

## Belief in *Aliens* and the Imaginary: A Transdisciplinary Approach

Carlos Reis

*Si el hombre renuncia a su ilusión  
de un dios paternal, si se enfrenta con  
su soledad e insignificância em  
el universo, será como el niño  
que ha dejado la casa de su padre.*

**Erich Fromm**

*Psicoanálisis y Religión*

**Abstract:** Amidst a historical and cultural scenario of profound socio-political and ideological transformations, contemporary society is experiencing an era of uncertainty, fear, and hopelessness, which induces one to create and cling to all sorts of illusions, beliefs, and utopias – angels, gods, heroes, oracles, demiurges, extraterrestrials, and hierophanies – as instruments of coping with the rough reality of daily life. The search for identity, the non-admission of its inner weakness and external fragility, the fear of death and cosmic solitude, the search for completeness, and the impossibility of being a *transcendent animal*, lead one to existential anguish. This paper brings a condensed analysis of one of these “metaphysical crutches” by deconstructing the “modern myth” through hermeneutics and transdisciplinarity, reinterpreting its symbols, languages, signs, and representations. We base our claims on five decades of research and experience, supported by a ‘collegiate’ of the most expressive names in various areas of human knowledge.

**Keywords:** History, Culture, Imaginary, Belief, Cosmic significance

### Architecture of an Illusion

Following Fromm’s (1956) thoughts, Becker (2008) understands that the need for cosmic significance is an anthropological structural datum directly linked to the horror of death. We do not like it, nor do we not want to admit that we are alone in the universe, and that we lean on something that transcends us – a system of ideas and powers sustaining us in which we are viscerally submerged. These two remarkable thinkers are not the only ones to adopt the same discourse, many join them, undertaking one of the most important reflections that integrate this matter. When one proceeds to an analysis on such a scale, it is essential to consider all the implicit variants through a transdisciplinary approach, that is, to go beyond the conjugate fields, which cannot be compartmentalized and watertight, always with a strictly critical view. This research platform, inaugurated in the mid-1980s, designed such an architecture in order to build bridges between the UFO phenomenon and the disciplines of knowledge that might have some relation with it: Sociology, Anthropology, History, Biology, Culture, Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, Neurosciences, Psychology, Mythology, Religion, and astronomical sciences. This study has shown, however, that “bridges” are not enough to bring light to more complex issues, they need to be integrated by establishing multiple permanent dialogues.

In order to fulfill this task, we intend to bring to academic essayism the specificity of ufological theme and, at the same time, enrich the critical view of ufological facts through university education. The problem consists, as Lévi-Strauss (1987) warns, in finding the invariant within a set of codes, what is common to all of them, and of translating what is expressed in the language of this set. That is, to *translate* and *interpret* what is expressed in a language through the

*comparative study of structural similarities.*

This paper presents a condensed overview of beliefs in general, particularly about “flying saucers” and *aliens*, their origins, their causes, the historical course, and the unfoldings of their influence on human life. A final opinion with echoes of conclusion does not mean that the topic has exhausted its possibilities of investigation, on the contrary, it indicates that everything is still in the initial stages of appreciation. The words of Sena da Silveira seek to portray the objective intention of the present study:

*Perhaps there is here, to remember an important intellectual, Ernesto Laclau, a significant void: everything fits together, everything can fit in it, it is, in short, an immeasurable bridge of beliefs and movements, an endless catapult of credible fictions and theories. (Silveira, in Reis, 2016, p. 23).*

The UFO phenomenon erupted through the combination of singular historical-social circumstances, religious drives, cultural factors and archetypal aspects, in a process of updating and ritualizing mythical thinking. In this sense, flying saucers have come to inhabit the popular imagination by virtue of a mistaken premise that has consolidated and is promoted through a systematic recurrence of errors. For these and other reasons, the “flying saucer” is part of a complex multifaceted synergistic system of biopsychosociocultural beliefs where mysticism, esoterism, divinatory practices, oracles, religion, spiritualism, post-mortem life, reincarnation, occultism, folklore, superstitions, legends and fantasies meet and confound, in a heterogeneous mixture of unprecedented creeds and hierophanies.

### **Deconstructing a Myth**

Why “deconstructing” and why “myth”? In a very synthetic way, *deconstruct* can be defined as follows: Disassemble, decompose the elements for analysis and understanding of the whole; and *myth*: Narrative of symbolic meaning referring to aspects of the human condition. Deconstruction of a myth, therefore, is to decompose the elements of symbolic meaning for analysis and understanding of the aspects relating to the human condition. For seven decades the “flying saucer” subject has been the order of the day around the world, designed for newspapers, magazines, television documentaries, and congresses, always clad in an aura of sensationalism or scorn. Surveys around the world have never yielded any scientifically proven, concrete, definitive results, despite thousands of electronic records, reports, alleged contacts, abductions, and physical marks. Everything remains on the obscure terrain of speculation.

These “thousands” of cases include frauds, lies, misinterpretations, hallucinations, ignorance about natural atmospheric phenomena, and other interferences. Moreover, human behavior, psychic and psychological factors to a large extent and interests of all kinds must be taken into account at all social and cultural levels. Once the sorting is done, what is left is a tiny parcel that has plausible and satisfactory explanations, or are inconclusive cases due to lack of data or contradictory information.

Faced with this absolute lack of “evidence,” the UFO community searches for evidence of the alien presence on the planet – astronaut gods, Hollow Earth, secret underwater bases, Bermuda Triangle; buildings, temples, sculptures, objects, and archaeological sites; as well as rituals and primitive tribal customs that would have been inspired by the presence of extraterrestrials in

antiquity. Nothing more than a set of puerile hypotheses. Ufology goes around itself. Its liturgy resembles a script of science fiction, and often fantastic fiction, with all elements of fantasy, mystification, and mysticism amid much naïveté, farce, and deception.

To summarize, ufology is based exclusively on reports, photos, films, radar echoes, the alleged physical injuries suffered by witnesses, and on electrical failures occurring in vehicles and buildings at the approach of the “saucers.” Ufologists understand that the statements of army people, pilots, authorities, scientists, and experts can not be disputed, that the physical evidence is indisputable, and that the mental communication and psychographies made with supposed entities of other dimensions are unequivocal proofs of their existence. Thus, there is a consensus among researchers that the reality of “flying saucers” is definitely proven; the corollary of this thought is that *flying saucers are vehicles manned by intelligent beings, coming from long-lived and advanced civilizations that visit us with the most diverse objectives.*

This is a generalist interpretation of the UFO phenomenon, incomplete, superficial, and, under the circumstances, precocious and precipitous. The phenomenon can only be studied if it is atomized, deconstructed, so that its constituent elements are observed separately and meet the nexus – if any – between them. In this sense, hermeneutics is effective in interpreting and clarifying the study. Semiologist Umberto Eco has had a lot of concern and criterion when dealing with interpretation, either for the written text or for the analysis of a given event, and he has also had hermeneutics as a tool for reflection. It is the instruments that interest us. Hermeneutics can be understood as the science of the interpretative process, used as soon as there are forms of symbolic communication. Some important voices understand that the contemporary moment is, *par excellence*, a “hermeneutic era,” and ufology, in this particular case, could not be excluded from this examination because it is essentially a source of symbolic expression.

Asserting the *intentio operis* – the intention of the work (or fact) was, for Eco, its fundamental purpose. We are talking about deciphering what is expressed in the language and structure of the object, be it text, speech, or event. Eco asks how it is possible to prove a conjecture of the *intentio operis*, and at the same time responds that the only way is to verify it from the text (speech or event) as a coherent set. Strictly speaking, what ufologists do is look at the phenomenon through the “keyhole,” and in so doing the view on the other side is partial, fragmented, insufficient. One does not have the vision of the whole, only part of it, and this is decisive for a distorted interpretation of the reality of the facts.

Even if ufology is not a formally constituted discipline, one can not deny the reality of the phenomenon that it has proposed to study, but, if it is not aircrafts and extraterrestrial beings, what is it? What are we dealing with? In order to understand it, we have to go back a bit in history, to 1958. With an interest in the subject, the renowned Carl G. Jung spent much of his time examining hearsay, rumors and news running through the newspapers, within his clinical practice. After analysing the events, with a careful reading of the subject, talking to experts and researchers, and comparing reports to his patients’ dreams, Jung wrote that year *A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies*, a work that became a milestone, provoked discomfort and criticism from his colleagues, and was rejected by UFO circles around the world.

It is important to highlight that at no time did Jung declare that the UFO phenomenon was a myth, but that it had such characteristics as to make him think that the psychic bias should be explored with attention: “Such manifestations seem to be modifications in the constellation of the dominant psychics, archetypes, ‘gods’ that cause or follow secular transformations of the collective psyche (Jung, 1991, p. IX). We believe that, at that time, his work was beyond the understanding of both laymen and researchers. He emphasized his point of view by stating that:

*The psychic aspect plays such an important role in this phenomenon that it can not be overlooked. As my explanations try to demonstrate, the raising of this question leads to psychological problems that touch possibilities, or impossibilities, as fantastic as a physical observation (Id, p. 98).*

In the late 1980s, by reading Jung and other authors, we decided to embrace this research line, broadening the spectrum of analysis by associating it with fields other than Psychology and Mythology, finding in Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism concepts a secure way to a possible understanding. By comparing the structure of the myth with that of the UFO phenomenon, we were able to identify similarities and parallels that overcame improbable mere coincidences. There was a clearly defined specular symmetry between them that could not be ignored:

- A) *Narrative*: links with the holy, the “high” or the transcendent;
- B) *Nature*: symbolic expression of higher forces acting in the unconscious;
- C) *Aesthetics*: manifestation in mythical scope: saving gods, heroes, “cosmic brothers,” supernatural creatures;
- D) *Meaning*: archetypes, psychic balance, non-transient divine character;
- E) *Function*: divided into four parts: Mysticism – dazzlement with the mystery, the magic, the fantastic, the *marvelous*; Cosmological – connection of human existence with the cosmos; Sociological – in the social, moral and cultural spheres; Psychological – in dealing with conceptions of life and death.

This fourth function – the psychological one – is one of the focal points of the present study, surely the most important one, when the phenomenon is articulated in terms of *finitude* and *immortality*. We are at the door of the imaginary, where, for Durand (2002), the necessity of the fantastic function resides in the faculty of the imaginary of surpassing temporality and death. The euphemization it secures is the main engine of this great socio-anthropological process. It is for this reason, according to the author, that myth becomes the provocateur of these two insurmountable cultural barriers – time and finitude. Here’s the point Experiencing the presence of a “saucer” or having “contact with *aliens*” is a way for the subject to be enveloped by the oceanic feeling of being “part of the cosmos” and giving some meaning to his poor biography. We are not afraid to say that the witness feels and believes himself privileged, *chosen* and even *blessed* (religious language) for witnessing an event of this nature, therefore, detached from most mortals. This ephemeral and unique moment, even if it is an illusion, fantasy or lie, can be the most relevant feature of one’s existence. The “saucer” or the *alien* is one of the symptoms of a greater and deeper cause. Obviously, the deliberate attitude of protagonism is evident. Anguish due to the lack of meaning in life – or excess, as Calligaris<sup>i</sup> used to say – is as painful as the irrelevance of anonymity. It is very important to know that anonymity, loneliness, anguish, and neurosis sit at the same table.

But Lévi-Strauss (1987) still presents us with an additional function of myth – the compensatory function. According to him, the myth narrates a past situation which is the denial of the present and which serves both to compensate humans for some loss and to assure them that a past error has been corrected in the present, in order to offer a stabilized and regularized view of nature and community life. The myth creates a symbolic and imaginary compensation against the inescapable real needs, tensions and sufferings of the profane life, preserves the organization of collective life avoiding the fracture of the society. According to Durand (2002), a society can only develop if its institutions rest on strong collective beliefs.

The myth inhabits people's imaginary, with their uncertainties and the blind faith they place in something that has the power to guide their lives. This indefinite power is not only a deity in the sense of classical mythology, but will always be a power that transcends the physical limit and human understanding. In mirroring the myth with the UFO phenomenon we have, reflecting the words of other notable thinkers, the understanding and synthesis of the problem:

*'Living' a myth, then, implies a genuinely "religious" experience, in that it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life. The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that one reenacts fabulous, exciting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the supernaturals (Eliade, 1963, p. 19).*

What is the alien but a supernatural creature? What is the encounter with the “extraordinary” but a transcendent, metaphysical, “religious” experience apart from the everyday world? Brazilian theologian and philosopher Rubem Alves gives poetic tones to his definition of myth: “Myths are stories that delimit the contours of a great absence that dwells in us. Enchantment is not in what you see, but in what you imagine.” (Alves, in Morais, 1988, p. 14). Absence of what, of whom? From the completeness of being. More than the simple connection with the transcendent, the relinking – *religio, religare* – of the profane with the holy, of the lower world with the higher plane, of the material with the immaterial. Religions are cultural, historical constructions where anthropomorphism is its foundation, and “flirting” with the gods is a reflection of human aspirations and ambitions. Religious thought arises out of this desire to connect with divinity. Eliade (1963) does not let us forget that sacredness for religious man is the complete manifestation of Being, and the enchanted world of stories, legends, fairy tales, fables, dreams and myths expresses this desire, or, more precisely, this *need* for re-encounter. We consider Cassirer's reference to Max Müller's reflection of special importance in the correspondence of language with compared objects:

*For Max Müller, the mythical world is essentially a world of illusion – but an illusion that finds its explanation whenever the original, necessary self-deception of the mind, from which the error arises is discovered. This self-deception is rooted in language, which is never making game of the human mind, ever entangling it in that iridescent play of meanings that is its own heritage (Cassirer, 1945, p. 5).*

The myth does not refer to an objective reality, but to an internal reality, subjective, abstract, conceptual, and emotional. It does not speak in a common language, but through symbols and metaphors, a language of correspondences, not of references. Likewise, the UFO phenomenon does not operate within an objective reality and does not speak a direct but symbolic language, by signs, symbols, and representations. It is up to man to decode such symbolisms and interpret

such representations because, according to Castoriadis (*in* Legros, 2007, p. 95), “Everything that presents itself to us in the socio-historical world is inextricably woven into the symbolic.”

Finally, Campbell complements the framework of definitions about myths, their relation to man, and between man and the world, in perfect harmony with the scope of this study:

*Myth is a necessary and universal form of expression within the early stage of human intellectual development, when unexplained events were attributed to the direct intervention of the gods. What the myth does is to point to the transcendent beyond the terrain of the phenomenon* (Campbell, 2001, p. 52).

Durkheim (2000) sees “religious thinking” similar to “social” and even a primacy over collective consciousness. In general, a society has everything it takes to awaken the feeling of the Divine in minds through the power that religion has over them. Religion is collective superstition and superstition is individual religion, Freud wrote (1969).

According to Lévy-Bruhl (2008), the primitive mind is irremediable and completely immersed in a mystical spirit state, unable to perceive the reality and truth with clarity and equity, disarmed from the faculty of abstraction and reflection, stuck in a manifest aversion to the reasoning and discursive operations of the thinking, unable to take advantage of the experience or understand the most elementary laws of nature.

This is what we seek to do, vigorously and disciplinarily, in the examination of the phenomenon, since when we consider it a palimpsest: to detach its epidermal layer in order to reach the “flesh,” the core, what is hidden. What is and where is the transcendent that Campbell (2001) is talking about? Certainly not the same as the mystic, the esoteric and the religious ones, but what transcends man – himself. The basic concept of mythology is the transcendence of personification, which is only a concession to consciousness to talk about these things: God, Brahman, Śiva, YHWH... it is the need to personify *something* that escapes our understanding. Why do we give names to aliens? Not because they are deities – they are not – but because giving names humanizes, and when humanizing, anthropomorphizes, approaches, establishes a character of reality to that what is unreal, of materiality to what is immaterial, of comprehensibility to what is incomprehensible. Just like the myth. By collating, approximating, anatomizing and interpreting the symbolism contained in these two matters – myth and UFO phenomenon – a resonance mechanism that generates and multiplies meanings is automatically installed.

When the gods are conjugated by an external influx, the archetypal forces protrude into the stimulus, appearing to our senses as being a predicate of the outer object, rather than something originating within ourselves. Thus, a fusion between subject and object occurs, through the bridge established by these forces as perpendicular, what anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl (2001) called *participation mystique*. This is how we introduce the object into our own psyche. This way it loses its character of absolute strangeness – we adapt to it, and the libido (as synonymous with psychic energy) that it was invested in can return to us.

This apparent predicate of the object is felt to be a total otherness, because it brings together what I do not know about it and what I do not know about myself. Just to reinforce the idea of Another, let us see what Abbagnano says: “To be another, to put oneself or to constitute oneself

as another.” (Abbagnano, 2007, p. 34). Returning to Lévy-Bruhl, he understands that the object is the Totally Other until I can incorporate it into my view of the world. With this, it also changes. This action is bipolar, it can occur both in relation to external objects and inward to my psyche, as long as one does not think of limiting it to consciousness.

In fact, the *inner space* is as vast and unknown as the exterior that fascinates us so. The experience of the Totally Other and the sentiment to which it originates is what German philosopher Rudolf Otto (2007) called *numinous*, considering it the basic foundation of religions, but not unique to them. It should be noted that *numinous* and *phenomenon* have a common Latin origin, respectively *numen* and *noumeno* – the thing itself, the ultimate reality apart from human action, the holy, unreachable to the senses and the rational. The numinous can be the property of a visible object, for example, a UFO, or the influx of an invisible presence, that produces a special modification in the conscience, for example, an alien.

The “saucer” is always beyond the sign. The sign only emerges with its absence, a mark of an already faded presence that we place on the emptiness inaugurated by its passage; it is born only after the real flying saucer – whatever it is – has already gone wherever it has gone. In a certain way, it is what Umberto Eco calls “cultural unity,” an image that brings together and represents a broad set of signifiers – lights, sounds, rays, flights, objects, photos, movies, images, and, above all, words – that translate a meaning not yet decoded. The flying saucer is a sign and only exists as such, a combination of various traits drawn from cases that do not always go together, never all together, but which are always sufficiently together so that one recognizes, or supposes, its inner uniqueness. As Renard points out, the problem of the existence of UFOs and extraterrestrials is spontaneously put in terms of belief: “Do you *believe* in flying saucers?” “Is the reason able to stand on its own in the face of prejudice and superstition?” (in Mayer, 1989, p.31).

We live in a world full of superstitions, and the imaginary is latent in symbols and reigning in aesthetics; the slightest vacillation of perception takes us to hallucinations, delusions and fantasies. A final comment on beliefs is given by Morin:

*The imperative and prohibitive power of paradigms, official beliefs, reigning doctrines and established truths determines cognitive stereotypes, ideas received without examination, stupid uncontested beliefs, triumphant absurdities, the rejection of evidence in the name of evidence, and makes cognitive and intellectual conformisms reign everywhere (Morin, 1999, p. 42)<sup>1</sup>.*

If we accept that ufology does not exist in itself, and is therefore incapable of examining the UFO phenomenon *per se*, and if it has all the characteristics to be understood as a “postmodern” myth, it remains to deal with the *object*, the “flying saucer,” the instigator agent of doubt, controversy, and debate. It is here, indeed, that the problem takes on extraordinary proportions of complexity, and its approach amounts to the weaving of a Persian tapestry. In order to give consistency and security to the “architecture of the bridges” mentioned in the beginning, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Le pouvoir impératif et prohibitif conjoint des paradigmes, croyances officielles, doctrines régnantes, vérités établies détermine les stéréotypes cognitifs, idées reçues sans examen, croyances stupides non contestées, absurdités triomphantes, rejets d’évidences au nom de l’évidence, et il fait régner, sous tous les cieux, les conformismes cognitifs et intellectuels.

study is grounded in four pillars: history, culture, fiction, and imaginary, all of them interconnected by transdisciplinarity.

With history as the guiding thread, the key moment comes from the second half of the 20th century, where the fact markers of contemporary civilization converge – and intertwine: the end of World War II and the flourishing of the “Cold War,” the collapse of institutions and the beginning of an era of anguish, fear, and disillusionment; the end of utopias and the reckless possibility and proximity of dystopias, the *establishment* fissure and the lack of a reliable north. The compass of civilization was disoriented. The world began to “liquefy,” Bauman (2008) said later.

The rise of counterculture, feminist and student movements, New Age, Woodstock, Beatles, LSD, Aquarian conspiracy, Aleister Crowley, *beat* generation, cultural revolution, Vietnam war, contraceptive pill, transcendental meditation, Oriental philosophies, esoteric sects and orders, alternative medicine, ecological consciousness, *underground* culture. They are the new paradigms. It is the culmination of literature and science fiction filmography with its techno-mystical aesthetics. Orson Welles, with the radio version of “War of the Worlds,” consecrates the stereotype of domination by invading aliens. The imaginary, the symbolic language and the signs of representations leave the academic debate and reach the streets. It was the birth of postmodernity or late modernity. There was something more in the air than simple airliners, sex, drugs and rock’n roll. There were flying saucers.

It is indisputable that science fiction is a fertile soil of representations and formulation of reflections on contemporary society, its structure and relations with scientific knowledge and technological development. It is also the cradle of metaphors that reflect the social imaginary – creative capacity of the anonymous collective – about past, present and future. Representations are instruments of identification, ordination and hierarchy of social structure, identifying the group or environment that produced them and consumes them. As Chartier says:

*The symbolic function (symbolization or representation) is defined as a mediating function that informs the different modes of apprehension of the real, whether it operates through linguistic signs, mythological figures and religion, or concepts of scientific knowledge (Chartier, 1980, p. 19).*

On the other hand, ufology absorbs all the data of science fiction in a mimetic process, an incessant transfusion of ideas and concepts. It is a story that needs another story to assert itself, it does not have autonomous life, it subscribes and writes/describes in other ways, by means of borrowed words. It should be emphasized that mimicry is one of the fundamental characteristics of the human being, as a set of internalized codes, predefined from its behavioral base, referred from Aristoteles to René Girard, passing subjectively through the great literary men of history. Therefore, there is nothing new that ufology operates within this imitative principle. Science fiction is a kind of contemporary version of the myth, and the world is littered with rituals, dreams, and non-rational visions, manifesting new models of magical-affective syncretism.

Belief is a natural psychological predisposition, organic and even pathological, beyond the reach of criticism, reason and thinking, inducing a certain intellectual stagnation. It has roots in the religious drive, one of the fundamental psychic forces of man, because the subjective sense of



religion contemplates exactly the *belief* in a transcendent power, the feeling of *dependence* on that power, and the *need* for contact with it. The UFO phenomenon, on the other hand, incorporates some of the main elements of religious symbolism: transcendence, plenipotence, multi-presence, omniscience, redemptive force. With its techno-mystical guise similar to *science fiction*, one can conclude that the “flying saucer” is the culmination of the symbiosis between science fiction themes and parareligious beliefs. Put another way, we can say that science fiction is the gateway, and religion, the exit. Several authors with different shades help to compose a very interesting polyhedral panel on this topic. We start with Grünschloß:

*Undoubtedly, an important attraction of beliefs in UFOs is their ability to synthesize elements of esoteric, spiritual, theosophical, and Christian traditions, to reconcile them with science, space technology, and modern cosmology. Specifically, the traditions of “numinous” people (e.g. the so-called “ascended masters” of Theosophy or the esoteric representations of Jesus Christ) often appear on the spectrum of UFO movements and their publications with a consistent pattern of functions (Grünschloß, 2002, p. 22).*

For theologian John Saliba, of the University of Detroit, many aspects of UFO mythologies (anthropogenesis and evolution) seem to combine “Religious search for absolute answers with the certainty of scientific objectivity, and, thus, tend to appear as secularized or scientific myths.” (Saliba, 1995, pp. 15-64). It is important to emphasize that science fiction cannot and should not be stereotyped as a mere form of entertainment, minor literature or a genre of alienation, much less depreciated as mass culture, marginal and escapist. Its value for contemporary social construction is indisputable. It moves through a stream of provocations, reflections, revelations and truths, instigator by vocation. Sci-fi writers may be the ones who best understand the palpitation of the world and, in a sense, feel the absence of being in the human and express it in their works, not always with subtlety.

### **Every Child Dreams of Flying**

The term “science fiction” may seem an oxymoron – an internal contradiction, claiming that its logical construction of counterposition and differences integrates procedures of a completely different nature: the fictional and the scientific. That is not correct, for it operates essentially with mediating metaphors between the subject and the world without the rigors of science.

Umberto Eco understands that fiction, in general, offers a reality that even concrete reality itself can not supplant, where the universe of narrative is the only one in which we can be totally sure of a thing and that offers a strong idea of truth. In his rich historiography on lands and legendary places, Eco not only reveals the human capacity to create imaginary worlds but also why it does so. If fiction exposes the truth for the lie, Morin asserts that, precisely because it is an “anthropological mirror,” cinema, as a mass vehicle of fiction, reflects practical and imaginary realities, the needs and dramas of human individuality. With insight and malice, sci-fi writer Ursula Le Guin reports that science fiction is not prophetic, not about the future, but elaborates a kind of “lie game”:

*The only truth I can understand or express defines itself, logically, as a lie. Science fiction does not predict, it describes, “and it ends”:* Science fiction is, in fact, a great metaphor, or an allegorical procedure, in which the dominants of contemporaneity intertwine (Le Guin, 2008, p.8).

And she is right, fiction is actually the lie that tells the truth. Lie brings to the surface the symbolic, determining its constitutive trait. Some of the recurring themes in science fiction are related to contemporary issues: the end of the world and the end of time; temporal paradoxes, communication and interaction with non-human intelligences; hybridity and genetic mutations, not incidentally present in philosophical and scientific encounters, in which discussions about the articulations between technology, subjectivity, and possible experiences have converged to the aesthetics of science fiction, evidencing the friction between factual and fictional in the present time. Still for Morin, there is a predominance of realistic fantasy and fiction over the fantastic and the documental, and it is the anthropology of the imaginary that brings us to the essence of contemporary issues. The hallmark of fantasy is to rationalize the fantastic.

When we talk about the man-extraterrestrial relationship, we inevitably enter into an equally complex theme – otherness. The question of alterity strikes the heart of man in his relationship with the world. Studies in this field are numerous, dense, and ever deeper. The *Other* is a fundamental piece for Psychoanalysis, Social Psychology, Anthropology, and Philosophy in the understanding of the subject, his behavior in society and its own. But, who Other? All of them, the next and the distant, the present and the absent, the old and the new, the brother and the anonymous, God and the devil, everybody. For Lévinas (2005), the *other* is the mirror of me, so we are interdependent, in(ter)dividual.

Lacan, in his study “Mirror Stage,” reiterates that the child, in order to reach the level of reality, must leave the imaginary mode of the vision of himself and of others, but, so that it can happen, he must use the symbolic mode. At some point, after the initial phase of contact with this *other body*, still not recognized as his/her, the child acquires the sense of *wholeness* and *unity*. Before that, he/she had a sense of *fragmentation*, of *shredding*, of *unruled body*. *The mirror gives the illusion of unity*.

When we admit our *cosmic childhood* and *solitude*, we establish a correspondence with the Lacanian study: *the presence of the alien gives man the same illusory sense of wholeness and unity, dissipates his misgovernance, and gives him an identity record*. In ufology, when we put ufologist and witness face to face, one sees himself in the other as if between them there was a semi-opaque glass: the face of one overlaps with that of the other, one *is* the other, one is reflected in the spectrum of the other.

The subject exists in function of the other, but the paradox is that one must disappear so that the other exists without the superimposed image. The other one talks a lot about me, while I know nothing about him. Only by understanding him will I understand me, and only when I understand myself will I understand him. Absolute aporia. It is the logic of the dialectic and the otherness advocated by Ricoeur, and yet, for Lévinas, *the Other is another Me*. A poetic license allows us to say *I am us*.

When we take this reflection to the territory of ufology, we are faced with a difficult equation of four elements, or, in terms of this language, four “others”: the researcher, the witness, the alien, and the UFO phenomenon. An intricate set of mirrors in which each one reflects himself and the

others, in a way that everybody is unknown to everyone. What is the true Face<sup>2</sup> of each one? Is there a true Face? Could there be presence without a Face? Who is behind my Face? For Scruton (2015), the wholeness of the subjectivity of the subject does not exist without the gaze of the other. And where is the one who does not see me and I do not see? What if the other's face is not the same as what I see?

Another, in Latin, is *alienus*, and alien – the “outsider,” or from any place beyond human dimension – gods, angels, demons, spirits... Bizarre, anomalous, burlesque, inhabitants of the realm of fantasy, of dreams, of myths and delusions, for this very reason so seductively captivating. Since man is marked by incompleteness, insufficiency, fragmentation and decharacterization of himself, he feels that *something is lacking*, and believes that “alientherapy” will restore the integral being and mitigate the pain caused by the presence of this emptiness. Myths, beliefs, dreams, and fictions are fruits of the magical vision of the world, putting anthropomorphism into practice. The imaginary is the spontaneous action of the spirit that dreams.

The diagnosis of the contemporary world presents a worrying picture, which can be translated by the following expressions: age of emptiness, outbreak of mass apathy, empire of the ephemeral, dilution of identities, shared solipsism. This body of definitions is summed up in three words: voracity, volatility, and vulnerability. Man still believes himself made just like the Creator because he refuses to recognize himself as fragile, needy, narcissistic, and cowardly. To mask this visceral anguish of helplessness and solitude in the cosmos, he creates fantasies, dreams, illusions, and utopias as defense mechanisms against a reality that reveals his ontological fears, his indigence and his non-place in the cosmic economy, and the contradiction of his mortality in the infinity of the universe. Contardo Calligaris<sup>3</sup> once said that “Anguish is discovering that we are pieces of meat left on a lost and smaller planet, and that all of this does not make any sense.”

Sartre feels the man creeping lethargically through the dark crevices of the cave, imagining himself to be a knower of the universe when, in reality, he satisfies himself with his small discoveries with sound illusion for the maintenance of his existence. He extends his reflection by arguing that the consciousness of his existence and the feeling of existence come from thinking, but this awareness is a terrible thing when man realizes that the only way to escape existence is to flee from thought. At the same time, Sartre asks how to escape thought if the need for escape is already a thought that brings us back to existence? Another aporia? He concludes that we are incarcerated in existing; the thinking and the feeling of being are inseparable.

The *Other* discussed here goes beyond simply reflecting our image, it is the tormentor who reflects what we *think* we see or *imagine* to be. For Rimbaud, the Self *is* another one, a boomerang effect: the nuclear idea of otherness is to put us as “other” and bring it back to us. We are essentially relational beings within a multitudinous solipsism.

A reflection of the size of the one we have developed goes beyond the theoretical and epistemological contours of the engaged disciplines and of the phenomenon itself. There are no boundaries delimiting the geography of this knowledge; the voices that put man at the center of

---

<sup>2</sup> Face with capital “F,” according to Scruton’s writing, in a sense of “identity.”

<sup>3</sup> Contardo Calligaris, “Angústia é descobrir que somos...,” <https://www.pensador.com/frase/MTg4NzZmZg/>

the discussion are not dissonant, but complementary, different visions that are not necessarily antagonistic. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the fact that all knowledge is not in itself free from deception and delusion in the search of truth, especially when it navigates in a sea of questions and doubts.

As an inverse cliché, the parts do not surpass the whole. Far from simple rhetoric, it is the way to ratify one of the pillars of complex thinking: incompleteness, unaccomplishment, fractional knowledge. Many topics could not be discussed or explored: the capital role of science fiction in language and in the making of the phenomenon, ethics, narcissism, religion, cosmobiology, dreams, language, folklore, cosmology, and symbolism in all strata.

Complexity is not necessarily a challenge, an engine of thought, as Morin (200) believes, but a recipe that replaces the simplification that almost always only answers, and does not clarify. Moreover, it is the complexity that leads to multidimensional and pollinator knowledge, but still incomplete. The correct understanding of utterances is also, above all, an unmodulated process of interpretation, which mobilizes the general intelligence and calls to knowledge of the world.

The current century demands, claims, imposes the urgency of an attitude of the one who intends to deal with the world, that is, to widen the range of connections with the knowledge where dialogue, reflection, dialectics, criticism, and transdisciplinarity must be the managers of the processes of growth. Either that, or the tenuous thread that keeps us tied to the present, will be broken by the weight of our inertia. In Morin's view, cognitive dynamics is the conjugation, in varying dosages, at all three levels – the individual, the collective, and the historical – of the three domains of aptitude that constitute the cognoscent subject: drive, reason and emotion. It is the connection between them that constitutes a given structure from which the collected knowledge and data are retotalized, resignified, understood, evaluated, and judged.

The general mapping of the study shows that, due to the historical bias, there is no doubt that the conjunction of specific factors contributed to the emergence of an *avant la lettre* phenomenon, of indisputable psychic nature in a silent gestation: wars, uncertainties, tensions, the political and social changes, and a culture in formation, making up a new and “strange” reality. In the psychic plane, it has been verified that the subject has no way to reconcile with himself or with the world, finding in the archetypes the outlet to express this conflict. The only language that the unconscious disposes come from symbols, images, deliriums, myths, and dreams. And neuroses. With the discovery of the unconscious, man saw his most repressed weaknesses, his deepest pains, his unpreparedness for life, his incapacity, and his existential shift sprouting: the thinking subject imprisoned in the predatory animal, an irreconcilable duality, a devastating subterranean confrontation, the total impossibility of a *transcendent animal*.

While man seeks a meaning for life, he finds death, and when he finds it, he does not know what meaning life has, or even if it has meaning, so he creates one for what he sees no sense in, and the search confuses with the veneration of obscurity. Sartre says that, more than death, existence itself is absurd, without reasons or explanations, it is not justified by itself. Not finding a meaning for life produces in man the noögenic, spiritual neurosis, one of the most widespread psychic sufferings in the world: the fear of death and the fear that life is just that – an instant of solitude between the first cry and the last breath. Human life lies between the nothingness of the before and the nothingness of

the after, a temporal spark in the cosmic calendar.

To the ontogenic desire to be part of the universe, Morin states that “To anthropomorphism, which tends to load things with human hope, cosmomorphism comes together weaker and darker, that is, the tendency to load man with cosmic presence.” (Morin, 1997, p. 87). Eco calls it *structures of consolation*, everything that contains an immediate appeal of leisure, of spectacular, that holds him off its miseries, horrors and misfortunes.

As anthropocosmomorphism fails to anchor itself in the real and objective world, it migrates to the imaginary. The imaginary substance merges with our emotional, psychic reality. According to Morin, “The imaginary confuses, in the same osmosis, the real and the unreal, the fact and the lack, not only to attribute to the reality the charms of the imaginary, but also to give the imaginary the virtues of reality.” (*Id*, p. 251).

### **Stars Don't Speak**

Man feels abandoned on an islet lost somewhere in space, with no one to hear his cry. The slightest movement on the cosmic horizon rekindles his hope. If life is indeed a cosmic accident, an anomaly, a prodigy, or a privilege, a work of chance and nature, an extraordinary and fortuitous encounter of random organisms under the influx of unlikely factors, then it does not seem to make sense to seek meaning for it. What remains for man, who is not even master of himself, but neurosis? It remains to represent, to be the architect of the imaginary and the ability to (re)create images and invent senses and outputs. It remains to cry out for the gods. Finally, for Durand (2002), the imaginary is the total of images and the relations of images that constitute the thought capital, the great denominator where the procedures of human thought fit. Succinctly, the imaginary defines itself as an unavoidable representation, the faculty of symbolization from which all fears, all hopes and their cultural fruits flow continuously since the approximately one and a half million years that the *homo erectus* has risen on the face of the Earth. Man is a *museum of images*, produced and to be produced, which designates the set of images produced by the *symbolic animal*, as Cassirer used to say. *Museum* is the word that Durand uses frequently to name the collector of experiences in which the subject is constituted – a *museum of representations and symbolisms*.

If we consider ufology in the realm of magical thinking, the imaginary, when in excess, breaks the limits of the real and assumes itself as absurd, the surreal, the extraordinary. “Magical thinking” is one of the escape routes in order not to face the truth of one’s own internal and external experience, starting from the creation of a mental state that starts to come into its own reality – angels, oracles, spirital entities, demiurges, aliens... an alternative, imaginary reality. The displacement, or transfer, to this imaginary reality is made through soteriological metanarratives juxtaposed in the flow of daily individual experiences: religious and non-religious beliefs, fictions and fantasies.

Magical thinking is also, ultimately, an amalgam of the ego’s defense mechanisms: displacement, fantasy, negation, compensation, projection, repression... Magical thinking is just the symptom of a cause that comes from the cradle, goes through the formation of the personality, and culminates in the inevitable needs and insufficiency of the individual. Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, and Jacques Lacan are some of the main names that gave their lives to this important question. The contribution of psychoanalytic studies has been essential to understand

the labyrinthine paths of the human mind, and this cannot be ignored. Thus, ufology is an invention and, as such, it is quite plausible to think it needs to go to the couch! The “fantastic” is one of the tributaries of this abundant imaginary river, and reveals an invasion of the incredible, the disconcerting, the supernatural in the natural world, as Caillois (1965) would say, the “unusual outburst”, is capable to signal movements for the reconfiguration of new forms of intervention in reality. For him, the “amazing” presents the supernatural event, which brings the subversion of conventional space and reflection; however, these supernatural events are inserted in everyday life and duel in two contrary dimensions, there being no total substitution of reality for fantasy. The imaginary is the legacy of mythical thought, a concrete thought that, operating on the principle of analogy, expresses itself through symbolic images organized in a dynamic way.

We must apply Semiotics to remove the veil of intentions behind verbal and non-verbal language. Any phrase, word, statement, formulation is a symbol of thought, just as language contains symbolism. Thought and word complement and combine; the symbol itself is essentially synthetic, therefore “intuitive,” serving better than language as a support for “intellectual intuition,” which is above reason. When dealing with the semiotics of magic, Nöth (1996) refers to the “enchantment” that words and narrative antics produce, signs that put themselves in the place of something else not revealed. It is the meeting of the subjective, adjustable unreal, with the concrete and immutable real.

According to Durand (2002), the world of images is divided into two domains: The first is that of images as visual representations: drawings, paintings, prints, photographs, signs that represent the visual environment. The second is the immaterial domain of images in our mind, which appear as visions, ghosts, imaginations, schemes, models, mental representations in general. Both domains are not separate, but inextricably linked to the source. There are no images as visual representations that have not arisen from images of those who produced them, just as there are no mental images that have no origin in the concrete world of objects.

Eco states that “we can define as a sign anything that, based on a socially accepted convention, can be understood as something that is in place of something else,” (1997, pp. 9-11) therefore, a representation. Peirce understands that the notion of representation includes several meanings, without losing its connection with the image, and can be seen as a synonym for both symbolic image and sign. Chartier notes that:

*The symbolic function (symbolization or representation) is defined as a mediating function that informs the different ways of apprehending the real, whether it operates through linguistic signs, mythological figures and religion, or the concepts of scientific knowledge (Campbell, 2001, p. 52).*

For Campbell, this particular aspect of the human experience obeys the two great themes that permeate the mythologies and religions of the world. They are not the same. They have different stories. The first to appear can be called *astonishment* in some of its modalities, from mere confusion in the face of the unexplainable to the outburst of demonic terror or *mystical reverence*. The second is self-salvation: redemption or liberation from a world that has lost its luster. The gods represent protective forces that sustain the subject in his field of action. When contemplating the divinities, he gains a kind of stabilizing force that places him, so to speak, in the role played by a particular

divinity, because the symbols of the divinity coincide with those of the Self, that is, with what, in the form of psychological experience, it represents the psychic totality and expresses the idea of divinity.

Ufology pulsates between fictional dynamics and redeeming ideology to mold its own concepts, firm as a house of cards, solid as the rainbow, while the UFO phenomenon, on the mythical plane, reveals a load of symbolisms that surpass it: the symbol is a kind of concrete abstraction, always poorer than what it symbolizes. Anyway, both of them, through different paths, deal with the ambiguous and conflicted human nature: sometimes mystical and fragile, sometimes critical and rational. After all, is “flying saucer” our projection, or are we its projection? In conclusion, for us, the “flying saucer” has never been a “saucer,” much less a “flying” one. In conclusion, Jung’s reflection appropriately synthesizes the great question of man, chorusing many who have gone through these pages and others absent of equal importance:

*In every adult, there lurks a child – an eternal child, something that is always becoming, is never completed and calls for unceasing care, attention and education. That is the part of the human personality which wants to develop and become whole (Jung, 2008, p. 150).*

At the heart of man there is a long and hard battle, which consumes deal psychic energy, so that the unconscious leaves the conscience out of the conflict of finitude. Ortega y Gasset understands that the true human condition is that of a castaway:

*The man with the clear head is the man who frees himself from those fantastic “ideas” and looks life in the face, realises that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. As this is the simple truth- that to live is to feel oneself lost- he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of (Ortega y Gasset, 1930, p. 114).*

## **Bibliography**

- Abbagnano, N. *Dicionário de Filosofia*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2007.
- Abrassart, J-M. *Le Modèle Sociopsychologique du Phénomène OVNI: Un Cadre Conceptuel Interprétatif en Sciences Humaines*. Louvain, Belgium: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2016.
- Banchs, R. *Fenómenos Aéreos Inusuales: Un enfoque biopsicosocial*. Buenos Aires: Leuka, 1994.
- Bauman, Z. *Medo Líquido*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2008.
- Becker, E. *A Negação da Morte*. Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2008.
- Bettelheim, B. *A Psicanálise dos Contos de Fadas*. São Paulo: Paz & Terra, 1980.
- Cabria, I. *OVNIS y Ciencias Humanas*. Santander, Spain: Fundación Anomalia, 2002.
- Caillois, R. *Au coeur du fantastique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1965.
- Campbell, J. *Mitos, Sonhos e Religião*. São Paulo: Ediouro, 2001.
- Cassirer, E. *Language and Myrh*. New York: Dover Publ, 1945.
- Cardoso, F.S. *A Ficção Científica, Imaginário do Mundo Contemporâneo. Uma introdução ao gênero*. Niterói, Brazil: Vício de Leitura, 2003.
- Castoriadis, Cornelius. *A Instituição Imaginária da Sociedade*. São Paulo: Paz & Terra, 1991.

- Chartier, R. *A Histórica Cultural. Entre práticas e representações*. Rio de Janeiro: Difel, 1980.
- D'Angelo, B. "Deuses Invisíveis: A ficção científica e os mitos cosmogônicos (Lem, Lessing e Le Guin)". *E-topia: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos sobre a Utopia*, nº 9, Edição Temática "Ano 2100". Porto, Portugal, 2008.
- Durand, G. *As Estruturas Antropológicas do Imaginário*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2002.
- Durkheim, E.. *As Formas Elementares da Vida Religiosa*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2000.
- Eco, U. *Os Limites da Interpretação*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1995.
- Eco, U. *Tratado Geral de Semiótica*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1997.
- Eliade, M. *Myth and Reality*. New York: Harper & Rowl, 1963.
- Forer, B.R. "The Fallacy of Personal Validation: A classroom demonstration of gullibility." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. 44, 1949, pp. 118-123.
- Freud, A. *O Ego e os Mecanismos de Defesa*. Pôrto Alegre: Artmed, 2006.
- Freud, S. *O Futuro de uma Ilusão*. Vol XX1. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1969.
- Grünschloß, A. "Quando entramos na nave espacial do meu pai - Esperanças cargoísticas e cosmologias milenaristas nos novos movimentos religiosos de UFOs." *Revista de Estudos da Religião*. PUC/SP, 3, 2002.
- Fromm, E. *Psicoanálisis y Religion*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Psique, 1956.
- Jung, C.G. *Um Mito Moderno sobre Coisas Vistas no Céu*. Petrópolis, Vozes, 1991.
- Jung, C. G. *Os Arquétipos e o Inconsciente Coletivo*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2000.
- Jung, C. G. *O Desenvolvimento da Personalidade*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2008.
- Lacan, J. *Escritos*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1996.
- Le Guin, U. *A Mão Esquerda da Escuridão*. São Paulo: Aleph, 2008.
- Legros, P. et al. *Sociologia do Imaginário*. Porto Alegre: Sulinas, 2007.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. *Mito e Significado*. Lisbon: Edições 70, 1987.
- Lévinas, E. *Entre Nós - Ensaios sobre a Alteridade*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2005.
- Lévy-Bruhl, L. *A Mentalidade Primitiva*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2008.
- Malinowski, B. *Magia, Ciência e Religião*. Lisbon: Edições 70, 1984.
- Martins, A. F. *Saudades do Futuro. O cinema de ficção científica como expressão do imaginário social e do devir*. Brasília: Ed. UnB, 2013.
- Mayer, J-F. *Novas Seitas, um novo exame*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1989.
- Méheust, B. *Science-fiction et Soucoupes Volantes*. Paris: Terre de Brume, 2007.
- Morais, R. de (org.). *As Razões do Mito*. São Paulo: Papyrus, 1988.
- Morin, E. *O Cinema ou o Homem Imaginário*. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 1997.
- Morin, E. *Sept Savoirs Nécessaires à l'Éducation du Futur*. Seuil/Unesco, 1999.
- Nöth, W. "Semiótica da Magia." *Revista USP*, 31. Set/Nov 1996, São Paulo, pp. 30-41.
- Ortega y Gasset, J. *The Revolt of the Masses*. New York: Norton, 1930.
- Otto, R. *O Sagrado*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2007.
- Peirce, C.S. "Illustrations of the Logic of Science. First paper: The fixation of belief" *Popular Science Monthly*. Nov. 12, 1877, pp. 1-15.
- Reis, C.; U. Rodrigues. *A Desconstrução de um Mito*. São Paulo: Livro Pronto, 2009.
- Reis, C. *Reflexões sobre uma Mitopoética*. São Paulo: LPBooks, 2011.
- Reis, C. *Naus da Ilusão*. Rio de Janeiro: Multifoco, 2016.
- Renard, J-B. "Religion, Science-fiction et extraterrestres" *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*. 50(1); 1980, pp. 143-164.
- Sartre, J-P *A Imaginação*. São Paulo: Abril, 1978.
- Scruton, R. *O Rosto de Deus*. São Paulo: É Realizações, 2015.



- Saliba, J. A. *Religious Dimensions of UFO Phenomena*. The Gods have Landed. Albany, 1995.
- Silva, A.; R. M. Nakagawa (orgs.). *Semiótica da Comunicação*. São Paulo: Intercom, 2013.
- Todorov, T. *Introdução à Literatura Fantástica*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2010.
- Tucherman, I. “A ficção científica como narrativa do mundo contemporâneo.” *Consciência*. Online.  
Available at: <https://www.comciencia.br/dossies-1-72/reportagens/2004/10/09.shtml>
-