only to have seen the small gray aliens with large eyes, and says that the beings communicated with his father telepathically. Further, he contends that the military threatened him with bodily harm if he came forward with his story. Indeed, in the past 20 years, *hundreds* of eyewitnesses have come forward with similar stories. As UFO expert Stanton Friedman, who broke the Roswell story, has put it, "We have consistent testimony that in a court of law would convict anyone." [5]

To make matters worse, in 1994, a film purporting to be an alien autopsy from the Roswell crash was shown in England (it has since been widely shown on American television and is available for video rental).[6] The film is shot on what some say is film stock authentic to circa 1947, While most UFO researchers believe that the film itself is a fraud, they maintain that the incident it depicts actually occurred.

Despite the sheer numbers of testimonies and video evidence of flying saucers other than the one at Roswell, only a minority of Americans openly admit to believing stories about aliens. Yet, vast numbers of people claim to have seen UFO's. Many can produce pieces of metal that they say has been implanted in their bodies by aliens. Relatively huge numbers of Americans believe they have actually been abducted by aliens. Several have come forward claiming to have worked on top-secret alien related projects, and even to have met aliens who work for the U.S. government.

On the one hand, to believe in aliens and a government cover-up is to mark oneself as utterly batty. The snide tone with which alien related stories have been reported in the mainstream press has been empirically verified by political scientists, Hickman, McConkey and Barrett. They have shown "a general pattern of profound skepticism on the part of the press" with regard to UFO stories:

Contemporary journalists have all but dismissed UFO sightings as phenomena that must be rationally understood by employing some alternative, 'this-worldly' explanations. Furthermore, reporters are much less likely to report UFO phenomena at all. But when they do, they often make their opinions known.[7]

Even respectable people who admit to some sympathy find themselves discredited merely by association with alien believers. Elaine Showalter cites Pulitzer Prize winner, John Mack of Harvard Medical School, Professor David Jacobs, an historian at Temple University, journalist C.D. B. Bryan and novelist Whitley Strieber. [8]

The curious flip side to this is that, while in the minority, there are a surprising number of Americans who *do* believe in aliens in one way or another. Jodi Dean cites a 1990 Gallup poll which revealed that 50% of Americans believe in aliens,[9] and a 1992 Roper poll suggests that 2% of Americans (or nearly 4 million people) believe that people are being

abducted by aliens.[10] President Jimmy Carter saw and formally reported a UFO before he became President. Gemini and Apollo astronaut James McDivitt says he saw a UFO just outside his window while on an Gemini mission on June 4, 1965.[11] He says that he snapped some photos and turned them over to NASA where they then disappeared.[12] In the Gulf Breeze sightings, over 500 people in Florida say they saw what were presumed to be spacecrafts hovering in the sky. Many of them took photos and videos.[13] In 1995, Louis Farakan wrote about his abduction experience in *The Million Man March Home Study Guide Manual*. In it, Farakan reports having been abducted in 1985 and carried to a "human built planet known as the Mother Wheel." There he says he "saw a city in the sky" after which the UFO, "brought me back to Earth and dropped me off near Washington." While there, he learned that the President, Colin Powell and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were planning a war "against the black people of America, the Nation of Islam and Louis Farakan." [14] Most recently, between March 7 and March 13 of 1997, there were mass sightings of a huge triangular shaped series of lights traveling at blimp speed and passing very low over Scottsdale, Tempe, and Phoenix, Arizona.[15]

In fact, sightings of UFO's have been relatively common since about 1947 (though pilots also reported seeing them throughout W.W.II). In 1994, there were 4000 sightings in the U.S., 1000 in Asia, 3000 over the former Soviet Union -- over 10,000 worldwide, and figures continue to rise.[16] To quell fears and curiosity related to this, between 1948-69 the military conducted Project Blue Book which studied 12,000 sightings. All but 701 were explained to the satisfaction of the military. This report only furthered charges of government cover-up and conspiracy.[17]

An extensive narrative has ensued; one that is far too complicated to reproduce here in full. Detailing a government conspiracy to cover-up alien invasions, it has been perpetrated through discussions and websites on the internet, a huge body of books and videos, and in other formal and informal networks comprised of ufologists.[18] Taken together, these have created a kind of interactive narrative about the relationship between power, corporate capitalism, technology and the government.

Many ufologists believe that alien crafts, like the one that is said to have landed at Roswell, have been captured by the military and are being tested in a top secret location known as "Area 51." The crafts are being used, some contend, to "back-engineer" electromagnetic propulsion systems, and have been used in the development of several of the more momentous inventions of the 20th century (such as Velcro and the microwave).[19]

An important part of conspiracy lore is the presence of "men in black" (given comic treatment in a 1997 Hollywood film of the same name). The men in black are said to have appeared to many who have had "close encounters" of one kind or another with aliens. Reportedly, they have tried to convince citizens to remain silent about their stories. The men in black are described as being completely bland looking men, dressed in black suits, driving black cars and sometimes walking and talking in a robotic fashion. Most incredibly, sometimes they drive automobiles and speak in patterns reminiscent of the 1940's.[20]

A central character in the Area 51 story line is a scientist named Robert Lazar. Lazar claims to have worked at Area 51 on something called "Project Majestic." He went public with this information upon finding out that records of his existence were being systematically destroyed; i.e., that he was being erased. Lazar says that he divulged his story in order to protect himself from being physically disappeared. Though he has a "W2" form from Los Alamos, and his name appears in lab phone books dating from the time he was to have been employed there, officials claim to have no record of his ever having worked at the base, or anywhere in the government. Former colleagues who confirmed part of his story say they were threatened by the government.[\[21\]](#) His story, therefore, has not been fully or convincingly corroborated.

What precisely would the government be doing with recovered space ships at Area 51? What kind of partnership do conspiracy theorists claim our government has struck with aliens? One hypothesis is that the American government is trading its citizens with aliens in exchange for weapons technology. Others believe that the aliens are trying to develop a hybrid alien/human race.[\[22\]](#) Most who claim to have alien implants in their bodies believe they are a kind of tracking device similar to what human researchers might use in tagging and studying wildlife on Earth. According to this view, we are part of some vast, intergalactic DNA harvesting project. Virtually all of these hypotheses as well as many others I have not mentioned touched upon the idea that UFO related incidents are connected to military activities involving illegal activities being perpetrated against American citizens. This hypothesis is buttressed by the fact that a huge proportion of sightings occur near military bases.

POST-WORLD WAR II PARANOIA

In truth, since the military never corroborates these sightings, there are only three possibilities. One, that they do not occur at all. This is unlikely given the sheer number of sightings, video evidence, etc. Two, that they do occur, but the military has not seen them. That the military cannot see large airborne objects above its top secret bases is extremely disconcerting in terms of tactical ability to protect us from foreign invasion. Thus, one hopes this second hypothesis is untrue. Three, that the military is denying having seen them because they are, in fact, evidence of top-secret military projects. It is my contention that this is the most likely hypothesis. Therefore, it is understandable that are happy to have these sightings deflected by being mythologized into UFO folklore. This third hypothesis, however, does not answer troubling sociological questions about the willingness of Americans to believe in UFO's, abductions and the presence of an alien-military industrial complex.

Conspiracy theorists who work with these scenarios of alien/military collaboration maintain that the government is extremely sophisticated in terms of the way it releases truth and propaganda as well as to whom it is released. That is, they assert, sometimes "true" stories are leaked to non-credible sources precisely in order to discredit the stories. Alternatively, partly true stories may be leaked so that when false aspects are revealed,

the true aspects conveniently go down in flames with them. This is called, "**gray propaganda**." [23] The alien autopsy film may be an example of this. The story would go something like this: the fact that the film is so obviously a fake, tends to discredit the entire notion that aliens landed and that there was an autopsy -- which might nonetheless be true. The Roswell incident itself is sometimes discussed as gray propaganda: viz., the government wants us to believe that aliens crashed at Roswell so that we will be less inclined to investigate the so-called "shadow government" that currently exists, is controlling our elected officials and our citizens, and is collaborating in the alien abduction of American citizens.

Some conspiracy theorists take a kinder view of the U.S. government, believing that we are being gradually prepared for news that there is intelligent life in space. The news of possible life on Mars was interpreted by some as just this kind of preparation. All in all, most serious UFO groups do not tend to believe that the government has *no* knowledge of the aliens who are alleged to be visiting or invading us. The only questions they pose are how many alien civilizations are here on Earth, and to what extent has the government cooperated in compromising the security of American citizens.

It should not have escaped anyone's attention that the date of the Roswell incident coincides roughly with the end of World War II and the beginning of the Cold War. W.W.II was an incredibly bloody war. Most estimates gauge total loss of human life to be at about 65 million people, including the Stalinist purges and the Holocaust. This was also a war in which there were dramatic breakthroughs in technology; many of which were used for destructive rather than constructive purposes. 1947 also saw the publication of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* where they wrote prophetically that, "the curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression." [24]

Hanna Arendt has written persuasively about the combination of technology and bureaucracy that emboldened and empowered both Nazi and Stalinist totalitarian regimes. The Jewish Holocaust has the distinction of being the first genocide that employed what were at that time sophisticated methods for categorizing Jews combined with the most efficient mechanisms for killing millions as quickly as possible. Science functioned well for efficiency if not for justice. So as not to waste resources, mechanisms were developed so that Jews literally paid for their own transport on the trains that lead them to the death camps with jewelry and cash confiscated from them beforehand. Once there, Jews helped to maintain the camps and were used as objects of scientific inquiry. [25] The Nazi regime itself was founded on various conspiratorial notions, not the least of which was the idea of a Jewish-capitalist world banking conspiracy trotted out in staples of anti-Semitic conspiracy theory in fraudulent hoaxes like "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." [26]

I am suggesting that the link between technology, capitalism and state power wreaked havoc on the truth in ways that fed into the propensity for the spread of conspiracy theory. Totalitarian regimes themselves were, of course, much aided by conspiracy theories, and Arendt argues, by the mass societies which found them believable. Arendt argues that the Nazis and Stalinist Soviet regimes were, in part, characterized by the ways

in which they made "reality" fit their propagandistic visions of the world, thus changing the meaning of truth. Linking power and knowledge, Arendt argues that truth is no more than one's power to create it: "all debate about the truth or falsity of a totalitarian dictator's prediction is as weird as arguing with a potential murderer about whether his future victim is dead or alive -- since by killing the person in question the murderer can promptly provide proof of the correctness of his statement." For example, "The assertion that the Moscow subway is on the only one in the world is a lie only so long as the Bolsheviks have not the power to destroy all others."[\[27\]](#)

It would appear that the totalitarian *weltanschauung* spread to the allies whether through some mysterious *zeitgeist*, or simply by virtue of the scope of the remedy necessary to defeat such immense state power. That is, the structure of untruth and conspiracy may have created a parallel structure among nations responding to the totalitarian threat. Thus, for instance, the FBI and CIA which were formed to combat an allegedly widespread, secret and evil communist threat, managed to create and mimic many aspects of the very behavior they sought to eliminate. They maintain(ed) a massive and largely unaccountable surveillance apparatus, one repeatedly used to suppress undesirable political viewpoints (as was the case with the COINTELPRO operation, actions against Dr. Martin Luther King, and covert subversion of numerous developing countries during the Cold War, etc.).[\[28\]](#) In addition, the secrecy surrounding the Manhattan Project, however reasonable, no doubt contributed to the growth of a secret military apparatus which needs only to invoke "national security" to classify information and to keep it secret even from elected officials.

On a less abstract level, World War II was nearly apocalyptic in its sheer scope, and nearly pure evil in its genocidal intent and zeal. By the same token, it was a war that greatly increased our technological capabilities while, not incidentally, increasing the partnership between an expanding state and a newly emerging corporate and transnational capitalism. All this was being done while, by the way, constituting an all out assault on truth via the policies of totalitarian regimes as well as by way of the secrecy needed to combat them.

Historically speaking, 1947 can be seen as a kind of demarcation between the war and the recovery years. Except that, as the alien narrative shows, we did not ever really recover. To wit, a kind of permanent malaise settled in over a significant portion of the American, and indeed the world, population. It can be said that the reality of the war itself, the technological advances, the power of the state, and the increasing power of international capital began to have deleterious psychological effects. And as a song from the cult science fiction film, *Rocky Horror Picture Show* puts it, "madness takes its toll." Part of the toll is, I am arguing, the presence of paranoid delusions and the willingness to accept them; both occurring on a mass scale. The fact that the alien fantasy takes the form of fears about technology, the state, and corporate capital can easily be explained in terms of the history from which the paranoia emanates. In addition, both the *fact* of its existence as well as its *construction* as entertainment can be explained by the equally sinister presence of the mundane boredom and anxiety of everyday life, what Adorno and Horkheimer have characterized as, "the restriction of thought to organization and



administration." [29] The search for meaning, the denial of one's own power, and the overwhelming nature of massified society appear to be acted out in this megalomaniac, narcissistic fixation on the metaphor of alien invasion and abduction. In an episode of the popular television series *The X-Files*, a reflective special-agent Fox Mulder offers some explanation as to why this fantasy might be fixated on the occult: "Perhaps the belief in otherworldly mysteries gives me some hope." [30] But, one might ask, hope for what?

In the years immediately following the War, government appeared to have become monolithic, invisible, and secretive. Various disclosures about totalitarianism under Hitler and Stalin as well as covert operations in the U.S. suggested that democratic accountability was a naive notion. It is possible that the all too bleak horror of the war and the subsequent specter of nuclear annihilation in a US/USSR conflagration has been sublimated and then transferred onto a notion of invading aliens. This paranoid scenario depicts the government as a permanent structure in partnership with mysterious, equally powerful corporations which completely lack ethical principles. This new entity is imbued by science with the power of Foucault's panopticon; a power to categorize, to conceal, and to engage in diabolical surveillance. President Eisenhower called it the "military-industrial complex." Political scientists and sociologists referred to it obliquely with the more benign notions of "elite theory" or "the iron triangle." I would argue that on a more mainstream level, conspiracy theorists appear to have opted out of this world entirely, finding some dreary comfort in the fantasy of a distant one among the stars.

Because we now live in [Guy Debord's](#) "society of the spectacle," paranoid fantasy is also entertainment. This in turn, functions on an ideological level to justify the status quo. Witness, for example, the festival in Roswell celebrating the 50th anniversary of the crash, the huge success of the television shows like *Sightings*, and the *X-Files*, along with films like *Independence Day*, *Contact*, *Men in Black*, and of course, *ET*. Moreover, the internet itself with its literally thousands of websites and discussion groups on this topic cannot be discounted on this score. Thus the fantasy appears as a kind of dance to the tune of the apocalypse; the problems of government secrecy and corporate greed reduced to a huge mystery/ science fiction story rather than confronted as political problems with definite, possible, real world policy solutions.

On a social level, all of this may amount to the acting out of a fantasy of infantile narcissism in which citizens appear both completely powerless while at the same time being the center of the universe. What better metaphor than that of the alien from outer space for a democratic people acting out a scenario of political helplessness? What Adorno has written against astrology and occultism is equally relevant in this new context:

By its regression to magic under late capitalism, thought is assimilated to late capitalist forms. The asocial twilight phenomena in the margins of the system, the pathetic attempts to squint through the chinks of its walls, while revealing nothing of what is outside, illuminate all the more clearly the forces of decay within. The bent little fortune tellers, terrorizing their clients with crystal balls, are toy models of the great ones who hold the fate of mankind in their hands. Just as hostile and conspiratorial as the obscurantists of

psychic research is society itself. The Hypnotic power exerted by things occult resembles totalitarian terror: in present-day processes the two are merged. The smiling of auguries is amplified to society's sardonic laughter at itself, gloating over the direct material exploitation of souls.[\[31\]](#)

THE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF PARANOIA

I am reminded of Freud's encounter with the paranoid Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber. Though problematic and controversial on many levels, Freud's account reminds us that paranoia is catching. The experiences Schreber claims to have had, which Freud then goes on to interpret as paranoid delusions, bear some remarkable similarities to the ones recounted by those alleging abduction.

Dr. Schreber's illness began in 1884 when it occurred to him during a state of half sleep that "after all it really must be very nice to be a woman submitting to the act of copulation."[\[32\]](#) This feeling progressed to a point where Schreber eventually came to believe himself to have been actually transformed into a woman. This was known to him alone, however, as the changes had occurred beneath his skin.[\[33\]](#) Schreber also came to believe "that he had a mission to redeem the world and to restore it to its lost state of bliss. This, however, he could only bring about if he were first transformed from a man into a woman."[\[34\]](#) Schreber heard voices, including those of trees, birds and God, eventually believing himself to be God's wife and to be living in another world."[\[35\]](#) By analyzing Schreber's relationship to his two physicians, Drs. Flechsig and Weber, Freud rather oddly concluded that it was Schreber's repressed sexual attraction to men that led to his paranoid delusions of persecution. As a means of fending off the wish fantasy, Freud believed that Schreber had become afflicted precisely with delusions of homosexual persecution perpetrated upon him by the persons to whom he was attracted. In order to make these feelings more acceptable, they were later transferred by Schreber onto God.[\[36\]](#)

But Freud admitted to being confused by one aspect of Schreber's delusion; little men talked to him. Freud concluded that these must symbolize for Schreber some combination of children (which his wife could not give him) and sperm.[\[37\]](#) At the close of his madness, Schreber became convinced that the end of the Earth was imminent, that he was the only real man alive, and that he lived in another world.[\[38\]](#) Freud offered this as evidence of the connection between paranoia, narcissism and megalomania. Thus for Schreber who believed he was persecuted, fantasies took the form of an infantile and narcissistic regression in which he was at once powerless and the center of the universe. Based on his treatment of Dr. Schreber, Freud observed that, unlike other psychotics, the paranoid never completely loses touch with events in the real world. Freud writes,

It cannot be asserted that a paranoiac, even at the height of the repressive process, withdraws his interest from the external world so completely as must be considered to occur in certain other kinds of hallucinatory psychosis...The paranoiac perceives the

external world and takes into account any alterations that may happen in it and the effect it makes upon him stimulates him to invent explanatory theories...[\[39\]](#)

Freud's notion that paranoia is connected to repressed homosexual desire at first seems distant from the conspiracy theories being examined herein (less distant than it is from, say, J. Edgar Hoover, a famously repressed and conspiratorial homosexual). On closer examination, however, Schreber's story reflects the alien conspiracy narrative. Schreber, too, saw and spoke to little men. Like abductees, he feared (and Freud argues, desired) sexual assault at the hands of a shadowy, persecuting figure who was sometimes depicted as being from another world.[\[40\]](#) Schreber, like alien conspiracy theorists, believed it was his responsibility to save the world, and that he would do so by virtue of his special relationship with God (an otherworldly figure).

What remains to be explained is Schreber's self perception as female. Let us hold aside the very likely hypothesis that Schreber was what we might today term, a transsexual. Alternatively, we can interpret his fantasy as a simple statement of emasculation; i.e., of powerlessness. In fact, Freud concurs with this, but incorrectly sees the emasculation as part of Schreber's homosexuality.[\[41\]](#) Like Schreber, the conspiracy theorist at once obsessed with politics, power and government feels emasculated by the real powers of government, science and capitalism leading him to seek otherworldly explanations. Both Schreber and contemporary alien abductees imagine little men who abduct and sexually assault them. Both imagine themselves to be vital to the survival of the world because they possess secret knowledge of their own persecution. And both, as is characteristic of paranoids in general, do not lose site of the world, but note changes in it and recreate their delusions to account for them. In an important sense, Schreber prefigures contemporary alien conspiracy theory. Missing, of course, are the key components of the military and capitalism which, I am arguing, figure prominently in post-World War II paranoid narratives. Technology is present in Schreber's tale only insofar as, as a physician, he too imagines a certain level of medically invasive procedures. It would not be until after the Manhattan Project and Holocaust, however, that technology would truly enter the social consciousness as an equal partner with the military and big capital.

I am arguing that the delusion of conspiracy theorists is directly related to W.W.II and its aftermath. It represents a total displacement of real, political concerns onto an unreal and unseen enemy. The modern day paranoid fantasy posits otherworldly beings who have control over a shadow government, the activities of which are unknown, even to the President of the United States. This fantasy becomes an excuse for political inaction since the real power is not located in the government, but in invisible sources of absolute power that function on its own and that can manipulate reality and truth at will. Participating in the democratic process is from this vantage point, a meaningless exercise. This fantasy appeals to narcissistic megalomania insofar as human beings remain the object of the invaders' interests, and all hopes for civilization depend upon the truth being told by conspiracy theorists themselves. Yet, as with Schreber, since there is no objective evidence and they must appeal to personal experience alone, no one believes them. They then become convinced that they are the objects of vilification and disinformation campaigns by the enormously powerful "military-industrial-alien complex." This, in turn,

inflates their importance to a megalomaniacal level such that they come to believe themselves to be both the defenders of the truth, not just for America, but for the universe.

Like many paranoid delusions, this one is seductive since it is extremely difficult to either prove or disprove. To the extent that the entire premise rests on the contention of a secret persecution, and since the psychotic actually believes these stories, they tend to have a certain plausibility. In a sense, they are, unlike other psychoses --- contagious. Freud himself admits to the seductive and confusing nature of paranoia at the close of his analysis of Schreber: "It remains for the future to decide whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit, or whether there is more truth in Schreber's delusion than other people are as yet prepared to believe."[\[42\]](#)

CONSPIRACIES REAL AND IMAGINED

In the decades following W.W.II, we in the U.S. were privy to several conspiracies that either turned out to be real or are believed as reality by a majority of Americans. Oliver North's shocking testimony to Congress in the Summer of 1986 introduced rank and file Americans to the notions of "plausible deniability" and "black ops." Other conspiracies like Iran-Contra, such as Hoover's FBI activities, all of the Watergate related activities, the Tuskegee Experiments, American nuclear testing done on Americans, CIA sponsored LSD experiments (as well as many other CIA programs too numerous to detail) -- just begin to scratch the surface of conspiracies that have already been exposed as real. It is then no wonder that the abduction scenario often details aliens who experiment on citizens and engage in mind control.

The prevalence of real conspiracies and covert government actions have undoubtedly stoked the fires of conspiracy theorists. Indeed, the government's own explanation of the Roswell incident bears this out. It admits that a) officials were lying in 1947, b) that even high ranking personnel at the 509th were unaware of alleged tests the U.S. government was doing, c) that top-secret events were conducted by the government without the knowledge or consent of Americans, d) and that such events are uniformly and routinely justified as having been necessary for "national security." That is, the government admits outright that it lies, conspires to lie and then covers-up.

In short, the government readily admits that the basic premise of conspiracies like Roswell are true. The embarrassing fact of the government's history of experimenting on its own citizens with apparent disregard for their safety means that almost everything about the alien scenarios is not only plausible, but has already occurred and has already been disclosed to us! The glaring exception is that we have no "smoking gun" to prove that there is life, intelligent or otherwise, on another planet, let alone that it has visited Earth.

The corporate capitalist role in alien conspiracy narratives is even less problematic to accept. It posits an out of control capitalist greed that will engage in partnership with any government, no matter how unethical or unjust, so long as profits are assured.

Once the premises have been accepted that governments engage in conspiracies and that capitalists mindlessly pursue profits, how hard is it really to believe that the government and capital are in cahoots with another alien species? One only need be willing to entertain the possibility that there is intelligent life on other planets, that those beings have landed on Earth, and that this has been hidden.

Once you have accepted the basic premises of any given conspiracy theory, belief in all of them becomes possible in principle. To have exposed one set of lies calls the rest of truth into question. This is the real and unexpected consequence not only of World War II, as I have been arguing, but also of conspiracies like Iran-Contra. To say as mainstream political scientists and media pundits are fond of saying that they have created a crisis of confidence is to dramatically understate the matter. In fact, they create social paranoia and ultimately have the power to utterly destroy democracy by destroying our faith in a democratically accountable government.

This tendency for one conspiracy to open up the possibility of *all* conspiracy explains why the really hard-core conspiracy theorists have always linked their fantasies together. Showalter reports that, "Many abduction narratives are embellished with details about conspiracies and especially surveillance...Like the men in black driving their black Cadillacs, black helicopters appear in the literature of right-wing militias and paramilitary groups; they link abduction narratives and other forms of paranoid conspiracy. Implants and microchips also turn up in the thi[n]king of people like Timothy McVeigh."[43](#)

The role of the internet certainly poses a new wrinkle. It is ironic that the internet, initially developed by the military, has become a major meeting place for conspiracy theorists. Conspiracy buffs who play on the net have been amusingly satirized on *X-Files* as Fox Mulder's weird, psycho-computer-geek friends. Apparently, the portrayal is not too far from reality. Allucquere Rosanne Stone reports a connection between computer programmers, fantasy role-playing games and the internet.

Role playing games were developed within a rather small community whose members shared certain social traits. First, most were members of the Society for Creative Anachronism, or SCA, one of the driving forces behind Renaissance Faires...Second, many of the people who belong to the SCA also consider themselves part of what is sometimes called the neopagan movement. And third, particularly in California, many of the people who participate in SCA events and who belong to the neopagan movement are also computer programmers.[44](#)

Indeed, there are sci-fi computer nerds who have a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards the technology on which they so extensively rely. Stone's work shows something that is, at first, counter-intuitive; that people who are enmeshed in technology also retain and act out fantasies connected to medieval and renaissance times. Why these particular fantasies? And again, why are alien narratives so often connected to New Age spirituality? Why do stories on the *X-Files* so easily blend stories about aliens with ones about magic, vampires and witches? It is no accident that these are all artifacts and historical periods from before the Enlightenment and science as we know it. It is as

though the particular form of these fantasies reflects a nostalgic longing for a time before technology.

The connection between fantasy and technology is intriguing in and of itself. If this narrative occupies the same cultural space as science fiction traditionally does, it also differs from traditional science fiction both in its interactive nature and in the fact that it is not conscious of its status as fiction. Indeed, its very *refusal* of that fictional status is what marks its adherents as paranoid. Yet, the fact that it is interactive and that it refuses a fictional status is extremely provocative in terms of its ability to illustrate the very problems of a vast and secret techno-capitalist government surveillance apparatus. Perhaps a paranoid narrative cast in the familiar idiom of science fiction is best able to illustrate modernist anxieties about truth, the slippage of reality, and the shrinking identity. The alien narrative *acts out* the damage conspiracies have done to truth (and, consequently, to democratic government) by posing the questions, "Am I insane or is the world insane? If what Ollie North said during Iran-Contra is true, how can I know that I am not being abducted by aliens? If I can find no words to describe my anxiety about the modern age and instead must act it out in this insane parody, doesn't that itself illustrate the extent to which the very possibility of meaning has been destroyed?"

If we look more closely at the three catch phrases reproduced often on the *X-Files*: "I want to believe," "The truth is out there," and "Trust no one," we see that they are perfect expressions of (respectively) the desiring self, the self that is nostalgic for truth and stability, and the paranoid self. Indeed, they, like the alien narrative itself, reflect a profound skepticism about the truth that is being told to us, and an urgent search for a truth we can tell. For without truth and self, how can one trust one's own memory, experiences or one's interpretations thereof? With Dr. Freud, I wonder whether there is more truth in the paranoia I have been describing than I am prepared to accept. For a hypothesis far more chilling than rampant social paranoia I have been suggesting is the one offered by a literal reading of the narrative itself; that the military is experimenting in some bizarre and totalitarian way on American citizens. The fact is, aliens or no, what we already know about covert operations remains chilling.

ENDNOTES

1 *The Roswell Daily Record*, July 8, 1947.

2 See attached photo from *The London Times*

3 Television special, *Sightings: The UFO Report*, broadcast on FOX TV, January, 1992. Now available through the SciFi Channel.

4 Richard L. Weaver, Col. USAF, Director, Security and Special Program Oversight, "Report of Air Force Research Regarding the Roswell Incident," July, 1994., available at www.af.mil/lib/roswell.html

5 Ibid.

6 *Alien Autopsy*, aired FOX TV, August and September, 1995, available from Trimark Pictures Home Video.

7 John Hickman, E. Dale McConkey II, Matthew Barrett, "Fewer Sightings in the National Press: A Content Analysis of UFO News Coverage", *The New York Times*, 1947-1995," *The Journal of UFO Studies*, n.s. 6, 1995/96, pp. 213-225, J. Allen Hyneck Center for UFO Studies, p. 224

8 Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and the Modern Media*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997), p.189. Showalter's chapter on aliens is, by the way, extremely disappointing. She argues that the phenomenon (along with a variety of other ailments of the 20th century such as chronic fatigue syndrome) are manifestations of hysteria. But, in the aliens chapter, she offers no analysis to support this. She merely tells re-tells the alien narrative in a snide tone as though that were itself an analysis.

9 Ibid.

10 Jodi Dean, "The Truth is Out There: Aliens and the Fugitivity of Postmodern Truth," unpublished paper prepared for the meeting, "Contested Terrain: Social Conflict and Critique," Prague, Czech Republic, May 20-26, 1996, p. 27.

11 Frank Edwards, *Flying Saucers: Serious Business*, (New York City, Bantam Books, 1966), p.120.

12 *Sightings*, 1992.

13 Ed Walters, *The Gulf Breeze Sightings*, (New York City, Avon, 1991).

14 Ken Ringle, "Farakan's Figures: Did He Count the Crowd From a UFO?," *The Washington Post*, Vol. 188, p. C3, Oct. 22, 1995.

15 William Hamilton, "Mass Sightings in Arizona," available through MUFON, 103 Oldtowne Road, Sequin, TX 78155-4099 or at <http://www.rutgers.edu/~mcgrew/mufon/index.html>. Some investigators have since tried to show that these UFOs were in fact high-tech flares used in a nearby military exercise.

16 *Sightings*, 1992.

17 Timothy Goode, *Above Top Secret*, (New York City, Quill, 1989).

18 The largest and most widely respected are, Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) and the Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR).

19 Philip J. Corso with William J. Birnes (Forward by Strom Thurmond), *The Day After Roswell*, (New York City, Pocket Books, 1997).

20 Time Life, *Alien Encounters: Mysteries of the Unknown Series*, (New York, Time Life, 1992).

21 *Sightings*, 1992.

22 Linda Moulton Howe, *Alien Harvest: Further Evidence Linking Animal Mutilations and Human Abductions to Alien Life Forms*, (published by Linda Moulton Howe, 1993).

23 Jacques Vallee, *Revelations: Alien Contact and Human Deception*, (New York, Ballantine Books, 1992).

24 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Concept of Enlightenment" (excerpt from *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*) in Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (eds.), *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, (New York and London, Routledge, 1996), p. 207.

25 Hanna Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York City, Penguin, 1994).

26 Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-45*, (New York, Schocken Books, 1973).

27 Hanna Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York and London, 1968), p. 48.

28 Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, (New York, Penguin, 1992).

29 Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 207.

30 *The X-Files*, "Quagmire," aired on FOX TV, May 3, 1996.

31 Theodor Adorno, "Theses Against Occultism," in Stephen Crook ed., *The Stars Down to the Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, (New York and London, Routledge, 1994), p. 129.

32 Sigmund Freud, *Three Case Histories*, ed., Philip Rieff, (New York, Collier Books, 1963), p. 108. Dr. Schreber was what we would term today, a transgendered person believing himself to be a woman trapped in a man's body. Because Freud had no knowledge of transsexuality, he hypothesizes that Schreber has repressed homosexual feelings for his two doctors despite the fact that no other evidence exists to support a finding of this fantasy. Schreber is, in fact, in what appears to be a happy, heterosexual marriage. While it is doubtless true that Schreber became quite mad at several points in his life, we might speculate that his desire to become a woman might not have progressed to madness were sex-change operations an available remedy. Despite his reputation as a homophobe, Freud writes that, "Generally speaking, every human being oscillates all through his life between heterosexual and homosexual feelings, and any frustration or disappointment in the one direction is apt to drive him over into the other," p. 145.

33 Freud, p. 113,

34 Freud, p. 112.

35 Freud, pp. 109 and 129.

36 Freud, p. 147.

37 Freud, p. 157.

38 Freud, p. 171.

39 Freud, p. 178.

40 Freud quotes Schreber as saying that, "a conspiracy against me was brought to a head. Its object was to contrive that, when once my nervous complaint had been recognized as incurable or assumed to be so, I should be handed over to a certain person in a particular manner." Freud interprets this to be a coded reference to Schreber's desire to be sexually "handed over" to Dr. Flechsig, Freud, p. 114.

41 It is possible that Freud means that Schreber's emasculation and powerlessness is an outcome of the repression of his transsexuality. There is a sense in which this could be true. That is, because Schreber cannot change his body from male to female, he really is powerless, and in the language of patriarchy, ironically, emasculated by the persistence of his maleness.

42 Freud, P. 182.

43 Showalter, pp. 194-95. She also notes that Whitley Streiber, author of the UFO abduction narrative, *Communion*, "announced that right-wing terrorists had threatened to kidnap his son and that the CIA was conspiring to prevent the publication of *Communion*," Showalter, p. 198.

The X-Files illustrated this brilliantly in an episode during the 1996 season entitled, "Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man." Cancer Man is a mysterious man who appears throughout the show as a nameless, chain smoking, high ranking government official. In this particular episode, Cancer Man is shown to have been the single force behind a great many historical events: the assassinations of JFK, Malcolm X, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, the Bay of Pigs, the Rodney King incident, Anita Hill, and the fact that the Buffalo Bills will never win the Super Bowl! The episode depicts the idea that there is no real difference between the interests of government and big business. The one thing he cannot control is the acceptance of his own fiction manuscript for publication.

44 Allucquere Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1996), p. 67.

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