



Antipoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología
ISSN: 1900-5407

Departamento de Antropología, Facultad de Ciencias
Sociales, Universidad de los Andes

Santo, Diana Espírito; Vergara, Alejandra
The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology*
Antipoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología, no. 41, 2020, October-December, pp. 125-146
Departamento de Antropología, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad de los Andes

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7440/antipoda41.2020.06>

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The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology*

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<https://doi.org/10.7440/antipoda41.2020.06>

How to cite this article: Espírito Santo, Diana and Alejandra Vergara. 2020. "The Possible and the Impossible: Reflections on Evidence in Chilean Ufology." *Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología* 41: 125-146. <https://doi.org/10.7440/antipoda41.2020.06>

Reception: February 25, 2019; accepted: June 23, 2020; modified: July 31, 2020.

Abstract: This article is based on a year of fieldwork with ufologists, contactees, abductees, and skeptics in Chile, using methods including ethnography, media and website analysis, and in-depth interviews. Our argument is that the "UFO" serves as, what Galison would call, a *theory machine*, a multiplicity generating not simply heterogeneous interpretive frameworks through which to understand anomalous flying phenomena, in different ideological spheres, but thresholds of evidence as well. We take evidence here, not as

* The research for this article was enabled and funded by a three-year project entitled, "Aspiration and Everyday Life under Neoliberalism: A multi-Sited Ethnographic Study of Self-Making in Chile," funded by Chile's ANID Anillos grant in the PIA program, under the number SOC 180033. Specifically, it was conducted through the fourth line of the project, "Emerging Spiritualities and Self-Improvement," through which Diana Espírito Santo and Alejandra Vergara have been carrying out field research with ufologists, contactees, abductees, and skeptics in contemporary Chile. The authors wish to thank Chile's ANID PIA project SOC 180033 for its financial assistance on the fieldwork that underwrote this article and its project; as of course our main interlocutors, some of which are protected with pseudonyms. Finally, many thanks go to our anonymous reviewers who pointed out the major flaws in this article, suggested many constructive criticisms, and led the way to substantial improvements, as well as to the guest editors.

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given but as an ethnographic category. In particular, the UFO as a theory machine in the Chilean context, and the different stakes of evidence found within it, yields a theory of possibility and impossibility, which we have called *evidence-as-possibility*. This is not confined to matters of the existence of UFOs, but also spatial differences in which one conceives of such manifestations. We pit materialist understandings of evidence against ones that regard alien contact as something interior and embodied. But we also forego this division and explore how different, apparently contradictory facets of the evidence-as-possibility theory actually work together, such that each condition or event creates its own spatial configurations for UFOs. Finally, we explore “absurd” moments in which this theory machine collapses or goes into overdrive, escaping this spectrum of possibility altogether.

Keywords: Absurd, aliens, Chile, evidence, theory machine, ufology.

Lo posible y lo imposible: reflexiones sobre evidencia en la ufología chilena

Resumen: este artículo fue escrito a partir de un año de trabajo de campo con ufólogos, contactados, abducidos y escépticos en Chile. Los métodos empleados incluyen etnografía, análisis de sitios web y medios, así como entrevistas en profundidad. Nuestro argumento es que el “OVNI” funciona como lo que Galison llamaría una *máquina de teoría*, una multiplicidad que no simplemente genera marcos interpretativos heterogéneos para comprender fenómenos voladores anómalos en diferentes esferas ideológicas, sino también umbrales de evidencia. Aquí no tomamos la evidencia como dada, sino como una categoría etnográfica. En particular, el OVNI como máquina de teoría en el contexto chileno y las diferentes cosmologías de evidencia que allí se encuentran producen una teoría de la posibilidad y la imposibilidad que hemos llamado *evidencia-como-posibilidad*. Esto no se limita a cuestiones sobre la existencia de los ovnis, sino que se extiende también a las diferentes concepciones espaciales sobre dónde pueden encontrarse estas manifestaciones. Primero, contrastamos las concepciones materialistas de la evidencia con aquellas que consideran el contacto extraterrestre como algo interior y encarnado. Pero luego, renunciamos a esta división y exploramos cómo las diferentes facetas, aparentemente contradictorias, de la teoría de la evidencia-como-posibilidad realmente funcionan juntas, de modo que cada condición o evento crea sus propias configuraciones espaciales para los ovnis. Finalmente, exploramos momentos “absurdos” en los que esta máquina de teoría colapsa o se acelera y se escapa por completo de este espectro de posibilidades.

Palabras clave: absurdo, alienígenas, Chile, evidencia, máquina de teoría, ufología.

O possível e o impossível: reflexões sobre evidência na ufologia chilena

Resumo: este artigo foi escrito a partir de um ano de trabalho de campo com ufologistas, contactados, abduzidos e céticos, no Chile. Os métodos utilizados incluem etnografia, análise de sites e da mídia, bem como entrevistas em profundidade. Nosso argumento é que o óvni funciona como o que Galison chamaria de *máquina de teoria*, uma multiplicidade que gera não simplesmente referenciais interpretativos heterogêneos para compreender fenômenos voadores anômalos em diferentes esferas ideológicas, mas também princípios de evidência. No entanto, aqui tomamos a evidência não como dada, mas sim como uma categoria etnográfica. Em particular, o óvni como máquina de teoria no contexto chileno e as diferentes cosmologias de evidência encontradas nele produz uma teoria da possibilidade e da impossibilidade, o que chamamos de *evidência-como-possibilidade*. Isso não está limitado a questões sobre a existência de óvnis, mas se estende também aos diferentes conceitos espaciais sobre onde essas manifestações podem ser encontradas. Primeiro contrastamos os entendimentos materialistas da evidência com aqueles que consideram o contato extraterrestre como algo interior e encarnado. Logo, renunciamos essa divisão e exploramos como as diferentes facetas, aparentemente contraditórias, da teoria da evidência-como-possibilidade realmente funcionam juntas, de modo que cada condição ou evento cria suas configurações espaciais para os óvnis. Por último, exploramos momentos “absurdos” nos quais a máquina de teoria colapsa ou é acelerada, fugindo por completo dessa gama de possibilidades.

Palavras-chave: absurdo, alienígenas, Chile, evidência, máquina de teoria, ufologia.

Introduction: A Consideration of Ufos as Substance and Symbol

Ufology – the study of unidentified flying objects – is gaining increasing traction in the Spanish-speaking Americas. Figures such as Peruvians Sixto Paz and Ricardo González, Colombian Enrique Castillo Rincón, Bolivian Fernando Mostajo, Mexican Jorge Reichert, and many other mostly male protagonists of modern ufology, have created a vibrant sub-culture of amateur sky-watchers and speculators, as well as their detractors, in the region. Chile is no exception to this trend. While in this country, ufology is considered a largely marginal realm of knowledge-making to the public eye, well-known ufologists such as Rodrigo Fuenzalida are routinely invited to morning television shows and radio programs to discuss topics related to sightings, or other controversies with alleged visitors from outer-space, such as abduction phenomena. But while Rodrigo may be considered its more “mediatic” face, creating some friction within the “community,” Chilean ufology is a complex

field of smaller geographically-separate units; groups that gather to discuss evidence, to do night vigils in what are considered “hot” sites – places of special interest to the “brothers of space” – or to organize conferences and seminars. Chile is considered by many UFO researchers as one of the prime locations for sightings due to its remote location, geographical idiosyncrasies, and clear skies. As in other parts of the world, one of the fundamental tropes of Chilean ufology is the concept of “evidence”; evidence at first taken in the most positivist scientific sense, of something that *proves the existence of a given object or conjecture or hypothesis*.

“Evidence,” in online dictionaries such as the Merriam Webster, is cited variously as, “a sign which shows that something exists or is true”; “something that furnishes proof”; as a verb, “to reveal outwardly or to make apparent.” But as Matthew Engelke argues in relation to anthropological evidence (2008), what is or not evidence is directly related to “evidentiary protocols,” a term he borrows from historian Collingwood (1994). It is not obvious what counts as empirical evidence, or what the questions are which evoke that evidence in the first place, or indeed, how much data one needs, to arrive at a place where one is certain that this data *is* evidence. These are questions Chilean ufologists routinely ask themselves as well. Pablo, a veterinarian who participated in a conference on ufology in 2019, told the audience, “the ufologist is not the same as the contactee, or the believer. We need to maintain a certain amount of skepticism.” Elsewhere, we heard him explicitly reference “Occam’s razor” in relation to ufological data. Another interlocutor says, “there are anomalous phenomena that people witness and that we can’t explain, but there is no evidence of extraterrestrial craft or of aliens”; he furthered, “abductions are even harder to prove.” Notwithstanding this apparently positivist rendering of evidence, ufology can also be compared along the lines of the intersubjective dimensions of anthropology. Ethnographic evidence is inevitably filtered through the anthropologist’s relational positioning and articulation in the field, and thus rendered *relational knowledge* (Hastrup 2004) that does not necessarily involve the “accumulation” of data in the strictest sense, but rather *insights from data*. As Engelke says, “In anthropology, evidence is also an argument” (2008, 5).

Evidence is not one thing in Chilean ufology; it is both partial, based on particular evidentiary protocols and their perspectives, and also relational in the sense that it needs to be seen and condoned by a wider group of people, as well as cross-checked. But, complementing Engelke, evidence here is not just an argument but a heuristic device that forms part of a larger theory machine, which is the UFO itself. A theory machine, according to historian of science Peter Galison (2003, in Helmreich 2011), is an object which stimulates theoretical formulation. A corollary of this, we would argue, particularly with invisible or “unacceptable” objects, is the notion of evidence. We argue here that the UFO as a theory machine generates a theory of evidence on a spectrum. This spectrum embraces a multiplicity of positions concerning what is possible and what is impossible, what is conceivable and what is inconceivable. In this article, we endeavor to both follow this UFO theory

machine and to understand the way evidence is articulated and deployed in diverse fields of ufological practice. We will also look at those where there is an apparent absence of significance or meaning: the so-called “absurd” events, where the gap between the empirical and the evidential is insurmountable.

How are UFOs essentially “theory machines?” We argue that UFOs, and all that they imply (in terms of a cosmology of their occupants and their potential causality on humans), resemble the seawater that Helmreich describes in his work on water as a theory machine (2011). According to Helmreich, water is both substance and symbol, being thus a medium for the ways both scholars and interlocutors have understood nature and culture (2011, 132): “Water as nature appears as both potentiality of form and uncontainable flux; it moves faster than culture”; “Water as culture, meanwhile, can materialize as a medium of pleasure, sustenance, travel, poison, and disaster” (2011, 132). Helmreich’s tactic is to operate an “athwart” perspective: one that sees theories as both explanatory tools, and as phenomena to be examined in and of itself (2011, 138). Thus water is both theoretical and empirical. Galison’s notion of theory machine, in Helmreich’s context, then generates an athwart theory as coherent in relation to water. UFOs, we argue, also operate as theory machines, generating evidence theories in different corners of the ufology movement. The problem with this is the vast forms of heterogeneous thinking in relation to concepts of evidence. We propose *not* to think of evidence in terms of something demonstrated; but something *possible*. So here, the margins of the evidence theory that the UFO as a theory machine enables are fringes of conceivability and inconceivability, fringes with fuzzy borders. These borders are negotiated anew in each space of UFO encounter and conceptualization. But the evidence-theory does not just refer to the existence of UFOs, but to possibilities of time-travel, abduction, out-of-body bodily experiences, divine intervention, and the cosmos itself.

In this article, we start off by arguing that ufologists can be rudimentarily divided into two fields, tendencies, ideals, we could say, which are sometimes at odds with each other, and at others, overlap and co-constitute. We will examine several brief ethnographic moments in the next section that exemplify the separations and overlaps of each of them. The two ways of “knowing” UFO phenomena, so to speak, are, in the words of Strieber and Kripal, “reductive comparison” and “religious comparison” (2016, 13). The former is what Diana Pasulka, following well-known ufologist Jacques Vallées (1969), calls the “nuts and bolts” approach to ufology (2019, 157), and that refers to those who seek physical evidence and who are concerned with material issues. The latter corresponds to the *content* of the experiences; the abductions, visions, moments of contact, extraterrestrial messages. This is an interior, spiritual approach to apprehending UFOs. It has an inevitable religious dimension, as Benjamin Zeller also shows in relation to UFO religions, such as Heaven’s Gate (2010); but it is not always religious. We prefer the term, “internal,” or “embodied.” If we take evidence-as-ethnographic-heuristic here, we understand that following it leads us to what Cristobal Bonelli, following Annemarie Mol (2002), has

alerted to be the “relational practice” of an object (2016, 25), in this case of evidence. Evidence, as a paradigm for the natural sciences, is not the only model deployed by those who seek concrete tangibilities; evidence of internal states and cues, of external synchronous coincidences and events, and of personal experiences, seem to be imperative across the board, as explained above. These variegated forms of apprehending evidence yield modes of cognizing possibilities and impossibilities in relation to the various UFO phenomena.

It is no surprise, then, that clear ambiguities between these two positions can be noted in the field. Indeed, processes of purifying evidence only reveal the extent of their performativity, their enactment within certain boundaries of reference. Even in Pasulka’s data, she argues that her interlocutor Scott, who curates a website dedicated to ufological evidence, is a “debunker *because* he is a true believer” (2019, 85). In this case, skepticism goes hand in hand with true belief, belying the idea that any ontological configuration is somehow more “evidentiary” than another. In many instances in our own research in Chile, the boundaries between materialistic, positivist evidence, and bodily, interior, and spiritual evidence, were easily blurred, bringing one to bear on the other and vice-versa. Indeed, ufologists can also be experiencers or contactees, for one. What does this entail for a concept of ufological “evidence?” At first glance, we could say that evidence, in ufology, is an unstable matter. But if we begin with an understanding of UFOs as theory generators, not as objects of belief, then there is no such thing. All matter, all evidence is ultimately unstable, and subject not just to parameters of objective scientificity but to human boundary-work and exclusionary politics. This is amply demonstrated in the sociology of knowledge of the paranormal sciences, for instance, where Collins and Pinch (1979) meticulously deconstruct the way in which normative science journals have systematically excluded parapsychological articles, notwithstanding the often rigorous scientific methods and replicability of the experiments underlying their conclusions or speculations. Moreover, these exclusionary tactics have been based on principles often not applied to orthodox and natural science itself, one of the strategies being a “blank refusal to believe” (1979, 244). In the *Book of the Damned*, published in 1919, Charles Fort argues to such effect. He writes, “our whole universe is an animation of the local by an ideal that is realizable only in the universal” (2014, 6). All things “are trying to become the universal by excluding other things” (2014, 8). The “damned” are data that are temporarily excluded from spaces of light, of admission, of officialism. Ufological “evidence” is most certainly still “the damned” for mainstream science.

As a counterpoint, take climatological science, where evidence is cleansed, calibrated, and also, controversial. While from the perspective of a sociology of science, or of Science and Technology Studies, there is no objective standard by which evidence is measured as evidence, there are still local rules by which this judging takes place and those are at the very center of analysis. This is significant. Walford, in her study of “raw data” among climatologists and other scientists in the Amazon (2017), argues

that the data become a *relation* themselves. As she mentions, in the Amazon, this data is “not data,” but it is at the same time, “not *not* data” (2017, 75): raw data is either data or it is not, because of the multiple errors that may occur with its collection in the dense forest. But this is not a fact that is apprehendable before this data is processed, or “cleaned up”; instead, “raw data instantiates the moment before any of these positions is even ascertainable” (2017, 75). This means that the data generates “endless potential for constantly creating the relation between them.” Something similar occurs in Chilean ufology, with its multitude of discourses and evidentiary standards that pull and tug for power. Indeed, we could say that all evidence, all data is ultimately relational, in the sense that it is accepted or rejected, and calibrated, within a given scientific system, with its multiple actors and instruments, including ideological ones. The main difference is that, while Walford’s data is always on its way to “becoming” data, scientific “proof” so to speak, or to *not* becoming data, and it fits within a presumed standard (even though there is no such universal standard), the same is not the case with a public and scientific apprehension of ufological claims to evidence. These are automatically excluded from a conversation with both science and astronomy. But this does not mean that an anthropology of evidentiary processes in ufology is not possible in close quarters to our interlocutors’ praxis, language, and concepts. We forward the case that both of these examples (climatology and ufology) are eloquent demonstrations of the contingencies of the instantiation of data, as data, and as evidence. But evidence in ufology is always underwritten by diverse stakes of possibility, and its opposites or correlates. In ufology there are a multiplicity of these contingent, evidence-making stakes, which we explore below.

But, the argument does not end there. There is a third space which is also theory-generating, but which escapes the dualism of the nuts and bolts and the internal-embodied fields of evidence-making. This is the ultimate space of extreme alterity. The theory machine overheats and perhaps “crashes” in these moments, when there is no meaning that can possibly be gauged from them. They are intensely paradoxical events. Ufological research is full of anecdotes of paradox, synchronicity, coincidence, and moments of “absurdity,” of the absence of any form of representation, where the theory machine does not generate meaning, or models for or of the world, of evidence, or possibility, or anything else. The phenomenon and the theory here collapse into one; they are not distinguishable, to such an extent that signification cancels itself out - it is “damned” *ipso facto*. An example of this would be a narrative in Jacques Vallée’s *Passport to Magonia* (1982, 23-25), where he recounts the tale of a Wisconsin farmer who encounters an alien craft, and when looking inside, finds that occupants that look like small Italians are cooking up pancakes in what looks like a kitchenette. Or, as we mention in the final section, an encounter with something ineffable in the field, while UFO-hunting. In the words of Strieber and Kripal, the “absurd” event “is both mental and material, or neither mental nor material, at the same time” (2016, 204). This paradoxical rendering of “evidence” will be made ethnographically “evident” in the last section of this article.

Domain-(In)Specific Evidence

It's 7 p.m. on a Friday and as we sit in front of Rodrigo Fuenzalida at his private alternative therapy practice, while the rush hour traffic noise of Vicuña Mackenna - one of the main arteries of downtown Santiago - fills the room. We have been there for almost two hours, but the conversation has gone on at length as he articulates the many nuances of Chilean ufology for us. He says, only half-metaphorically, that "people here will go 'aaah I love flying saucers and extraterrestrials. Will the Virgin Mary get angry about that?' So then they take her and put her up in the flying saucer. The conflict is over! That's what they do." By this example Rodrigo refers to the common co-appearance in Chile of religious tropes in narratives of contact, and tales of abductions and UFO sightings. To him, this "syncretism" of UFOs and Cristian cosmology, a word he uses, is nothing more than an extrapolation of religious elements to a non-conventional phenomenon; one that is ill-understood by most speculators. He even considers it a form of "contamination."

One flagrant experiential case of this is the now mediatic "Friendship" case, in which a ham radio operator in Santiago conversed for fourteen years with another station in the south, namely, with inhabitants that he described as "extremely technologically advanced," medically and scientifically, as well as erudite scholars of the bible. Indeed, Octavio Ortiz, the radio operator, says that they described themselves - before disappearing from the airwaves in Chiloé in the mid-1990s - as being from "outside this planet, but belonging to the same humanity" (pers.comm. with Espíritu Santo 2019). The curious thing, according to him, was that they routinely referred to the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and the Bible in their conversations. The "Friendship" group - the name of their radio station but also of their community - also stated that they were the "helpers" of the "Lord's angels." This particular case, made famous in television re-enactments and extensive newspaper coverage, has become a headache to Fuenzalida, and others, whom, on the one hand, are reticent to accuse its protagonists of direct farce and, on the other, intuit that there is a kind of "magical realism" - fairly Christian in nature - that permeates these experiences, something perhaps characteristic of the geographical territory itself. One interlocutor from Punta Arenas ventures to call some of the "believers" *ufólotras*, a play on the term *ufólogo* and *idólatra* - those who worship idols.

The relative consensus among historians and sociologists is that the event that inaugurates the UFO's place in Western imaginary - or more precisely its association with extraterrestrials and outer-space technology and the wide dissemination of its images - is the sighting and report made by businessman and pilot Kenneth Arnold (Denzler 2001, 8) in 1947 of nine strangely shaped metallic objects that floated "like saucers skipping over water" (2001, 4). The "incident" at Roswell (of an alien "crash," recovery of a body, and subsequent military denials) later in the same year - 1947 - ignited a host of conspiracy theories that has linked the US government with "secret" knowledge and UFO cover-ups since. Deborah Battaglia (2005) connects the alien craze with the fears and anxieties of an "Other," unfolded by and in the context of a

nuclear globalized world, linked to a technological utopia not entirely dissimilar to spiritualist or theosophical treatises of the 19th century. Indeed, as Cristopher Roth (2005, 43) argues, the “scientific” - or even forensic - perspectives towards these kinds of sightings (what others have called the “nuts and bolts”) did not stand alone for long. Even as early as the 1950s, self-proclaimed contactees - such as George Adamski - began to articulate new tales of space travel and extended contacts with whom he and other contactees started calling “space brothers.” Ufologists were now having to deal not just with a flood of eye witness reports, but with testimonials of highly emotionally charged experiences which had the characteristic of being utterly unverifiable. This added a tone that was deemed by some of the more “serious” investigators of ufology, to be of a religious or faith-based nature (2005, 43). Rodrigo’s complaints are not alone then, but rather, part and parcel of ufologists’ skeptical narrative “toolbox,” so to speak, which began in the 1960s with astronomers such as Allen Hynek, among many others. This would cohere with the distinction made by Pasulka between different focuses in ufology; the first, on the “empirical effects of UFOs”; the second arising “with the advent of the application of hypnotic regression to experiencers” (Pasulka 2019, 157).

As mentioned above, the “nuts and bolts” contingency of knowledge-making requires, or desires, “hard evidence” to back up claims that UFOs exist, and further, that they are somehow related to extraterrestrial life, but as we will show, this “hard data” is posed as emerging from a position of practical impossibility. Thus, in our theory of “evidence-as-possibility,” this position would constitute one of the extremes; that is, that which is possible is necessarily material in its definition. Not even a representational form of materiality (such as a photograph of a UFO) would lead to definite possibility. In Chile, the institution that most represents this empirical drive is the CEFAA, the Comité de Estudios de Fenómenos Aéreos Anómalos (Committee for the Study of Anomalous Aerial Phenomena), based inside what was the site of Santiago’s first airport, in Cerillos, where there is now an Aeronautical Museum. Hugo Camus, an affable man of about fifty-five, has been its director since 2017. He had previously worked as an aeronautical journalist, reporting on the Soviet and American space programs, among others. CEFAA has been in operation since 1997, directed previously by an air traffic controller and an aeronautical engineer. CEFAA’s mission, as described on its website, is to lend “support to the safety of aerial operations in national territory.” Camus says it was created due to the numerous cases of sightings of non-identified crafts, both on the part of pilots and airplane crew on commercial and private flights, and on the part of a general public. Currently, CEFAA is the only official organ of the state through which people can “report” anomalous aerial phenomena. Camus has a team of people, internal and external advisers, who provide consultation on each case. These include pilots, air traffic controllers, aeronautical and aerospace engineers, meteorologists, astronomers, entomologists, ornithologists, and psychiatrists, among others. Camus describes the work they do in official terms. They receive a report, say, by email or by phone, and each one must be

investigated. They decide to which experts the report will be sent, the so-called “lines of action” – whether to experts on the weather, insects, or planes, for instance. There is a quota of investigation that needs to be complete by the end of the month: 55 %, an entirely unrealistic number, Camus tells us in conversation. A good 66 % of cases are entirely “explainable” – balloons, satellites, planets, and so on. However, 4-5 % of cases are not. The conclusion is that there is something “anomalous,” making it “impossible to elaborate a conclusion based on its origin due to the sciences and technologies of today” (pers. communication 2019).

However, a major shortfall of investigation, according to Camus, is the fact that reports come primarily from post-facto testimonials; and they are personal. You can either believe them or not. Also, “things happen fast,” and often details are hazy; yet, with investigations, one needs to know exact times and places. Photographic and video evidence is also notoriously unreliable, and manipulable. In essence, Camus says that he is dealing with a needle in the haystack in relation to finding *evidence*. It does not mean that there isn’t any evidence, only that the standard by which CEFAA judges data as evidence is simply too restrictive such that data relating to UFOs cannot possibly measure up. There is a standard for falsification, not for proof, because there is no theoretical criteria to decide on what counts as evidence of UFOs. It does not get more “nuts and bolts” - or as another interlocutor says, “*tornillos y tuercas*” - than this. Camus represents here a form of orthodox scientific thinking based on what Collins and Pinch have argued is an “ethnocentrism of the now,” a common strategy used by mainstream science to delegitimize and exclude non-conventional fields of investigation (such as parapsychology), and which consists in the premise of “nothing is true which conflicts with what is now known” (1979, 245). This does not discount the fact that Camus, or other ufologists who express this frame, may have been witnesses to inexplicable phenomena themselves.

Our second example lies on the other end of the “spectrum” - and it deals with a case of abduction and close contact. Mariano is a sixty-year old man who claims to have had an abduction experience, out of this earth, to the planet Venus. The experience was “like a dream, but it’s not: it’s reality.” When he was thirty-nine, he moved to the south of Chile, to Puerto Natales, where he met a wise, sage woman who introduced him to UFO contact phenomena. She trained him to meditate, to communicate telepathically, and to reach a stage of astral travel. She would be his “evidence broker” of sorts; not only through her teachings but through information which only she was sent. One day she told him: “they’re going to come to get you tonight.” Then, at 4:30 that night, his windows began to vibrate. He describes entering a whirlwind in the shape of a cone. Suddenly a beautiful woman and man stood in front of him, urging him to put on a suit, which he did. “We are family,” they say, “you are our brother, we are all siblings; we share the same DNA.” From here Mariano experiences another jump and they suddenly appear in a fully inhabited planet. Large, white domes, with legs, “mega-constructions,” Mariano says, were “where all the society lives, because the environment is inhospitable outside.” He asks them where they are, and they

respond, Venus, and point up to a celestial body above. “That’s the moon.” Mariano responds that Venus has no moon, after which they say, “it does, but your scientists don’t know it yet.” All this communication was telepathic.

Mariano was deeply impacted by this experience, in which he was introduced to a completely different narrative of the universe and what is possible, one that includes intergalactic wars, secret missions, hidden planetary governments, and evil races of aliens that plan to infiltrate humanity to destroy it. But Mariano was not simply introduced to a new “reality,” whereby he was given access to knowledge of the kinds of technologies that he describes as “transcending science fiction,” but he was also initiated into a novel way of evidence-making, where the dream-like state of accessing “reality” becomes larger, more *evidential*, than reality itself. Similar to the emphasis on self-spirituality reaffirmed by the “New Age” (Heelas 1996), where the body is the ultimate evidentiary gauge, the arbiter of divine knowledge, Mariano de-territorializes the traditionally spatial ufological topology, by positing *interior* visions as places of ultimate truth, and thus evidence. A traditionally religious space of faith - one’s body and mind - becomes therefore the site of “expertise” (Roth 2015, 68).

What is “evidence” in these examples then? In the first example, it was defined by its negation, almost; by the negation of *possibility*. Collecting proper evidence in this field of testimonials and flawed, even falsifiable data, is a “needle in the haystack,” so much so, that CEFAA does not consider itself in possession of *any* evidence of UFO, much less alien, phenomena. Mariano takes a different turn and has an internal dimension of experience *as* a reality; by “internal” we do not mean imaginary. Indeed, Mariano was adamant that his experiences did not just happen in mind; they happened *physically*. On the one hand, there is an implicit statement in each of these cases towards evidence as demonstrative. But on the other, these different spaces of apprehension become different gauges of demonstration, with different rules and principles. Camus makes this explicit when he says that, “when we face inexplicable data, it is inexplicable perhaps because the science of now does not have the tools to explain it.” So normative demonstrative, empirical-based “science” here remains the threshold. But while Mariano’s narrative does not rely on this, his is nevertheless a highly empirical account; it is not religious: “A ufologist is rarely a Catholic, or a Muslim, or a Hindu. You need to be able to see ‘the totality.’” Both of these men work from an empiricist perspective; from an appeal to a “totality” that one day science might explain, or that could be provided incrementally by astral travel or projections, such as Mariano’s. But there are important differences as well. Camus works from an exclusionary perspective, whereas Mariano from an evidentiary inclusive one, that seems to be more representative of the ufological community in Chile. In our view as observers of this community, the fact that there is not one standard of evidence, nor body or institution to judge it, leads to a proliferation of local modes of knowledge-making, each of which has its unique protocols. This means that while many ufologists consider themselves to be in possession of irrefutable pieces of evidence-as-possibility, others would describe these same pieces of data as forgeries,

enigmas, or results of suggestion. We understand these two positions as underwritten by different stakes of what is possible and not.

Perhaps we could read these different modes of understanding UFOs as evidence-in-becoming, or intended-evidence, or indeed, data on its way to evidence. Let us consider Charles Fort's notion of the "damned." Fort concerned himself mostly with collecting anomalous facts, facts which were in a sort of "purgatory" of existence, which he called "intermediateness" or "quasi-existence, neither real nor unreal, but expression of attempt to become real, or to generate for or recruit a real existence" (2014, 14). All phenomena, it seems, are on their way somewhere, being either assimilated into a more or less stable scientific system, or deemed irreconcilable, and distanced. Certainly, extraordinary experiences such as Mariano's would be automatically discarded by Camus and others. *But Camus's own evidence is rather the lack of it.* It is therefore not just the case that ufological data is pulsating to be recognized by the establishment; it is *also* that it is often in a perpetual state of quasi-existence for those on the very *inside* - or of a quasi-comprehension of a type of totality in which it may fit. We could then opt out of understanding evidence in this ethnographic case as that which demonstrates.

But this explanation does not quite follow the theory machine described by Galison and Helmreich, and which we aim to explore here. It is not enough, in our view, to say that each specific evidentiary paradigm creates its own "world." Gad, Jensen and Winthereik, suggest that we can take Isabelle Stengers' proposal of ontological divergences, rather than those of the "ontological turn," which seems to apply bounded, incommensurable units to different cultures (2015, 71). Stengers focuses on "ecologies of practice" (Stengers 2005, in Gad, Jensen, and Winthereik 2015, 72), such that no practice can be defined externally, only from within. "In other words, any practice must be studied with a view to the processes through which it is differentiated from other practices, and also its ongoing process of transforming itself" (Gad, Jensen, and Winthereik 2015, 72). Early in this text, we state that we aim to consider "UFOs" as theory machines, and propose the term "evidence-as-possibility" as the theory generated by this particular field. By way of what Jensen calls a "practical ontology" (2010), we hope to show that while each ufological group or field holds true to its notions of what is possible and thus evidential, the field of knowledge-making in current Chilean ufology is also a highly relational one, dependent on modes of technology and their shifting evaluation as credible or not, networks of ufological and social support, and the media and its public as a source of validation. Practical ontology, argue Gad, Jensen, and Winthereik, has the advantage of viewing ontologies in STS through the materials and objects that are mobilized in ever-emerging, ever-constituting worlds. They argue that it makes the reverse move than the "ontological turn" in anthropology, in which language and concepts are primary: practical ontology "ontologizes epistemology" (2015, 75). All cultural phenomena are "relational, semiotic and material" at once (2015, 75). However we may look at it as scholars, for our interlocutors there is always an indeterminacy about

alien phenomena. This may not relate to their existence as such, but to other factors such as their appearance or even movement, or the veracity of messages received by telepathy. This is why the theory of evidence-as-*possibility* is useful here, because it encompasses more than just the possibility of existence. The “UFO” phenomena, much like water itself, is pure multiplicity. What we suggest in the following section is that different stances appropriate and work this multiplicity in particular ways.

Ufo as Theory Machine

What is or not science is a moot debate for contemporary STS theorists, despite being ethnographically central. Instead, they seek to deconstruct the methods, apparatuses and discourses whereby data become data, and to understand the endeavor as one of performance and enactment. This does not simply apply to people themselves, but to the objects and materials of investigation and evidence, and their measurement or validation. Walford, for instance, proposes a scheme in which scientific knowledge is created - or more precisely, certified - not by a reduction of the relations that proliferate around data, but by a selection and cleansing of untrustworthy relations (2017, 72) - say, dirt around the measurement apparatuses - and the privileging of others (2017, 73). She resembles this process to one of “stabilization” of data, of making data trustworthy and by doing so, enabling it to lend itself for scientific practice (2017, 74). What we have called the nuts-and-bolts ufologists in Chile, those whose criteria they consider higher than others with a more sensorial, embodied approach, also “purify” their data. They have computer programs to clean images, telescopes, extremely high-tech cameras for vigils, mobile phone applications that when pointed at the sky provide immediate recognition of satellites, iridium flares, planets, and airplanes, in order to discard anomalous phenomena, as well as vast databases of accounts and images of past and ongoing ufological cases. The dangers of holding material objects and records as the ultimate threshold for confirmation is that, when published or disseminated in a given community, these are always up for scrutiny. How is the UFO a theory-generating machine here? We propose that it is because it circumscribes, opens and closes a domain of evidentiary possibility particular to a group, organization, or community. UFO, in the case of the nuts-and-bolts approach, becomes relational, semiotic, and material at once, by virtue of the controversies produced by the objects of evidence widely disseminated in the public media. The “thing” - which could be a photograph or a film - conjures up what Helmreich would call “new reifications” (2011, 133) of the UFO. But much like Helmreich’s seawater, it is exactly because the UFO is both thing and theory, that it is pliable in its interpretation, particularly once it reaches the wider public. If for one group the UFO theory machine renders possibility as solely encompassed by tangible or material evidence, this tangibility can be abruptly curtailed by others who consider the physical record untrustworthy, polluted, or even manipulated.

An example of this was the controversy over a photo, taken in Parque Forestal in Santiago in 2004, and made public by one of Chile’s most respected ufologists.

This man, whom we shall call Juan, went on television and on social media to advertise the fact that he had been sent an image by a civil mechanic of what looked like a small alien. Juan was careful to say that it was impossible to parse unequivocal judgment on what it was, but that he was nevertheless sufficiently impressed to take it to the media, for which he was highly criticized subsequently in ufology circles. The image itself is grainy, but appears to show a bipedal humanoid figure, looking at the camera, dwarfed by two Chilean police officers on horseback, one standing ahead and one behind it respectively. It made the rounds in the morning shows, and was widely discussed by ufologists on their websites and on television, even internationally. Controversies multiplied discursively around this highly ambiguous image. But then it was analyzed in digital laboratories by photographic experts. One of them suggested it was actually a dog, with its paws in the air, and rotating its body as the picture was taken. The hypothesis was that it was the distortion of the photograph that somehow furnished this small creature with what appeared to be humanoid characteristics. Thus, a case of classic pareidolia - the human tendency to see order, patterns, in chaos. This suddenly became a very plausible interpretation, which was a huge embarrassment for Juan and his team, and all those who had invested in an “alien” hypothesis. So, the evidence, the fuzzy picture, indeed, the fuzziness itself, became a relational vector for the entire ufological community and its technical wings (the computer and imagery experts), who are crucial in the process of moving “evidence” from a place of obscurity or impossibility to one of possibility. Pieces of potential evidence require that a particular community relate, among other things, through intense dialogue.

The UFO as a theory machine is thus somewhat different to Helmreich’s version of water as athwart, as he describes it. Helmreich analyzes several domains of knowledge whereby nature and culture are irremediably separate, separations that are pre-analytic. Maritime anthropologies, for instance, treat the sea as naturally distinct from the land (2011), by understanding local systems of management and meaning, and the ocean as ontologically unpredictable. In contrast, the prime division in this ethnography, as we have mentioned is not between nature/culture, but between the “possible” and the “impossible,” which waddles into metaphysical as well as physical terrains. Some ufologists are plainly skeptical of material data as demonstrative of UFOs, even creating staged material of seeming UFO movements, strange floating objects, or UFO-like drone lights, to prove a point. Marco Antonio Gómez, of a small group in Santiago called MARCC UFO, told us, during a recent vigil, that they regularly upload such fabricated videos on their Facebook page in order to educate the public on the ease of such falsification. UFO phenomena is experienced as so elusive, in fact, that it becomes much easier to prove its opposite - its non-existence. This does not mean that proof of “possibility” is not obtainable elsewhere; but the high standard of possibility here renders UFOs *mostly* impossible.

But we could ask whether uncertainty, ambiguity, and elusiveness are not the exact factors that keep a piece of material evidence rolling, multiplying spaces of

thought, action, negation, *and* possibility. Thus, evidence is a possibility (within the UFO theory-generating machine) because there is a large margin of interpretation regarding its validity, and it is a margin that is permanently shifting, according to this relational dialogue. As concepts of evidence shift, so does what is “seen.” Thus the theoretical becomes the empirical, and also, vice-versa. As Randle mentions, the existence of good footage or of a credible still photograph is “never going to be sufficient to prove that flying saucers are of extraterrestrial origin. They are, however, evidence that something extraordinary is happening” (Randle 1999, 125). To further complicate these distinctions, Pablo, a veterinarian in his mid-40s, and a founding member of a ufology association in San Bernardo, Santiago, tells us that the threshold of ufological “evidence” these days is often not material, or digital, in nature; it’s personal. “It is virtually impossible to ascertain the validity of a video or a photo. It is not like it was in the 1960s or 70s. One seeks a personal experience instead” (pers. comm. 2019). He believes that people’s “states” allow contact to occur. This can be translated, for instance, as a large meditating crowd during a vigil, which creates what he calls “correspondence” from the *hermanos mayores* (the “brothers” from space). For this he offers quite a material explanation; in his perspective the possibility of establishing contact and witnessing the unexplainable comes from a certain pre-disposition, one that certain people possess in their very neurons. According to Pablo,

We have a software that religions call spiritual world, the extraterrestrial, the paranormal; something that can’t be touched, there is an interface for that, to connect. And from my point of view, that interface - that would be the keyboard or the mouse - are the neurons. The more developed your neurons are, the more you can connect. That means that there’s something here, an intangible matrix that is capable of connecting with the tangible-biological matrix that is the neuron.

In the theory of evidence-as-possibility, Pablo does not lie on the side of “impossibility.” But neither does he lie on the side of pure “materiality” in terms of possibility, but rather an internal, embodied dimension (explained in neurological terms), which enables possibility. So there are more than two dimensions here; there is at least an axis of four: possibility versus impossibility, and material evidence versus internal, personal evidence. Indeed, for Pablo, it is the intangible quality of the UFO phenomena, its lack of physical traces (“something that can’t be touched”), which means that “evidence” for it can only be found at an “interface” of sorts. In his theory, in sensitive neurons (what he calls *hiper-sensibilidad neuronal*, which can be trained). We believe that this ambivalence is not an example of a “middle ground” between two separate datasets and practices, but a demonstration of the special nature of ufological evidence, one that tends not just to movement and destabilization, but to theory as well. It is as if the “hypothetical” - or the “possible” - took a life of its own as an empirical construct in ufology. So, the UFO becomes both the thought-process and the sensation, or empirical effect. Pablo reaffirms this.

Everything that I've said here is theory. It would be fantastic if we could prove it, but it's all theory. You have the extraterrestrials that travel through space, you have the chrononauts that travel through time, and you have the interdimensionals, that could come from other dimensions. If you ask me what I think, what I intuit, with no proof, I think that it's all at the same time. Reality is so vast! The most likely thing is that every day, everything is happening and at the same time.

In such statements, we can gauge through practical ontology that for Pablo “evidence” is not simply “out there,” as something physical, or a material record, but also in the confines of the mind and its neuronal structures. This is not just a discourse definition but one that redefines the spatiality of possibility itself; not just the content of UFO but also its form. There seems to be a different concept of space, or even of space-time at stake. Space is enacted. So says John Law (2002). For objects whose boundaries are fluid, or unstable, ANT tends to understand them as “broken.” Law breaks off from traditional ANT here by saying that “to enact objects is also to enact spatial conditions of im/possibility” (2002, 92). His example of this is of a pump, where its fluidity and variability “contributes to its success as it shifts and adapts to local circumstances. There is no fixed structure, no basic agenda” (2002, 99). But he says, this pump, far from being regarded as deformed or broken, a part of a broken network, is part of a “fluid form” (2002, 99), which, while lying beyond the conditions of network possibility, nevertheless traverses multiple spatial systems. The question Law poses is: is it possible for it to be homeomorphic in another “space” altogether? (2002, 99). Law argues that it holds itself together in what he calls “fluid space” (2002). Among the suggestions he lists, Law says that no particular structure of relations is privileged; new relations come into being because they are reconfigurations of existing elements (2002). We believe that just as Law's pump, and Helmreich's seawater, ufology as a field and the UFO as the theory machine that gives momentum to this field, owe their dynamism to their capacity not only for creating flexible understandings of space (and its inhabitants), and the beyond of space, but even for creating new “space,” new imaginaries of where contact can take place, unfolding new ideas of what is possibility and what is impossible. Evidence - as a conceptual frame - would thus glide in the gaps between the possible and the impossible, reconfiguring the spatial scope and recursively affecting, and enabling or disabling the object of the machine itself: UFO. This final example shows exactly how the heterogeneous dimensions of the theory-making machine, which has generated our theoretical hypothesis of evidence-as-possibility, work in conjunction, sometimes with more friction than others.

In September of 2019, we took part in a large scheduled contact meeting, in the Chilean desert, with a Peruvian ufologist and contactee called Ricardo González. González had gained fame in the late 1990s and early 2000s for having been contacted by entities called Ivika and Antarel, from a star system called Alfa Centauri. These entities claimed to have been descendants of a special mission sent

by earth in our future, and thus being partly human. As in many other contact situations, the messages articulated by these beings involve a catastrophic future, which is their own past, preventable by the development of harmonious coexistence between earthly beings at this very moment in time. For this particular meeting, González, who communicates with Ivika and Antarel telepathically, was told that contact would be established at a precise hour, at a precise day, and at a precise location. This location was at the foot of the Licancabur Volcano, in González' narrative, a site somehow related to the lift-off of the same spatial mission that colonized (or, in our time-frame, will colonize) Alfa Centauri. It is not surprising that the scheduled meeting, in which 340 people from over 20 countries came to camp on a large clearing away from any town, should be called "Memories from the future."

At the expected hour, after a long session of meditation, in which we all "ommed" and hummed, and chanted in unison for a couple of hours, under the clearest sky in the world, we witnessed a series of blinks of light. Whatever it was, it was static for about five minutes above us, under the moving animation of the celestial arch. This was the most "evident" part of the night. But in parallel, certain people were engaging telepathically with the authors of these strange flashes. The following morning, several testimonials were shared in *viva voz* among the entire group, of experiences on the astral plane (astral voyages), personal messages received about the nature of the cosmos, human preparedness for certain kinds of information, and others, of a more personal bent. Ricardo González himself, while we were all under meditation the night before, had psychographed an extensive message from Ivika. But interestingly, accompanying us on the three-day meeting was a team of filmographers, led by Rob Freeman, who describes himself as a "UFO World Explorer." We were told that they were producing a documentary. Freeman posted his video of the flashing lights, replete with evocative cosmic music throughout, on YouTube. In the video, Freeman and his main cameraman are seen arriving at the site, and meeting González. More or less at the half-mark of the twelve-minute video, Freeman shows us the night vision footage of the evening that had been signaled out for contact. He shows us the footage of the flashes of light, stationary. At one point, his voice is heard saying, while filming, "it has to be an ET. I've never seen one of those before, that doesn't move. It's the very first time I see it blink and it sits in one spot." In the following minute, a text appears, with the following:

Analysis of video footage by Rob Freeman, of the Center for the Scientific Study of Atmospheric Anomalies (CSSAA):

The craft was parked in the sky above us, completely stationary/flashing for over 5 minutes. Only the star field in the background was moving, due to the rotation of the earth. The flashing was exactly regular throughout the entire videoclip, with the exception of 2 flashes being out of synchronization with the rest. We consider this a form of communication, a confirmation from our "star friends." We have observed this phenomenon over & over again, when everything else about the sighting mimics a known object.

So, how do these particular blinking lights become evidence, not just for UFOs or “crafts,” but for ETs, according to Freeman? The obvious path here is to say that evidence is created out of a *mise-en-scène* of pre-existing relations, biographies, life journeys, social conversations, consensual assumptions between a given group, and all the work that led up to the very moment of witnessing strange lights and associating them to the other elements in this network. Evidence is also created through multiple “technologies,” including the body. Material technologies are a huge part of this process of validation of the UFO phenomenon, but these are not separate. The spiritual dimensions of the contact send “signs,” places and times where lights will be seen. Confirmation that these internal dimensions were “real” come exactly from the success of the sightings themselves, accompanied as they are by footage, photographic or filmic, and eye-witnesses. So “evidence” here is the result of a backwards and forwards of cues and confirmations; but it is one that is given in a context of *possibility* that allows time-travel, and that embraces the body and the mind as a space for telepathic revelation.

The Absurd

In this final section, we explore those instances or events in an ufologists’ career that fall flat of all meaning, where the theory machine, which we have divined in this case to be evidence-as-possibility, either comes to a complete halt or works into theoretical overdrive. We can gauge here how paradox baffles signification to the extreme, and where frames of evidence either disappear or are placed at the service of abstractions. In the first example, we see the first type of phenomenon: the “object” is never static enough for evidence to be sought, or examined, through and from it; there is no possibility, neither physically nor symbolically. In the second example, an experienced and disenchanted ufologist ruminates about human consciousness as the source of the absurd itself.

To the first example. Carlos, a nurse and ufologist in Punta Arenas, has had numerous experiences of the “absurd,” or the “impossible,” as he says. “Sometimes I see something, I film it, and it doesn’t appear.” He tells us that it is crucial to understand, “in your inner forum, that there are phenomena that escape rationality. [...] You try and fit it, frame it, but that evidence that you are witnessing just does not fit.” Once, he was called to Tierra del Fuego, south of Punta Arenas, to record some anomalous lights. He and a companion were on a dirt track, where they were suddenly flashed twice. Their car began to vibrate and, looking around, they saw, about a hundred meters away, two large spheres floating, emitting lights from below. He says he grabbed his camera and began to film, but they could not see them on the camera itself. So, they decided to walk to them. They got out of the car carefully, and steadily paced towards these objects. When they were about twenty meters away, the crafts suddenly folded inwards, becoming vertical, in lines almost, and disappeared upwards into the sky. The shock of this was accompanied by the sudden appearance, at that very moment, of tail-lights from an unknown car. They had not been aware

that there had been anyone else there. As they began to walk back to their vehicle, the car began to move, to follow them. As they walked faster, the car picked up its pace. As they got in, the car passed by. But as Carlos and his partner looked on, to see the identity of the driver, which in theory you could see with the city lights in the background, they were overwhelmed to notice that no one was at the wheel. There was no one inside at all. At that precise moment, the motor of their own car is suddenly ignited, without human prompt. The radio blasts at full volume, white noise. He describes this as an “electromagnetic shot” to the car. They take off, eager to find the mystery vehicle, but it had disappeared, as soon as it had turned a corner down the hill. The absurd event here was not witnessing the bending UFOs, which could conceivably be in the knowledge base of wider ufology; it was the driverless car, a seemingly very earthly material behaving in a way that leads to no conclusions, and the simultaneity of the two occurrences.

The second example is given by Sergio Sánchez, one of the two editors of a skeptical ufological newspaper *La Nave de los Locos*, which ran from 2000 to 2010. He alerted us in interview (in 2020) to certain intellectual factions of ufology, especially in France, for whom ufological thought itself was born out of the confrontation with paradoxical structures in UFO-related narratives, with the “absurd.” In his book, *Érase una vez en Ovnilandia* (2016), Sánchez explores the significance of French ufology and comes up with what he calls “para-ufology,” a kind of meta-ufology which questions the very terms of engagement of a materialist ufology. In a footnote, Sanchez says (our translation), “It postulates the existence of a *real* and *inexplicable* phenomenon, but that does not necessarily have to do with extraterrestrial origins” (2016, 33). Jacques Vallée, and also John Keel, are keen exponents of this view, which some have called, the “great trickster” – the idea that there is some superhuman form of consciousness which generates forms according to our cultural ideals, and “plays” us with riddles and absurdities. But, according to Sánchez, other theorists, such as Aimé Michel, Beltrán Meheuse, Jean Bruno Rénard, and Jacques Bergier, all came up with different ways to understand absurdities – to not reduce them to the “psychosocial question,” and to incorporate mythology, science fiction, and larger mass cultural constructions in the apparatuses of the apprehending of (or creating, ideoplastically) the “absurd.” This seems fundamental, as Sánchez believes that in this story, there is a larger work of analogizing, travelling back and forth in history, recovering pieces and ideas, projecting them into fantasies and theories, and having these become real by the force of popular consciousness. However, for Sánchez, the “absurd” also has a real dimension. Availing himself of his knowledge of this literature, he considers it valid, for instance, to hypothesize that, “the absurd is nothing more than a product of an ontological shock” (personal comm. 2020), a crash between realities with different languages, and in which, when one witnesses something one must decode it in terms that often produce paradoxical twists.

Most scholars and lay people would brush off experiences of driverless cars and other anomalies as figments of the mind. We are not claiming that all UFO experiencers,

or ufologists for that matter, experience the “absurd.” Only that this “absurd” cannot be excluded from mainstream data because of its anomalous or highly personalized character. This would be Sánchez’ position as well, who would argue for its very centrality, even constitutionality in relation to ufology. From our perspective here, it inflects how people understand evidence. Convictions about the “realness” of an absurd experience are not necessarily (or indeed ordinarily) accompanied by conclusions about it.

Such experiences present themselves as “anti-structure” by definition (see Hansen 2001), where marginality is not an incidental epiphenomena but central to them. This means that one of the ways in which to understand them *is* anthropologically (or even through practical ontology), since they defy language itself - there is *ipso facto* no language of verification, or of evidence embedded in the experience itself, nor are there any parameters of possibility or impossibility. This would be true for the example of Carlos, where there is a vision of something, but where it’s elusivity defies evidential or even propositional parameters. Could we think of evidence here not in but as movement? Motility, as defined by Martin Holbraad (2012), means defying meaning for the interlocutors themselves (as well as to us, their anthropologists). In Afro-Cuban oracular practices of Ifá, for instance, motion is “primordial, and stable entities” derivative outcomes (2012, 99). The process of casting the divination nuts, and arriving at the divination signs - *oddu* - lends itself to an analysis in terms of the trajectories of motion: motion of the diviners themselves, with their markings, and motion of the deities themselves, which are called down from a state of immanence. The process itself, Holbraad says, is construed as “transformative” (2012, 99), and the meaning of the myths of the signs is seen as being in constant motion - a motion which allows them to bear on the circumstances of the client at hand.

The idea that evidence of “absurd” UFO phenomena is motile and not set, embraces all aspects of it - physical, material manifestations, but also spiritual, psychical, telepathic, paranormal experiences described above. There is no specific “coordinate” or space in which one thing becomes “truer” than the other. The “over-drive” impulse to the UFO theory machine comes to life exactly through this last observation. Abstraction and the multiplicity of theories that are forthcoming from the UFO as an abstract “thing” rather than as an “empirical” thing, imply several steps of removal, so to speak. This does not mean that they are not true or even truer of the object in question. But the elusiveness of the tangible, physical aspect of this movement creates an imbalance, which is more productive as a theoretical endeavor than as a truth-evaluating exercise. In essence the “object” disappears somewhat from the equation, and what is left are complex speculations about quasi-objects, or objects removed from physical space. But the concept of motility, while not entirely applicable to both ends of the evidence-as-possibility spectrum, alerts us to the fact that we have to take these experiences as more than “cultural construction,” as argued by Diego Escolar in an article in which he describes being trailed by what appeared to be extraterrestrial lights in the Argentinian desert (2012). Motility accounts for paradoxical experiences in their own terms, as producing their own forms of

knowledge, embodied and otherwise; in constant reformulation. On the one hand, there are no reality assumptions on a motile scale; as Escobar mentions, regarding his extraordinary experiences, there is no “model” to explain the events (2012, 43). On the other hand, he expresses what is equally true for our interlocutors, that there is a “radical uncertainty” about these “absurd” experiences that falls nowhere along the lines of a continuity of evidence that defines it as *that which demonstrates in some field or scope of possibility*.

In this permanently shifting environment of evidence, the “absurd,” we are more likely to find an anthropological answer when we indeed go to the core of how it can be conceived along the lines of its permanent semantic and ontological mutation.

Summarizing Note

In this article, we have attempted to follow “evidence” of UFOs through various domains with differing thresholds and definitions of it. We also proposed that this evidence - and its standards - can be characterized as an instantiation of a larger theory machine, which is put in motion by the phenomenon of “UFO” itself, and which expresses itself in this field as evidence-as-possibility. Following this theory produced by the UFO as a theory machine, we have proposed that evidence is itself a manifestation of different regimes of “possibility” and “impossibility.” The emphasis on the materiality and physicality of proof on the one hand, and, on the other, the internal, embodied disclosure of UFOs as the ultimate mode of evidence, are some of the expressions of this spectrum. In line with Walford, we argued that data can take a relational path to becoming evidence for a given community, even if it is “damned” for others. This means that an initial piece of evidence can move into the shadows when scrutinized by experts and unvalidated, oscillating then between domains of possibility and impossibility. Finally, we explored a particular field of experience where the theory machine goes either mute or into overdrive, proliferating abstractions, and we would imagine, also controversies. We proposed Holbraad’s motility as a heuristic device to understand these occurrences deemed by our interlocutors as “absurd.” These do not speak to notions of possibility or impossibility precisely because there is no meaning or evidentiary standard that can be gauged from them. The only possible meaning comes from abstraction.

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