

## UFO-Abduction Narratives and the Technology of Tradition<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*This article examines UFO-abduction narratives posted to online discussion fora, and argues that these narratives reflect millennial anxieties over an anticipated hyper-technological future figured as "alien." In particular, UFO-abduction narratives reflect concerns over developments in those technologies used to transmit information over space and time, i.e., technologies of tradition. These narratives thus thematize the circumstances of their own transmission, and developments in the transmission of traditional lore more generally.*

The first to point out a connection between UFO phenomena and the supernatural phenomena of tradition was astronomer Jacques Vallee, who, in 1969, suggested that the similarity among accounts of UFOs, demons, angels, fairies, and ghosts provides evidence against the extraterrestrial hypothesis of UFO origins (Vallee 1969). Folklorists have since heeded Linda Dégh's call to study reports of encounters with UFOs and those who pilot them as legends, hence as part of a tradition of anomalous-experience narratives describing human dealings with unusual beings of various kinds (Dégh 1977). In particular, Thomas Bullard and Peter Rojcewicz have contributed to an understanding of

the links between UFO- and fairy-lore, observing that informants' descriptions of aliens bear a remarkable resemblance to traditional accounts of anthropomorphic supernaturals, not least in the propensity of both groups to abduct human beings (Bullard 1989; Rojcewicz 1991).

A major factor distinguishing the two groups is the aliens' use of highly advanced technology, which is, from a human standpoint, futuristic. Accordingly, several scholars have interpreted the UFO-abduction narrative as a reaction to technological change, in one form or another (Dean 1998, 126-52; Luckhurst 1998, 38-40; Bullard 2000, 156-7; Barbeito 2005, 206-10; Dewan 2006, 197; Kelley-Romano 2006, 394; Brown 2007, 70-82, 85-99). I would like to contribute to this conversation by proposing that these narratives are especially concerned with developments in those technologies used to transmit information over space and time—what I am terming "technologies of tradition." I introduce this term to refer to any device for conveying knowledge or culture from one context into another, and to serve as a reminder that technology is intrinsic to tradition, even if it is only that most fundamental technology of tradition: language. Casting the matter in this way discourages the tendency to see technology as opposed to tradition, and allows the anxieties engendered by recent developments in new media to be contextualized within a long history of anxiety over changes to the ways in which elements of the past are brought into the future. The latest major development in the technology of tradition is the advent of the Internet, which represents the culmination of advancements in two spheres: digital

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information technology and mass media. Through an analysis of various motifs, I will argue that UFO-abduction narratives express anxieties over the rapid changes in these two spheres during the period in which these stories have been told, from the mid-twentieth century to the present. In particular, I argue that these narratives thematize the circumstances of their own transmission, which occurs today in large part via the Internet.<sup>2</sup>

Though referencing studies published by abduction investigators, this article focuses on the UFO-abduction narrative as it exists online, where numerous sites host discussion fora in which participants report their own and comment on one another's abduction experiences.<sup>3</sup> I have amassed a database of a little over 200 abduction narratives from English-language discussion fora, each of which is embedded in or, indeed, constituted by a discussion with multiple participants. Online-forum participants contribute their narratives spontaneously in an informal setting, responding to questions and comments from other participants who stand on a more or less equal footing with themselves. Instead of playing an active role, the researcher may choose, as I have done, to stand outside this process. As Jan Fernback and Trevor Blank have individually observed, the online discussion forum is therefore an ideal site to study legend, a genre that unfolds in conversation, often as a debate regarding matters of contested ontological status which informants might feel abashed to discuss in the presence of the academic researcher (Fernback 2003; Blank 2007). Despite these inherent advantages, there has thus far been little study of legends on the Internet. The UFO-abduction nar-

rative is a particularly apt subject for such a study, and a legend of particular interest at this time, in that it confronts one of the central concerns of our age: humanity's transformation through its engagement with technology.

### **Technology vs. Humanity**

Reports of anomalous objects in the skies go back at least as far as the description of Ezekiel's visions in the Old Testament, and the extraterrestrial hypothesis was adduced as early as the nineteenth century, when mysterious "airships" were sighted over various locations in the United States and presumed in the popular press to contain emissaries from other planets (Ezekiel 1, 4-28 NRSV; Sanarov 1981, 163; Denzler 2001, 5-6). The beginning of the UFO era is, however, usually dated to 1947, when "flying saucers" were first described by pilot Kenneth Arnold, who saw a group of disc-shaped objects above the Cascade Mountain range in the state of Washington; later that year stories surfaced about a crashed alien saucer in Roswell, New Mexico (Arnold and Palmer 1952; Coates 2001, vii). First-hand accounts of contact with the occupants of these craft began to appear in the 1950s and initially described benevolent beings who proffered gentle advice to willing human interlocutors (Leslie and Adamski 1953; Angelluci 1955)—but reports of a more sinister kind soon started to emerge. The best known UFO-abduction report of this era, and the first to exhibit a pattern that has since become familiar, was made in 1961 by Betty and Barney Hill, who, under hypnotic regression, told psychiatrist Benjamin Simon of being taken off a New Hampshire road by aliens who used mind control to force the

couple into their craft and subject them to medical examination (Fuller 1966).<sup>4</sup> Several similar accounts gained wide publicity in the 1970s, and in the 1980s and 90s UFO-abduction narratives became almost commonplace, as investigators obtained stories from hundreds of individuals who underwent hypnosis to recall periods of “missing time” they suspected might indicate alien interference with their memories.<sup>5</sup> Today, UFO-abduction narratives flourish online.

The UFO-abduction narrative is, then, a phenomenon of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. What distinguishes this era from previous eras is the proliferation of increasingly sophisticated technology and its growing presence in the daily lives of ordinary people. When the modern UFO era began in 1947, many of the household electronic devices in use today had already been developed, but ownership of these devices was not widespread, even in relatively wealthy countries. Advances in mass production in the 1950s and 60s together with increased prosperity in the wake of World War II greatly expanded the presence and number of such items in the average homes of industrialized nations. Electronic television sets, for example, became available for purchase by the general public in the 1930s, but the proportion of U.S. households owning televisions in 1950 was just 10%, increasing rapidly to 94% by 1965 (Steinberg 1980). By 2005, ownership had increased only slightly, to 98%, but the average number of televisions per household had grown to 2.6 (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). Other technologies have taken longer to infiltrate the home. The 1940s saw the beginnings of computer technology, but it

was not until the introduction of the microchip in 1975 that the home computer became a possibility. In 1984, just 20% of Americans used a computer, and most of this usage was confined to the workplace, but by 2007 this number had increased to 80%, with 76% of Americans owning personal computers (U.S. Census Bureau 1988; Pew Research Center 2007). Even more intimate than technology in the home, the use of technology in the body also increased dramatically during this period. The first electric pacemaker was implanted in a heart patient in 1958. Today, roughly 250,000 cardiac pacemakers are surgically implanted each year, and the use of other medical implants, such as neurological stimulators and cochlear devices, is growing (Haddad, Houben, and Serdijn 2006, 38). Perhaps the most startling developments have occurred in the realm of assisted reproductive technology, or ART. Since the birth of the first “test-tube baby” in 1978, an issue of great controversy at the time, in-vitro fertilization has become a relatively routine practice, especially in Europe and the United States, with some 200,000 ART babies born worldwide in 2004 (Horsey 2006).

Our current idea of the future is, logically, one in which technological advancement has continued apace, and technology has become embedded even more thoroughly in every aspect of our everyday existence. The aliens in UFO-abduction narratives, with their high-tech devices that allow them to intrude into the most intimate realms of human life (the interior of the home, the interior of the body, the “recesses of the mind”) aptly represent this vision of a hyper-technological future. UFO-abduction-forum participants regularly comment on

the advanced state of alien technology, which they attempt to contextualize by estimating how far in the future human beings might be expected to reach similar levels of technical expertise. AmentiHall, for example, characterizes aliens as possessing “technology and mental faculties far exceeding our own from hundreds to thousands of years,” while LooseLipsSinkShips puts a finer point on it, stating that the aliens use “technology that is roughly 2,500 years more advanced than where we are in the year 2007” (AmentiHall 2009; LooseLipsSinkShips 2007). Bart5050 goes further still:

If a species reached the industrial age say four billion years ago, manipulating the physical laws might be simple. We manipulate the physical laws of the universe every time we turn on a PC. Scale that up a few billion years. (Bart5050 2009, Post 9)<sup>6</sup>

The aliens in these narratives wield a futuristic array of high-tech devices, and it is their highly advanced technology that allows them to come to this world in the first place, but their connections with technology go further than this. Aliens also tend to exhibit the traits of technology. A common motif in both UFO-abduction narratives and popular representations of aliens—from the pod people of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to *Star Trek’s* Spock—is that aliens lack emotion. This lack is usually regarded as connected with alien intelligence. As abductee and discussion-forum participant Mark Larson puts it:

[The aliens are] just a group of people without emotions. They lack emotion and are curious about our emotions: happy, sad, uneasy, frightened, love,

hate. What we have for emotions they have for intelligence. That’s the compromise. (Larson 2007)

Larson expresses a dichotomy that is common to both the human/alien and human/machine distinctions in the popular imagination. We anthropomorphize machines in terms of “intelligence,” imagining that there could be a consciousness at work in the computer or the robot, but we are less able to imagine a machine consciousness capable of emotion, which is felt to be more deeply human than reason. Lack of emotion links the alien and the machine. In the discourse surrounding UFO-abduction, this similarity prompts speculation as to the aliens’ true “nature.”

In an online discussion of the seeming affectlessness of the “Gray” aliens who usually figure in abduction narratives, Advancer states that “the Grayling must be seen as a robot controlled by a cowardly being, for this is what they are - nothing more than flesh with no free mind” (Advancer 2009). Roberto21 describes his alien abductors as “small beings who behaved, as always, in a totally robotic, mechanical way” (Roberto21 2009, Post 32). Bart5050 conjectures that they are beings “specifically engineered to make long journeys and gather material,” while Angel opines that the Grays may be “clones,” because “they all look the same” (Bart5050 2009, Post 3; Angel 2006). In line with this idea and noting Bridget Brown’s characterization of the Grays as “an army of uniformity,” scholar Patricia Barbeito suggests that this sameness “identifies [the aliens] as symbols of the effects of mass reproduction,” a symbolism that is reinforced in “hybrid-

ization" narratives, which confront human beings with their own "technical reproducibility" (Brown 1997, 5; Barbeito 2005, 206-7).

The engineering of humanity is the central theme in the "hybridization" narrative, as Stephanie Kelley-Romano terms those abduction stories in which aliens act to save their own species from extinction through a human-alien interbreeding project (Kelley-Romano 2006, 394-7).<sup>7</sup> During many abductions the reproductive systems of both sexes are examined at length, and ova and sometimes embryos are removed from female abductees while sperm is collected from males (Bullard 1989, 156; Rojcewicz 1991, 493). Some narratives go further, describing how fetuses resulting from the aliens' breeding program are implanted in and then harvested from female abductees before being placed in a high-tech facility abduction investigator David Jacobs terms the "incubatorium" (Jacobs 1992, 153). The scale of the incubatorium's "mass reproduction" is emphasized in the online narrative of Rz Blade, who reports having seen aboard a UFO "shelves and shelves full of babies in jars—thousands and thousands of them" (Rz Blade 2007).<sup>8</sup> Aliens are like devices or copies of a prototype rather than individual organic beings, and they treat their human abductees correspondingly as things to be mechanically reproduced and manipulated.

Another dramatic example of this is when aliens simply "switch off" people whom they do not wish to abduct but who are present during an abduction, rendering them unconscious or at least immobile for a time (Hopkins 1987, 34-5, 97, 110-11; Jacobs 1992, 55, 71). Abduc-

tion-forum contributor HighlanderConspiritor describes the experience thus:

[I] was with a friend, camping in my back garden. Bright lights above our heads. All I remember was he went nuts, screaming about aliens, while I just suddenly couldn't move and fell into a sort of deep sleep, totally numb with no thoughts while awake at the same time. Aware of things, if you know what I mean. I just remember being stood over for a long time by very tall thin people, and then waking up with my mate crying in the corner of the tent. (HighlanderConspiritor 2005)

The aliens' ability to reproduce and manipulate human beings in mechanical ways suggests the technologization of humanity, a suggestion reinforced by the terminology used to describe what aliens do to abductees in several narratives posted online. Dark Knight, for example, reports that aliens are "overwriting" her thoughts and performing a "data download" into her mind, while Phil describes a procedure in which a Gray "programs" an abductee by staring into his eyes (Dark Knight 2008; Phil 2009).<sup>9</sup> Aliens are, moreover, said to implant humans with tiny devices, which are supposed to locate, monitor, and/or control abductees (Hopkins 1987, 59). In one forum it is speculated that an abductee might have a "micro-stargate installed by aliens" in her uterus as part of the hybridization program (OmegaLogos 2009). The alterations made to abductee Cliff Dess are more thorough:

I had my left eye removed from the socket and things threaded through the optic nerve. Things were pushed

down the back of my throat and a fine needle which was pushed up through the table that I was lying on was inserted into the back of my neck [...] I have some of the most sophisticated technology integrated into my body that is state of the art [...] I believe the procedures that were performed on me were an advanced way of monitoring us. They are able to see what I see, hear what I hear and speak, so I am a prisoner inside my own existence. I do not believe that I am the only one with this technology integrated within. I believe this is being done rampantly throughout society to certain individuals who may be a threat to their agenda. (Dess 2007)

Many abductees feel that they have been electrically charged as a result of such implants or other alien procedures, and that this charge causes the equipment around them to sometimes malfunction (WorldShadow 2007; Dreamforaday 2009; Koval321 2009; Roberto21 2009: Post 1.). In a related phenomenon, abductees report hearing electrical sounds before, during, and after their abductions, and one abductee sporadically sees “wavelengths” or “grid lines...like on a computer,” after the aliens have “altered” him (Smersh 2008; Cravemor 2009; Mamasong 2009; NCDreamer38 2009; Proustwouldlikesumtea 2009). Such technologization may ultimately render human beings as affectless as aliens, for Dark Knight claims: “I also have not felt my emotions since the attacks started in 1998” (Dark Knight 2008).

The de-humanization of humanity through alien technology is a theme that is regularly discussed in UFO-abduction fora. In a story reminiscent of fairy changeling legends (ML 5085), abductee

Cliff Dess relates that during his childhood his mother was periodically replaced with a “clone” who acted “robotically” while his true mother was used by the aliens in their breeding program (Dess 2007). In Dess’s narrative, it turns out that humans are being replaced on a much larger scale, for Dess sees alien/human hybrids, whom he identifies in part through their “robotic” actions, intermingling with the human population wherever he goes, and one such hybrid communicates telepathically with Dess’s wife, telling her that “humans are becoming outnumbered” (Ibid.). Indeed, at one point Dess laments the decline of humanity into mindless consumerism and emotional coldness—which is part of the alien plot—with the statement that “we are becoming the hybrids of the future” (Ibid.). On another forum, Red expresses a similar idea:

We are all stressed out, but what is driving so many people over the edge? I have been called paranoid and delusional, and sometimes it hurts. But I stand by my theory that we here on Planet Earth are being invaded. They are using advanced technology to warp our minds, and to turn us against one another. (Red 2007)

In UFO-abduction narratives, it is technology’s increasing capacity to affect and alter humanity on many levels that the aliens, as the machine-like representatives of a high-tech future, portend. I propose that these narratives are especially concerned with the effects of developments in those technologies used to transmit information over space and time—what I am terming technologies of tradition. After all, what aliens seek during abduction is, largely, information.

### Aliens and Information Technology

Aliens gather various kinds of information during abductions. They study human anatomy at length and collect physical samples, especially of reproductive materials providing genetic information. Aliens are also interested in the knowledge humans possess, but rather than ask abductees questions, aliens often resort to a technique Jacobs refers to as “information transfer” (Jacobs 1992: 197). Sometimes this is accomplished through special equipment, as in the case of Roberto21, who describes the following experience aboard a UFO:

I was also able to see my whole life projected into images, extremely fast. I had the feeling that everything inside my brain, past memories, sensations, experiences, was also being watched and recorded by some kind of a device linked to me through the chair I was sitting on. (Roberto21 2009: Post 1)

Here, information is conveyed not through oral, written, or even telepathic communication, but as a kind of download, as from one machine to another. Information may also be transferred wirelessly, as it were, through a procedure Jacobs terms “mindscan,” during which an alien stares deeply into an abductee’s eyes, leaving abductees with the feeling that “data” has been “extracted from their minds” (Jacobs 1992: 97). Adding to the technological quality of this process is the mindscan interface, i.e., the aliens’ eyes.

The eyes are perhaps the most commented-upon feature of alien anatomy. Most abductees describe alien eyes as enormous and uniformly black, taking up most of the alien’s face (Bullard 1987,

243-4; Jacobs 1992, 223). Many, like abductee John\_Doe, remember the eyes as an especially frightening aspect of the abduction experience:

It had eyes that were big and almond shaped [...] there were no pupils. Its eyes were black and void, showing no signs of feeling [...] I still get nightmares of this entity looking at me (John\_Doe 2009A)

Noting the eyes’ seeming hardness and reflectivity, some abductees have likened them to an artificial covering of some kind, such as glass or plastic (Hopkins 1981: 189-90):

To me, it looked like they were wearing a very hard, shiny helmet around their heads –so I wasn’t really seeing the real head, and it looked like they had coverings on their eyes. They had the classical large, black, almond shaped eyes – but to me they looked like coverings. (Alexis\_Amy 2009)

In short, alien eyes resemble blank screens.<sup>10</sup> The interface between human and alien during information gathering is therefore akin to the screens that serve as interface between humans and various devices used to transmit and receive information: the television, the computer, the mobile phone. Abductees often report seeing a bluish glow during abduction, which mimics the glow from such a screen in a darkened room (GenericallyMajestic 2009; Roberto21 2009, Post 1; Ibelieve 2009; Spacemushrooms 2009; John\_Doe 2009A). And just as one usually confronts a blank screen before beginning an experience with information technology, the aliens’ eyes often serve as a gateway into the abduction experience

(Jacobs 1992: 96). The experience of abductee Mark Larson is typical:

I was about eleven years old when I woke up to a strangely, dimly lit room with three Grays over my bed, two on one side, the third "leader" on the right-hand side. My older brother was about ten feet from me in his bed sleeping. I gasped to holler out and tried to flex myself from my bed. I was paralyzed from the neck down and nothing came out of my mouth, no noise. My vocal cords were completely shut off. The three Grays were just bending their heads staring at me, like they could read my mind, their eyes wide and big. (Larson 2007)<sup>11</sup>

In addition to gathering information, aliens also use their eyes to implant visions, feelings, and thoughts into their human subjects, constituting a data-transfer in the other direction (Jacobs 1992: 99-106, 143-50, 197). This is what happened during the abduction of Funky-Zoo:

Then I suddenly woke up and I saw this short being, about 70 to 80 centimeters, in front of my bed looking into my eyes. At first I was terrified, thinking, what is this thing going to do to me? But then, while looking in its eyes, these calming thoughts came into my head. I remember thinking, "he is a good guy; he's here to help you; he won't hurt you; you're safe now." I remember looking in its eyes was very relaxing. (Funky-Zoo 2009)

The alien eye is the interface for a two-way exchange of information, much like the screens that serve as interface between humans and the digital database. The digital database is the defining technological breakthrough of the "Information Age,"

constituting a revolutionary development in the technology of tradition. The beginnings of digital information technology can be traced to machines built in the 1940s, the decade when the modern UFO phenomenon began. The development of Internet technology, which profoundly increases the scope and power of the database, starts with the United States' establishment of ARPA (the Advanced Research Projects Agency)<sup>12</sup> in 1958 as part of the Cold War quest to supersede Soviet technology, motivated in part by the USSR's Sputnik launches. The development of cyberspace is thus linked at the outset to the conquest of outer space. It is the speed of computer technology and its capacity to process through great expanses of information in brief periods of time that make possible the digital database; correspondingly it is the ability of Internet technology to transmit information rapidly through space that radically increases access to the digital database. These features of the database are mirrored in the great speed at which UFOs are reported to travel and the vast distances they are said to cover, indicating a power for transmitting information unparalleled in previous technologies of tradition. But there can be a horrific aspect to the inhuman scale of such power, and UFO-abduction narratives are, for the most part, horror stories.

To be abducted is to be overwhelmed by technology. Aliens almost never use bodily force to capture human beings, but rather rely on special devices beyond human ken to render humans helpless. A beam of light is sometimes used to transport abductees to the aliens' ship, or a mysterious technology is used to paralyze humans so that the aliens may do



their work unimpeded, as in the case of AmentiHall:

The next occurrence was a battle of battles. It changed my life and my perception of everything. I, as a soul, was fighting for my life, for control of my body. This being horribly violated my entire body and was attempting to control me. I was in my body but POWERLESS. The technology it used was beyond my comprehension. There was a loud frequency “scratching” or “crash sound” in my brain. (AmentiHall 2009)

During capture, and during information gathering, many abductees report feeling similarly “overwhelmed” by the hypnotic power of the aliens’ screen-like eyes, which they are “powerless” to resist (Jacobs 1992: 98-9). The information abductees receive from aliens can also be overwhelming, as in the experience of Dark Knight, during her “data download”:

I was inundated with swirling 3D shapes and numerous background sounds, very confusing, very disorienting [...] the movement, swirling shapes and noise, I couldn’t concentrate. Everything to overload your senses so you just shut down. (Dark Knight 2008)

In the often nightmarish terms of the UFO-abduction narrative, humanity is opposed to the alien technologies that threaten to overwhelm it, just as the latest technologies of tradition are so often seen as threatening to overwhelm and alter basic elements of our humanity, and our connection to the past. This perception goes back at least as far as Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates tells how the

King of Egypt once warned that the technology of writing would make people forgetful insofar as they would become dependent on “external marks that are *alien* to themselves” (graphēs exōthen hup’ allotriōn tupōn), rather than relying on their own powers of memory (Plato 274e).<sup>13</sup> Walter Ong has pointed out that concerns over computer technology mirror the concerns over writing expressed in the *Phaedrus*, in that both technologies are seen to “provide an external resource for what ought to be [an] internal resource,” and in both cases “give-and-take between real persons” is replaced with something “unreal” and “unnatural” (Ong [1982], 78-9). The alienness of the UFO and its pilots stands for the perceived unnaturalness of the latest technologies of tradition, and their power to alienate by to some extent replacing face-to-face oral interaction as a means for transmitting information. In this respect, UFO-abduction narratives serve as commentaries on the circumstances of their own transmission, for these narratives are transmitted mainly through mass media.

### UFOs and Mass Media

Torunn Selberg has observed that in a number of narratives relating UFO sightings in 1991 near Bergen, Norway, references to the mass media provided the specific orientation in space and time characteristic of the legend genre (Selberg 1993, 114). Selberg cites several instances where the narrator sets the scene with reference to a particular television or radio program to which he or she was paying attention just before sighting the UFO, as in the following:

And when I was sitting here and was about to start following the program "Window on the World"...And I was sitting here and watching the start of that program. Then I saw, out of the corner of my eye, a cluster of white blinking lights... (Selberg 1993, 110)<sup>14</sup>

Sometimes, as in the case of online-discussion-forum contributor All-Natural, mass media transmissions alert abductees to the fact that they have had a "missing time" experience:

I was watching the History Channel, a two-hour biography of the life of Nero. After a few minutes of watching it I got bored because I'd already seen that the day before. So I went outside in their backyard to enjoy the view of the city [...] I sat on one of the lawn chairs for about 30 minutes [...] Then suddenly the wind stopped and I had an annoying ringing noise in my head. Also I had a headache. I just felt weird. It's kind of like the feeling you get when you realize you're on the floor after you fainted [...] When I looked at the TV the biography of Nero already passed! It's impossible after sitting for 20-30 minutes a two-hour biography ended. (All-Natural 2008A)

Another kind of mass-media referencing is found in the UFO-abduction narrative of online-discussion-forum contributor Kayla, who, in another move characteristic of the legend genre, reassures her readers of her story's veracity with the following analogy: "I will tell you right now that the experience and the 'aliens' were as realistic as I'm seeing the computer screen right now" (Kayla 2001). In a similar vein, Gabblebee describes her alien abductors as being "as pale as the textbox I'm typing in" (Gabblebee 2009).

On the one hand, the fact that people use references to mass media to verify and to locate the events of UFO narratives spatially and temporally reflects the amount of time people spend engaging with these media, especially at night when most UFO phenomena occur. On the other hand, as is especially evident in the last two examples, the proximity of mass media experiences to UFO experiences in narrative reflects the ways in which this lore is transmitted. Selberg reports that in the case of the Bergen UFO sightings the mass media served to transmit people's experience stories and, by so doing, provided the reference points for many more people to interpret their anomalous experiences as UFO sightings (Selberg 1993, 114). With respect to UFO-abduction narratives, Thomas Bullard notes that "dispersal of this folklore by electronic and printed means has become so important that oral transmission plays only a minor role" (Bullard 1989, 166). Indeed, most abductees first become aware that they have been abducted after encountering an abduction account in the mass media and then beginning to question "missing time" in their own experience; once they are convinced of their own abduction, abductees then typically become avid consumers and producers of abduction narratives in the mass media, increasingly on the Internet (Brown 2007, 178-9, 182). The UFO phenomenon is thus part of a relatively new development in the transmission of folk narrative, one that only becomes possible in the latter twentieth century, whereby the mass media become the primary conduit for some narratives which would have previously been spread mainly through the oral tradition. There are ways in which UFO narratives thematize this development.

C.G. Jung described accounts of UFOs as constituting a “visionary rumour,” that is, “a story that is told all over the world, but differs from an ordinary rumour in that it is expressed in the form of visions, or perhaps owed its existence to them in the first place and is now kept alive by them” (Jung 1959: 19). With this definition, it would seem that any widespread traditional narrative relating a type of anomalous experience that entails a visual component could likewise be termed a “visionary rumour”—but Jung’s emphasis on the visual aspect of UFO phenomena (an aspect which is also brought out in the term “sighting” commonly used to refer to UFO encounters) is peculiarly fitting, for UFO narratives may be regarded as “visionary” in ways that other anomalous experience stories are not. Whereas the anthropomorphic supernatural beings of tradition tend to dwell in the hidden nooks and crannies of the world (in the woods, underwater, beneath the mound, inside the crag), UFOs are on display in the sky, at least potentially visible to many people at once.<sup>15</sup> Jung emphasized the “collective” nature of UFO visions, which frequently involve waves of sightings (Jung 1959: 19-20). This collectivity features prominently in the UFO-dream narrative posted online by Dreamforaday:

I walked over to a large field with a crowd of people standing and looking up at the sky [...] I looked up and saw a bunch of star-like shiny dots [...] I remember feeling a surge of excitement and unusual connection hard to put into words. I kept looking up at the shiny metallic objects gently hovering in the sky [...] I ran home to see what the TV networks say. And indeed, every channel was covering the event.

They were visible to everyone everywhere in the world. There was no panic, no fear, no incidents, no warnings. Just pure awe and excitement. (Dreamforaday 2009)

The sense of “unusual connection” Dreamforaday feels sharing this experience with the crowd in the field deepens into “pure awe and excitement” at the prospect of sharing it with “everyone everywhere in the world.” It is unclear from the narrative whether the UFOs are visible to everyone in their skies or on their television screens, suggesting an equivalence between the two modes of viewing. The UFO in flight, visible by many people and from many perspectives at once, symbolizes the accessibility of information, and the “unusual connection” between people that can result, when the mode of transmission is through mass media.

The history of mass media arguably begins with the printing press, but the range of media transmission does not reach a truly massive scale until the twentieth century with the broadcasting of radio and television, and, most recently, the advent of the World Wide Web. Since the Web went online in 1991, the Internet has become a major mode of transmission for UFO and UFO-abduction narratives. Numerous websites, chatrooms, and discussion fora are devoted to UFO phenomena, and this is part of a larger trend in the transmission of traditional narrative. The mass readability of information posted to the Web, styled “electronic skywriting” by cognitive scientist Stevan Harnad (Harnad 1991), is akin to the mass viewability of the UFO as object in the sky. The proliferation and simultaneous existence of UFO and UFO-abduc-

tion stories on the Web, each providing a unique perspective on the phenomenon, often through the firsthand narration of an individual experience, is akin to the multiple perspectives possible simultaneously of the aerial UFO. But although Internet technology lends itself to such visual analogies, and although the transmission of folk narrative via the Internet is still largely accomplished through the medium of writing, Internet technology may be understood as sharing in some of the characteristics more normally associated with orality/aurality, and these characteristics may be part of what makes this medium so appealing as a mode of transmission for legend.

### **Secondary Orality:**

#### **Community vs. Alienation**

Walter Ong coined the term “secondary orality” in 1982 to refer to that orality “sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (Ong [1982], 11). Secondary orality is like the orality of face-to-face communication not only in its use of the spoken word, Ong maintains, but also in “its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas” (Ibid., 134). Each of these characteristics distinguishes orality, secondary or otherwise, from written modes of communication, according to Ong, as writing presupposes the separation of message-sender from message-receiver in both time and space, making it less present- and less presence-oriented than spoken communication, which is rooted in the temporal and spatial togetherness of face-to-face interac-

tion. Also, the written word is mostly delivered in a form geared toward individual reading, while the spoken word is at least potentially audible to many people at once, especially if it is broadcast through the mass media of radio or television. Thus for Ong, “listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience,” whereas “reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves” (Ibid., 134).

Writing in 1982, Ong did not address computer-mediated-communication technologies (CMC)—such as email, texting, and online chatrooms—in his discussion of the differences between orality and literacy, but others have pointed out the ways in which these technologies share in some of the characteristics of orality that Ong identifies, despite their being written modes of communication (Harnad 1991; Langham 1994; Fernback 2003). The speed of CMC approaches that of oral conversation, creating a sense of co-presence in time, while the interface of the screen, with messages co-present in visual space suggests a shared place. The potential for fostering the sense of participation in a temporally and spatially co-present group that characterizes face-to-face orality is thus arguably greater with CMC than with the forms of secondary orality that Ong described in 1982, with the possible exception of telephony. In the age of YouTube, DVRs, and podcasting, as well as the personal viewing/listening device, radio and television audience members may not be listening to a particular program at the same time or place as anyone else. Radio and television, moreover, mostly provide one-way transmissions in contrast to the multi-user communication technology

of CMC, which better approximates the give and take of face-to-face oral conversation. Orality and CMC are also to some extent comparable in terms of their greater accessibility compared to such forms of transmission as literary publishing or television broadcasting, to which contributing access is severely restricted. In these ways CMC brings us back together again from the relative isolation of earlier modes of writing and earlier forms of mass media. The acts of mass-media transmission by which UFO-abduction narratives are spread, especially via the Internet where technology reproduces some of the qualities of face-to-face communication, likewise reunite abductees with their fellow human beings, overcoming to an extent the potential for these technologies to alienate us from one another. The “secondary” sense of togetherness fostered through these technologies thus constitutes a way in which humanity resists being overwhelmed by technology.

Many abductees seem to regard the Internet in this light, as a way to overcome isolation. Abductees often report feeling cut off from their fellow human beings insofar as they cannot talk about their experiences with non-abductees without the fear of ridicule, as in the case of John\_Doe:

Now it's like I want to talk to friends about it, but then again I don't want to be labeled as that crazy guy. So here I am searching for answers on an Internet forum. (John\_Doe 2009B)

Even if non-abductees are willing to offer a sympathetic and non-judgmental ear, they cannot be relied upon to give advice in matters so far beyond the aver-

age person's range of experience. This is why, after abduction, All-Natural turns to the Internet:

I have no idea what happened. The next day I was kind of depressed thinking how my goals in life are so stupid and pointless. I stayed indoors for a few days looking up all over the Internet to find people who I can talk and relate to. Nobody I interact with in my daily life seems to have any answers. (All-Natural 2008B)

The Internet is regarded by abductees as an improvement upon earlier forms of mass media in this regard, because it makes possible interactions among people who, though separated by geography and other circumstances, are united by abduction. Another way in which the Internet constitutes an improvement on previous technologies of tradition is indicated in an online post by Howoulduno:

Technology has changed so much in the last few years that a truer picture of the number of encounters is emerging via the INTERNET [...] My first experience was in 1969, then I read all the UFO books that I could on the matter. I found USA authors very unreliable in their reporting, whereas the INTERNET has many witnesses to these UFOs from their own experiences [...] All the books that I read didn't fit with my encounter, but the INTERNET has shown me that many people have had similar experiences. (Howoulduno 2009)

By creating a vast database of personal accounts, the Internet provides a better idea of abduction's extent, allowing abductees to feel themselves part of a widespread phenomenon rather than isolated

in the singularity of their experiences. Also, the Internet grants a “truer picture” of the nature of abduction, directly from abductees rather than filtered through the writings of abduction investigators. If, as in the case of Howoulduno, this picture better comports with an abductee’s own experience than the picture given elsewhere, the sense of singularity is reduced even further. Abductees use Internet technology to connect with one another and thus overcome feelings of isolation, but is this techno-togetherness really sufficient to counteract the alienating effects of the technology through which it is accomplished? It is important not to paint too bright a picture, for UFO-abduction narratives thematize the circumstances of their own transmission, and these narratives tend to be dark tales. The role of isolation in UFO-abduction narratives indicates that there is no simple resolution to the problem of technological alienation.

The transmission of UFO-abduction narratives through mass media tends to happen when one is physically alone or *as if* alone, increasingly when one is in front of the computer screen interfacing with the online digital database. Likewise, abduction tends to happen when people are alone or as if alone (in group situations, everyone else is “switched off”), confronted by the screen-like eyes of the alien abductor. Of course, anomalous-experience stories in general tend to begin with the isolation of the protagonist. The person traveling alone at night through the forest is far more likely to meet up with the anthropomorphic supernaturals than is the person who remains among her fellow humans, indicating that isolation may signal or constitute a norm vio-

lation that makes one liable to encounter an anomalous being. In UFO-abduction narratives, however, isolation is often achieved not through norm violation but through a kind of norm adherence, when an abductee follows the cultural norm of retreating into solitude to utilize technology. In many UFO-abduction narratives, abduction happens when people are interfacing with electronic media, or immediately thereafter:<sup>16</sup>

I was staring at the TV screen when all of a sudden I looked at the doorway and an un-worldly-looking figure was there. (MagicWords55 2009)

I went to my room to play video games to take my mind off of things, and fell asleep in my bed with controller in hand. LOL! Anyway, I woke up again to see a blue-purple face that was in the shape of what a Gray face would look like. (Lionbear 2009)

After about an hour of messing around on the computer, I decided it was time to go to sleep. I shut my computer down [...] then I looked up. I was completely thrown off guard. I was staring at a being. (John-Doe 2009)

It may be that people do feel a certain guilt or uneasiness engaging in what could be construed as anti-social behavior when they isolate themselves physically to interface with technology, and these feelings may play a role in actualizing what is usually a negative abduction experience that in some ways mimics the experience of engaging with technology. Like the use of electronic media, abduction is typically an act of physical

isolation during which abductees are transported away from their fellow human beings and into the alien realm. Even when people are abducted together, like Betty and Barney Hill, the aliens separate them aboard the UFO, placing them in individual rooms to undergo individual procedures and returning them separately to the original point of abduction (Fuller 1966). Sometimes abductees report seeing other unknown abductees aboard the craft, but separation usually obtains among them, as in the narrative of Roberto21:

I woke up and instead of being in my bedroom, I found myself inside a clear glass cylinder [...] I remember desperately trying to get out of the container but I could not move a muscle except for my eyelids. Finally, and all at once by sheer force of will, I was able to regain movement of my limbs. I jumped out of the glass container faster than a spring [...] To my horror, I saw a row of glass containers [...] In each of these clear glass cylinders there was either a man or a woman, lying nude under this dense glowing greenish solution. I panicked and, yelling and screaming like a madman, I began to run towards a window of light I saw at the end of a corridor. It was not easy to get to the light. This place was huge [...] I passed many other containers, all identical to the one I have been in. [...] Just a few steps before I reached the lighted area, still screaming at the top of my voice, two humanoids came to me from the opposite direction. One of them touched me on the shoulder and I passed out immediately. (Roberto21 2009: Post 1)

Like the participants in an online discussion forum, these abductees are united

by abduction, but their union leaves something to be desired. The passive and isolated state the aliens inflict on their human victims mimics the state of sleep, which is fitting given that so many abductees are taken from their beds, but it also evokes engagement with electronic media, during which one tends to be physically (and sometimes mentally) passive, and, increasingly, alone. In Roberto21's narrative, the isolation that the aliens are able to inflict is what saves them, for their human captives outnumber them and would easily overpower them if only they could act in unison. This happens in the home as well as aboard the ship, for abductees commonly cry out during abduction to other people sleeping nearby, who strangely fail to awaken. In these scenarios, abductees feel that if they could only communicate they would not be abducted. This motif is echoed on another level of UFO-abduction discourse, in the opinion expressed by many participants in online discussion fora that if enough abductees will share their stories, abductions can be brought to an end.

The desire to gather as much information as possible about the phenomenon of abduction in one place, so that ultimately an answer can be found as to what is really going on and abduction can be ended, is expressed again and again on these fora. In a forum on UFOSeek.com, a participant named Jeff refers to his attempts to compile a comprehensive record of his own in a "big book":

The big book is actually everything I have experienced personally over the past 37 years. I wrote it because I was forgetting too many important answers, and when I come across people

like you and the rest on this forum, it allows me to open up and give you everything I've experienced in hope that this information would be of great value to everyone here. (Jeff 2009)

The idea behind the book is appreciated, but the technology of the book is considered outmoded by another participant, Miro, who replies:

Hey Jeff, try to imagine the BIG BOOK is here and it is live and it is called the UFOSeek forum. To be helpful we have to come together in one place and work side by side. We should not pull the information away in pieces. All the info needs to stay here to help anyone who will freely enter our forum [...] I just think that this kind of research can never be finished by one person. (Miro 2009A and 2009B)

Community is seen here not as an end in itself, but as a means to understanding and ultimately overcoming abduction. The technology of the Internet is regarded as instrumental in providing an arena where this community can coalesce. Insofar as this community is established online, however, it partakes of the technology that, like abduction, induces isolation, resulting in a circular movement with an uncertain outcome. This tension between isolation and community, with both states linked to technology, runs through UFO-abduction narratives and indicates these stories' significance as meditations on the complex problems of communication in the Information Age. This tension, and its implications for our relationship with the latest technologies of tradition, will be explored in the remainder of this essay through the analysis of one individual's abduction saga.

### **The Case of Raptor\_Evolved**

The complex interplay among themes of isolation, community, and technology is evident in the narrative of abductee Raptor\_Evolved. Raptor identifies himself as "Mexican-American," and states that he was "born and raised in Chicago" (Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 1). His earliest abduction experience happens when he is a child visiting relatives in Mexico:

I believe I was about ten in the summer of 1992. It was either a Saturday or a Sunday, but twice every month the entire village has a get-together in the front of the patio of the old Catholic church where we have pozole. You know, a great kind of get-together of sorts where all the adult people dance, laugh, and drink to all hours of the morning, while the kids run around chasing each other. At around 12 AM I remember looking for my dad and telling him I was tired, I wanted to go to sleep. I thought my dad ignored me. He came back a couple seconds later and told me my uncle would take me to their house to go to rest. My uncle also took one of the other villager's kids to drop off at their house which is further down from the road. (Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 1)

The celebration Raptor describes at the beginning of his narrative—set as it is in a "village," in front of "the old Catholic church," where the entire community, young and old, gathers to share the traditional pre-Columbian stew known as "pozole"—evokes an earlier era more characterized by face-to-face *communitas* than the Information Age. The sense of community that is established so effectively here is contrasted sharply by the isolation of the following scene:



So my uncle's house is at the end of the village. He has a mezcal field which is the plant that is used to make tequila. He dropped me off at his house and went about his business. I remember resting on the couch reading a book before I went to sleep. It was a book on the history of the Pemex Corp (really boring) when one of the cats started getting really annoyed. It puffed up and ran at one of the doors and started hissing through the glass. I put my book down, went to see what all the fuss was about and saw nothing. I immediately felt strange. I could not describe it back then but I know now it was as if someone was watching me outside. When you look outside through the glass doors you see the mezcal field. Out of curiosity I opened the door and nothing was there. It did seem perhaps strange that the mezcal was waving in the air back and forth even though there was no wind. I was very scared at that moment so I raced back inside and locked all the doors and secured all the windows and turned all the lights on in the house. (Ibid.)

The eerie solitude of the uncle's house, at the edge of the village and bounded by a field, frightens Raptor, oddly, by inducing the sense of his not being alone. His isolation from other human beings exposes Raptor to the sense of a mysterious presence. He seeks solace in a technology that is often used to combat feelings of loneliness, the television:

I then went into my uncle's bedroom and turned the TV on with the lights on. I found all three cats scared underneath the bed. I locked the door to the bedroom. I sat on the bed watching the TV. In my left hand I had a black plastic watch. In my right hand I had the

book. I still had my shoes on. I woke up to the sound of a pickup truck in the driveway. I got up and realized that I had none of the items I mentioned before me, nor did I have my shoes or socks on. The door was open to the bedroom. The cats were nowhere to be found. As I walked down the hallway I looked to the right and on the counter were my items, perfectly lined next to each other. I found my socks, shoes, book, and my watch right next to each other perfectly placed next to each other! (Ibid.)

The television serves to simulate human companionship, but it is sometimes just when people turn to this medium to overcome feelings of loneliness that abduction occurs, bringing them together not with their fellow human beings, but with an uncanny alien presence (Crazyflanger 2007; Jtobias69 2009; Lionbear 2009; Magicwords55 2009). Media scholar Jeffrey Sconce has observed that from their inception electronic media have inspired a sense of mysterious presence or "liveness" that belies their mechanical reality (Sconce 2000). Radio and television in particular, in that they broadcast disembodied voices and images without substance, give the impression that they serve as "gateways to electronic otherworlds" (Ibid., 4). In Raptor's story, his sense of mysterious presence in his uncle's house is followed by an experience with television, which is in turn followed by what he interprets as an abduction. Although Raptor does not seem to purposefully forsake the old-fashioned human togetherness of the village feast in favor of the simulated togetherness of TV, this is the substitution in which he engages. The sense of simulated togetherness the TV provides not only falls short of the to-

getherness achieved through real face-to-face interaction; it brings Raptor together with an alien presence.

The next experience Raptor narrates happens when he is in his twenties and living in the United States. This time, it is when he is trying to move in the opposite direction, from simulated to face-to-face companionship, that abduction occurs:

I was playing some Killzone online on the PS2 when Isaiah called me at around 11:45 PM and asked me to pick him up because he was bored. I decided I was going to pick him up. So after about fifteen minutes or so I suited up and headed outside through my basement apartment. I took a right up the cement stairs then a left down the sidewalk towards the garage. Halfway there I remember looking at the compost heap and deciding that I wasn't going to pick Isaiah up. I turned around and backtracked to the basement. As I approached the staircase I reached to turn the light on which was now on my right. Then I woke up in my car in the garage with all the lights turned off. A split second later I was overcome by the same presence I felt while I was younger, that someone was watching me. (Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 10)

Again, Raptor is engaging in the simulated companionship of electronic media, and, again, he experiences a mysterious presence. The automotive motif, evident in his previous abduction story as the means by which he is transported into isolation, makes another appearance. Like the Hill couple whose highly publicized 1961 abduction was among the first to be reported, many abductees are abducted while driving their cars. In

their stories these abductees lose control of their cars, which may slow to a halt or speed off in a different direction, before being forcibly removed from them by aliens.

The automobile is a technology whose power is palpable in its use. Unlike the radio, the television, or the computer, the power of which is more intellectually understood than physically felt, the car grants its user a visceral feeling of the harnessing of technological power. To lose control over this device is immediately and physically dangerous, whereas other technologies present subtler dangers if one's control of them is curtailed. The out-of-control car presents an especially profound and frightening experience, therefore, which may serve to represent other kinds of dangerous impotence with respect to technology. The car may also represent isolation, despite its potential for bringing people together. Although cars may be used to transport people across the distances that separate them, cars isolate their users during travel, keeping people in their own individual containers rather than participating in the communal experience of, say, public transportation. As a mode of transportation, the car may further be understood to represent the isolation of liminality, the space one occupies that is no place, when one is betwixt and between one's point of departure and one's destination. This liminality echoes the placeless space of electronic otherworlds, like that of the online game Raptor plays prior to this abduction experience.

At the beginning of his narrative, Raptor intends to use the car to achieve face-to-face interaction with his friend. It is unclear whether the decision not to

pick up his friend immediately precedes the abduction experience or is part of it, perhaps as an alien-induced course of action, for the vision of the compost heap bears no logical connection to the “decision” although the two events are juxtaposed in the narrative. In any case, a failure to connect ends in abduction, and Raptor awakens in the liminal space of his car, which is not used as a means to achieve connection, as previously intended, but merely as a place to be alone. This automotive motif recurs in a subsequent abduction, the narrative of which begins with Raptor’s decision to leave a friend’s house and drive home:

I was at my friend Marco’s House on a Wednesday sometime in March. After some talk about some ideas for a comic story I decided to head out to my house at around 3:00 A.M. I was kind of hungry so I stopped by Burger King and ordered three Whoppers with cheese. I headed back to my house.

As I turned on the left corner of the alley to park my car in the garage I got to maybe the fifth garage before my garage. And my car stopped completely. I started it again and nothing. I was then again overcome by the same sensation I had before of being watched. My vision turned white and I woke up in my backyard on the bench next to the tree at around 5 A.M. Strange thing is I didn’t wake up. I just came into being.

You know when you wake up you feel groggy. I didn’t. It felt like someone threw me onto the bench or something when I came to. My dad had just opened the back door and was headed

to work in his red van and asked me what I was doing there. I had no answer so he shook his head and ignored me and went to work.

I told Marco what happened after I left his house. He was a little shaken. (Raptor\_Evolved 2006B)

Raptor loses control over his car, but this time, instead of preventing him from seeing a friend, loss of control prevents him from reaching home. It becomes evident here that Raptor lives with his family, so home represents another opportunity for human connection, but Raptor is prevented for a time from making that connection and is again trapped in the liminal space of his car. When he finally does reach home, rather than waking up Raptor “just comes into being”—it is as if he were “switched on” right at that moment. The aliens thus impose a confusing experience on Raptor which is difficult to articulate because it is more mechanical than human. Because he is unable to communicate this experience to his father, and thus provide a suitable response to his father’s inquiry, Raptor’s father “ignores” him, recalling Raptor’s first abduction experience when he thought his father “ignored” him at the community gathering in Mexico. Here as there, an opportunity to connect with another human being is missed. After this experience, however, Raptor does connect with his friend Marco, telling someone for the first time about his strange experiences. As a result of his abduction experiences Raptor decides to spend more time with Marco and thereby avoid being alone. Eventually, alas, Raptor must leave Marco’s company and is again abducted, but

this time his car carries him all the way home:

I arrived at home, parked my Honda Civic in the garage and went inside my house without incident. My pad is in the basement. Turned on the TV, couldn't find anything interesting except infomercials, so I went to my bed to sleep [...] I don't know if I was dreaming or not. I'll explain. I found myself outside of my car. I have a green Civic. I was outside of the driver's-side door. And I didn't have a perception of where I was. To describe it I would have to say emptiness, because there was nothing but me and my car in a black emptiness. (Raptor\_Evolved 2007)

As was the case with his first abduction, Raptor is watching television immediately before his abduction experience. The black void in which Raptor finds himself corresponds to the placelessness of electronic media, and the isolation that typifies the experience of those using them. Raptor finds himself in the void, but he is not exactly alone—his car is there with him, suggesting the “companionship” of technology, and the loneliness of that companionship. In contrast to his previous experiences, this time Raptor does not find himself in his car, but outside it. The car, it turns out, has carried him to a destination of sorts, which is an encounter with aliens:

I looked up at eye level and a mist formed all around me. It formed all around leaving only I would say a foot or so of clearance between me and the mist. I turned to my car. I thought I heard a noise. At that instant I felt the presence I had before of being watched. I rolled my head back around in front

of me. I could tell that there were three figures off in the mist. I could tell they were humanoids but right away I knew they weren't human.

The one on the left moved slightly encircling me to my left. Then the one on the right moved to my extreme right. To describe their movement I would have to say that they seemed to float. Then both the ones on my right and my left stopped and looked at the one in the middle, as if gesturing [to] him to proceed. He moved forward in my direction. Little by little as he moved through the mist I could make out more details. I wasn't afraid at first but I found myself unable to move and I couldn't move, I could only think. The fact that I couldn't move gave a kind of inner panic and I found myself afraid and scared.

Their eyes, their eyes are the most frightening things I have ever seen. They penetrate you as if looking through your very soul. Their skin is rough like a mixture of elephant skin and a reptile's. The one in the middle stopped about a meter away from me and held out his hand close in front of his chest. He was staring at me and cocked his head to the right a little. I could tell he was talking to me.

He asked me why I was afraid. I didn't respond. I tried to think of someplace to put my mind in. I thought of a fireplace and concentrated on thinking about it. I tried to glaze my eyes over to avoid staring into his. He repeated the same thought to me and that I should not act the way I was behaving. I kept thinking about the fireplace and didn't say anything. I could tell they

were trying to get me to go with them. I tried to think of anything, math problems, something to keep my brain active.

The one in front of me I could tell was very disturbed by my behavior. I could tell by the expressions in his face. He rolled his hand back, removing it from my front; his expression changed. He looked slowly to his left and his right, and backed away from me a bit. He cocked his head slightly to the right and said to me why I did not want to go. I replied and said that I didn't want to go with them, I was not interested. He stared at me more intently. I could tell the other two were moving away from me back to the mist. I communicated to him and said no, I was not going to go. I could tell he stopped because I was able to move. His face became expressionless and he slowly faded back into the mist.

I found myself in my garage with car gate still opened, car door still opened, and the car itself was on. (Ibid.)

In this scenario, Raptor cannot move—he can only think. He is no longer a physical presence but only a mental presence, like the alien presence of the electronic otherworld, or like the presence Raptor possesses in the online discussion forum where he tells his narrative. The aliens communicate to Raptor without speaking, as is their wont. Their power, as Raptor acknowledges, is in their eyes. Raptor describes the screen-like eyes of the aliens as “the most frightening things I have ever seen,” and feels he must avoid staring into them lest he fall under their control, evoking the power of the televi-

sion he watched immediately before this abduction experience. The aliens want to take Raptor with them into the misty void, but by keeping his mind “active” Raptor is able to resist abduction and the enforced passivity and isolation it entails. The forces of technology cannot take us out of this world through their powers to divert our attention to an “electronic otherworld” if we won't pay attention to that realm. At the end of this abduction experience, Raptor finds himself isolated, once more, in his car. Raptor's abduction saga began at the community celebration in Mexico and ends here, in the car which is as liminal a “location” as the alien blackness. There is no final return to community within Raptor's narrative; rather, the return to community occurs outside the narrative, in the forum wherein the narrative unfolds.

In the analysis above, I have “isolated” Raptor's narrative from its original context, where it is embedded in an open-ended discussion with many participants. In the forum where Raptor tells his tale, many posters praise Raptor's story for being “realistic,” “authentic,” and “believable,” while others mock his gullibility for believing that certain experiences constitute evidence of abduction. Several participants share their own UFO-sighting and UFO-abduction experiences in response to Raptor's, and one poster offers various theories as to the reasons for abduction. This exchange of praise and criticism, experience and explanation, is characteristic of the online discussion forum, which overcomes to some extent the isolation of the Information Age by bringing people together to engage in the traditional interaction of legend telling. But the question remains, is it enough?

## Conclusion

Although nothing new, fear of technology has intensified as the pace and scope of technological development have increased, especially since the mid-twentieth century, leading to the sense that we are in a time of profound transition, when tradition comes to seem especially problematic. It is feared that what has been brought forward out of the past and into the present will be lost in a future where advancements in technology will overwhelm humanity, changing it into something unrecognizable as human, into something alien. This essay has examined how certain motifs in UFO-abduction narratives present the disturbing prospect of an unnatural humanity manipulated, altered, and isolated by alien technologies in a hyper-technological future. The latest technologies of tradition give human beings unprecedented powers to transmit and receive information, but to the extent that they replace face-to-face interaction these technologies are feared to be alienating, and the sense of connection they do provide through “secondary orality” or “online community” is feared to be insufficient to sustain humanity as we currently understand it. The UFO-abduction narrative and the websites where it takes shape provide a forum for exploring these fears, as well as the hope that they may not be realized.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

1 This essay is based on a chapter from my dissertation (Ball 2009). A version was presented at the 2009 conference of the American Folklore Society in Boise, Idaho.

2 I therefore agree with Jodi Dean in seeing a special connection between UFO-abduction narratives and Internet technology, though our reasons differ. For Dean, the “multiple layerings and linkages” made by abductees and abduction investigators to account for seemingly unconnected occurrences as abduction phenomena mirror the links made possible through Internet technology (Dean 1998: 131).

3 A few examples: [abduct.com](http://abduct.com), [abovetopsecret.com](http://abovetopsecret.com), [alien-abduction.com](http://alien-abduction.com), [aliencases.conforums.com](http://aliencases.conforums.com), [alien-ufos.com](http://alien-ufos.com), [book-of-thoth.com](http://book-of-thoth.com), [curezone.com](http://curezone.com), [irishufology.net](http://irishufology.net), [iwasabducted.com](http://iwasabducted.com), [theblackvault.com](http://theblackvault.com), [ufocasebook.com](http://ufocasebook.com), [ufos-alien.com](http://ufos-alien.com), [ufoseek.com](http://ufoseek.com), [unexplained-mysteries.com](http://unexplained-mysteries.com).

4 The Hills’ story was made into a book in 1966 and a TV movie in 1975 (Fuller 1966; Colla 1975).

5 The most famous UFO abductions of the 1970s were the “Pascagoula incident” involving Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker in 1973, the Travis Walton case in 1975, and the Betty Andreasson case, experienced in 1967 but not reported until 1975 (Walton 1978; Fowler 1979; Hickson and Mendez 1983). The best-known UFO-abduction investigators are Budd Hopkins, David M. Jacobs, and John E. Mack (Hopkins 1981, 1987, 1996; Jacobs 1992, 1998; Mack 1994, 1999).

6 Here and throughout, I have standardized spelling, and have made some minor changes in punctuation and grammar to increase the readability of online posts.

7 The theory that the aliens’ purpose for visiting our planet is an alien/human hybrid breeding program undertaken to save the alien race from extinction is associated especially with the work of UFO-abduction

investigator Budd Hopkins, who recorded many narratives of this type from his informants (see especially Hopkins 1987).

8 Barbeito, Kelley-Romano, and Brown each interpret “hybridization” narratives as expressing anxieties over developments in reproductive technologies (Barbeito 2005, 206-10; Kelley-Romano 2006, 394; Brown 2007, 70-82, 85-99).

9 Here and throughout, I refer to discussion-forum participants according to the gender they profess online.

10 Patricia Barbeito likens the alien eye to a movie screen (Barbeito 2005, 209).

11 David Hufford has pointed out how the paralysis commonly described by UFO abductees is similar to aspects of the “Old Hag Experience” (Hufford 1982, 233-4).

12 ARPA’s name was changed to DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) in 1971, then back to ARPA in 1993, and back to DARPA again in 1996.

13 The English is from Barbara Johnson’s translation of Jacques Derrida’s *La Dissémination* (Derrida 1981, 104-5). The italics are mine.

14 “...Og da sitt’ eg her og skal begynne å følgja programmet ‘Vindu mot verden’... Også sitte eg her og ser på starten på dette programmet. So ser eg ifrå øyekroken, ein klase med kvita blinkande lys...”

15 Bengt af Klintberg makes the point that whereas in earlier times the realms where one could encounter “the other folk”—the forests and seas, or inside the mountains—were mysterious places, they are less mysterious today, so that the “others” have become aliens, for “space is now the only unknown territory that remains for our fantasy” (Klintberg 1986, 259).

16 In addition to the examples given, see the following: Raptor\_Evolved 2006: Post 1; HiddenUFO 2008; GenericallyMajestic 2009; Abudctee 2009; Raziell 2009; Crazyflanger 2009; Jtobias69 2009.

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