

**The Majic Research Group:
On Managing (Mis)Perceptions of Flying Saucers**

Robert Morrison George

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The Timeline:

What follows is a timeline of important historical, conspiratorial, art historical, cultural, personal, legitimate and illegitimate events. They are the context - both aesthetically and theoretically - for *The Majic Research Group*. This timeline begins on June 24th, 1947, the date on which the term "Flying Saucer" was coined. It concludes on April 14th, 2023, the date that *The Majic Research Group* show opens.

June 24th, 1947: Kenneth Arnold witnesses 9 boomerang shaped crafts "skipping like saucers" over Mt. Rainier, WA. He estimates their speed to be much faster than any known jet at the time, and claims that their size is comparable to a 94' Douglas DC-4. He reports the sighting when he lands to refuel his plane. When he ends his journey in Pendleton, Oregon, he is met with press who bring his story to international attention. Reporters for the *East Oregonian* interview Arnold and report the crafts as being "saucer-like¹." The next day the term mutates into "Flying Saucers," and the unknown objects begin to take specific shape in the minds of the excited American public.

As with all encounters with flying saucers, there are a few potential explanations for Arnold's sighting:

1. Arnold made the whole thing up.
2. Arnold saw advanced crafts piloted by extraterrestrials.
3. Arnold saw advanced crafts piloted by military operatives.
4. Arnold misperceived atmospheric phenomena or terrestrial objects.

Unlike the cases that follow, it seems highly unlikely that Arnold would have made the whole thing up. Aliens were by no means a strange concept, but they had not really appeared in the form that his sighting would suggest. If he did in fact see crafts from another world, then Arnold's sighting is an unusual beginning for the phenomenon. As more and more people would claim to see alien crafts, the boomerang shape would fade into relative obscurity. The many sightings that quickly followed Arnold's would, more often than not, take the form of *how* his sighting was reported, not what he *had* reported. This coincidence either suggests that the pilots of these crafts were keenly aware of how the media perceived them, or more simply that the

¹Russell Lee, "1947: Year of the Flying Saucer," National Air and Space Museum, June 24, 2022, <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/1947-year-flying-saucer>.

flying saucers were nothing more than an “impressive collection of mistaken observations and conclusions into which subjective psychic assumptions have been projected.”² In either case, the journalist’s pithy phrasing had an immense impact on one of the most significant cultural symbols of the 20th century. Regardless of what was actually seen the sighting enters into the public consciousness as a misinterpretation.

Unfortunately this mistranslation complicates the possibility of finding an explanation for what actually did occur over Mt. Rainier. “Boomerang” shape may sound exotic for an airplane, but it is a term synonymous with “Flying Wing.” The flying wing is an aircraft design that has no fuselage and no rear stabilizer. The most popular craft of this sort is the B-2 Spirit stealth bomber, a plane often mistaken for a UFO. The B-2 was unfortunately 50 years away from being publicly announced during Arnold’s sighting, but several precursors including the Horton HO-229, Northrop XB-35, and Northrop N-9M had all had successful flights by 1947. It’s not likely that they were flying in the area at the time, but unlike flying saucer shaped planes they existed. It’s also possible that they could have been another type of jet plane (relatively new for the time), reflections of the mountains, clouds, raindrops on the windshield, or high-altitude birds³. This is not to say that more evidence exists for any of these possible explanations than with Arnold’s, but any one of them seems more likely. One needs only to consider all the times in which their brain saw something that was not really there, and then weigh that against the possibility of crafts with the ability to travel between planets.

Late June/Early July, 1947: Mac Brazel, a farmer near Corona, NM, reportedly finds strange metallic debris on his farm. He has not yet heard of the Kenneth Arnold sighting. When he learns about the Flying Saucers, he brings the wreckage to Walker Air Base in nearby Roswell, NM. When Major Jesse Marcel sees the materials, the two return to Brazel’s farm to investigate the debris field.

July 8th, 1947: Following a press release from Walter Hault, the AFB’s information officer, *The Roswell Daily Record* runs the headline: “RAAF Captures Flying Saucer on Ranch in Roswell

²Carl Jung, *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (New York, New York: Signet Books, 1969), 23.

³ Bruce Maccabee, “The Complete Sighting Report of Kenneth Arnold with Comments and Analysis,” *Beyond Weird*, https://beyondweird.com/ufos/kenneth_arnold_sighting_bruce_maccabee.html.

Region.⁴ The wreckage is further clarified as a disc, which has been loaned to the military with cooperation from Brazel⁵. With the Arnold story still fresh, the news of the Roswell disc quickly gains traction.

July 9th, 1947: Images of Jesse Marcel holding wreckage are released to the public. They look comically like tin foil. The flying saucer story is walked back, and the crash is reframed as having been a weather balloon. Outrage begins to form around the source of this confusion; how could members of the U.S. Army Air Force mistake a weather balloon for an advanced alien craft?

Again, options for an explanation emerge. The first being some sort of trickster impulse from Hault and Marcel. Following Arnold's sighting, the two decided to grossly misinterpret the balloon wreckage that was brought to them. When their joke gets international attention, they're made to recant their claim and Marcel has his embarrassing photo op. It is also possible that incompetence was to blame, and that they didn't intentionally misidentify anything. Though either narrative is possible, neither is a charge typically leveled at Marcel and Hault.

Another explanation is that a flying saucer *did* crash on Brazel's ranch, and the relative novelty of the phenomenon allowed Hault to feel as if the truth could be told to the public. When the powers that be catch wind of the story, tin foil balloon wreckage is brought for Marcel to pose with. In the years that follow, this coverup story gets fleshed out. Aliens - one living and multiple dead - are alleged to have been brought to Walker AFB along with their wreckage. The foreign materials were all then flown to Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, OH where they could be studied in comfortable secrecy. This narrative is absent from contemporary sources, but eyewitness interviews filmed in the early 90s⁶ outline similar versions of the story.

The official explanation, however, claims that the wreckage was part of an advanced espionage balloon from Project Mogul. Mogul was a classified initiative which monitored Soviet nuclear technology. The strange wreckage looked a bit like a flying "saucer", and the base believes that explanation would be a good cover for the top secret balloons. When it is

⁴ Roswell Daily Record, July 8th, 1947.

⁵John C Abell, "July 8, 1947: Roswell Incident Launches UFO Controversy," Wired, July 8, 2010, <https://www.wired.com/2010/07/0708army-announces-roswell-new-mexico-ufu-sighting/>

⁶ Available on the National Archives YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_DA-g94Ro1I&t=768s.

determined that this is too sensational of a story, the balloon debris is traded out for foil - itself not from the advanced balloon - and the news story is corrected. This story was officially made public in the 1990s with *The Roswell Report*, an Air Force lead investigation of all materials relating to Roswell.

Regardless of the craft's origin, the tactics of the latter two possibilities fall in line with perception management. This is the same principle at play in advertising, propaganda, art, and PR efforts of all stripes. Perception management treats information as malleable, and as an effective means of manipulating people into behaving a certain way. In military use it is a psychological operation that "convey[s] and deny selected information and indicators to targets resulting in behaviors and actions favorable to the originator's objectives. This is mainly achieved by combining truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations in various ways."⁷ If it's really a flying saucer, the PsyOp begins with the rephotographed wreckage and the shifting narrative. If it's really Mogul, then the situation multiplies in complexity with the flying saucer cover being covered up. The genius of the latter explanation is that interested parties are so distracted by the extraterrestrial hypothesis that they look past espionage technology. Through this calculated approach, the military is able to use the emerging paranoia of the flying saucer situation to cover up and simultaneously make a fool out of anyone who claims to see these tinfoil craft. As the phenomenon matures, these tactics grow in popularity and effectiveness. If one is to understand the cultural relationship between flying saucers and the Military Industrial Complex, perception management is an invaluable lens.

September 18th, 1947: Following the issuance of the National Security Act of 1947 (signed July 26th, 1947), President Harry S. Truman establishes the United States Air Force (USAF) as a branch of the military. Up until this point, it was the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) and it existed as a subdivision of the U.S. Army.⁸ Conspiracy historians have long claimed this move was done in order to establish a group that could more effectively handle the UFO phenomenon.

⁷Konrad Becker, "Perception Management," *Tactical Reality Dictionary*, 2007, <http://world-information.org/trd?trdid=P>.

⁸Office of the Historian, "National Security Act of 1947," accessed April 6, 2023, [https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act#:~:text=The%20National%20Security%20Act%20of,National%20Security%20Council%20\(NSC\)](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/national-security-act#:~:text=The%20National%20Security%20Act%20of,National%20Security%20Council%20(NSC)).

Unknown Date, 1947: President Harry S. Truman calls⁹ to order the Majestic 12 (Majic 12). The Majic 12 are a group of scientists and military generals who are tasked with responding to the new issues of extraterrestrial contact. Their existence will remain a secret until **December 1984**.

Unknown Date, 1948: Walter Morrison invents the first frisbee, which he markets as the “Flyin’ Saucer.”¹⁰

January 23rd, 1948: Project Sign begins at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, OH¹¹. Run by United States Air Force officials, it is the first government body tasked with studying reports of Flying Saucers. The group is not concerned with direct investigation, and is more of a repository for reports and data that the Government receives about flying saucers. It will be the first in a series of Air Force investigations into flying saucers, and in this context, Sign is understood as an initial assessment of the first years of the phenomenon¹². Some claim that Sign’s research points towards an extraterrestrial explanation for the objects, and others claim that all of the investigated sightings were easily explained by natural phenomenon. Regardless of aim, their tenure is brief.

November, 1948: The Polaroid Model 95 Land Camera goes on sale¹³. It is the first instant camera, and it revolutionizes the experience of photography. No longer must an image go through the wet chemical processes of the darkroom to appear in a form where it can be seen. Once shot, the image cannot be altered in a way that does not clearly show the mark of change. By cutting out this unseen process, it becomes far more difficult to level a charge of illegitimacy at photographs made with the Polaroid. With the Rex Heflin images, for example, shot on a Land camera in 1965, one cannot claim that his flying saucer is a double exposure or that it hangs from

⁹ allegedly.

¹⁰Lenny Flank, “History of the Frisbee,” Hidden History, August 5, 2015, <https://lflank.wordpress.com/2015/08/05/history-of-the-frisbee/>.

¹¹ Gerald K. Haines, “CIA’s Role in the Study of UFOs, 1947-90,” Defense Technical Information Center, Studies In Intelligence Vol. 01 No. 1, 1997: Central Intelligence Agency, 67.

¹² Ibid., 67.

¹³ American Chemical Society National Historic Chemical Landmarks, “Edwin Land and Polaroid Photography,” 2015 <http://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/education/whatischemistry/landmarks/land-instant-photography.html>.

some thin thread removed in the darkroom. This is not to say that this confirms the craft's extraterrestrial legitimacy, but that *something* had to have flown in front of Heflin's lens in order for him to make that photograph. More than most forms of photography, Polaroids are tied to the indexicality of photography, the "existential connection¹⁴" between subject and photograph.

This is not to say that Polaroids essentially tell the truth, for as Berger says, "the photograph cannot lie, but, by the same token, it cannot tell the truth; or rather, the truth it does tell, the truth it can by itself defend, is a limited one."¹⁵ The camera, any camera, simply provides a report of one perspective of the situation, but this is always a perspective that is shaped by the photographer. In the genre of UFO photography specifically, the issues of misperception can play an outsized role. As long as one cannot identify the things in front of their lens, their photos become evidence of something that cannot be identified. Countless UFO images present some blurred artifact, either present on the lens or as some flaw in the photographic process, and "[t]hese photographs "picture" that which cannot be seen - cannot be known."¹⁶ The Polaroid picture only simplifies these issues and presents a photography which is not easier to believe in but more difficult to not believe in.

Unknown Date, 1949: Project Sign becomes Project Grudge. Little is known about the exact details of this transition, but it is known that these initiatives have different goals. Grudge existed with the explicit purpose of trying "to alleviate public anxiety over UFOs via a public relations campaign designed to persuade the public that UFOs constituted nothing unusual or extraordinary¹⁷." This PR campaign was tasked with managing perception of things which they believed¹⁸ to be little more than misperceptions of natural phenomena. Contemporary historians suggest that the U.S. Air Force was afraid of the mounting paranoia in relation to increased UFO sightings and the impending threats of the Cold War. If the UFOs themselves didn't pose a physical threat to the US, then they presented a psychological weakness that could be exploited by an advantageous terrestrial foe. As no other country had the atom bomb, it would make sense

¹⁴ David Levi Strauss, *Photography and Belief*, (Verona, Italy: David Zwirner Books, 2020), 39.

¹⁵ John Berger "Appearances" in *Another Way of Telling*, ed. by John Berger and Jean Mohr, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 97.

¹⁶ Mike Kelley, "On the Aesthetics of UFOlogy: (excerpted from an interview with M.A. Greenstein)," *Blastitude*, 2002, http://www.blastitude.com/13/ETERNITY/ufology_kelley.htmv.

¹⁷ Haines, "CIA's Role," 68.

¹⁸ allegedly.

that the wary population at the dawning of the Cold War would see technologically alien advanced civilizations through a paranoid lens.

December 27th, 1949: Project Grudge is dissolved¹⁹. In the effort to minimize perception, they are accused of amplifying it. At some point, it is determined that the “very existence of Air Force official interest encouraged people to believe in UFOs and contributed to a war hysteria ‘atmosphere.’²⁰” Conspiracy historians point to the short-lived nature of these investigations as proof of more extraordinary findings. Research into a topic could only be so brief if an answer was found, and the only reliable answer could be one that proved the existence of extraterrestrial contact.

September 18th, 1951: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* premieres. This sci-fi classic follows the landing of a flying saucer in the middle of Washington, DC. The aliens, Klaatu and Gort, are (respectively) an interplanetary diplomat and his invincible robotic bodyguard. Klaatu’s unwavering message of peace is routinely met with terror and aggression by the paranoid humans of cold war America. The film’s final message remains clear: end the aggression or face the wrath of an inconceivable power²¹.

Cinematic depictions of aliens in the 50s were oftentimes shaped around Cold War paranoia. The advent of nuclear technology, made beings of the universe aware of the might of the American military. Their ships arrive with one of two missions: to cease the threat of a nuclear armageddon or to destroy a newly empowered foe. In films like *War of the Worlds* (1953), the aliens take the role of an invasion force, dominating the American military with the ease reserved for depictions of invasions done by America. When the A-Bomb is dropped²² on the Martian “saucer,” it is unscathed; the same cannot be said for the men and women rocked by

¹⁹ Haines, “CIA’s Role,” 68.

²⁰ Haines, “CIA’s Role,” 68.

²¹ *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, dir. by Robert Wise, (20th Century Studios, 1951), 1 hr., 32 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_M5d8cRzI0

²² The bomb is dropped by a YB-49 flying wing. The decision to use footage of a prototype was likely made with the belief that the plane would one day be the standard bomber. Its connection to both Arnold’s sighting and the B-2 make for an interesting dimension to this scene.

its blast²³ (though depictions of their radiation poisoning are conspicuously absent). In *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), the aliens are the disinterested spectators who recognize the threat to all life through the frivolous use of super weapons. Their cry for peace is couched within a threat of violence. In either case, the alien is just an allegory for a paranoid America.

The paranoia around nuclear/alien connection was not at all unjustified for those who followed along with the topic. The sudden presence of unknown craft not too long after the use of nuclear weapons, especially in the areas where these weapons were tested, does not seem like a coincidence that can simply be shrugged off. Coupled with the growing fears of Soviets, concerns of espionage are projected into the UFOs and “people felt [like] they were being observed and spied upon from space.”²⁴ The military’s investigation, no matter how dismissive, simply bolsters these fears. As films of this sort begin to boom through the drive-in era of the 1950s, the phenomenon becomes further cemented in the American psyche. With this rise in popularity, the topic only becomes more effective in managing perception.

March 1952: Project Blue Book is formed. Despite the efforts of Project Grudge, UFO reports continued to increase in the years since 1949. The necessity of Blue Book would soon be verified with a massive UFO flap²⁵ over the United States in the summer of 1952. July alone had 332 reports with 12.15% of them being classified as Unidentified²⁶. Most notable amongst these “Unidentifieds” were the back-to-back weekends of sightings over Washington, DC. Radar picked up multiple objects on the weekends of 19th and the 27th²⁷, and pilots observed saucer shaped crafts.^{28,29} Neither sighting went as far as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, but this did little to alleviate the growing tensions around the flying saucer issue. No explanation was given for the sightings of the crafts themselves, but the radar blips are alleged to have been caused by

²³ *The War of the Worlds*, dir. by Byron Haskin (Paramount Pictures, 1953), 1:01:53 to 1:08:10. https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B0B8SX4LSX/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r

²⁴ Jung, *Flying Saucers*, 21

²⁵ The generally agreed upon nomenclature for a group of UFO sightings.

²⁶ Anonymous, “pbb cases-1947-1958,” Black Vault, <https://documents.theblackvault.com/bluebookdesk/pbbcases-1947-1958.pdf>

²⁷ Haines, “CIA’s Role,” 68.

²⁸ “Saucers Over Washington, DC,” National Archives, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/595553?q=ufo&objectPage=2>

²⁹ It is notable that the CIA history does not make any mention of crafts sighted, but sources prominently displayed on the National Archives website do mention these sightings.

temperature inversion. Though Project Blue Book had a legitimate scientific goal of understanding the phenomenon, their explanations would often fall into the pattern of the radar blips. Strange instances, even those with likely atmospheric origins, would be interpreted as mundane phenomena without concession to those who experienced those moments personally.

Unknown Date, 1952: The USAF coins the term UFO.³⁰ The exact document remains unknown, but it likely originated within Project Blue Book.

July 16th, 1954: Records found in the National Archive claim that this is the day when President Dwight D. Eisenhower met with the Majestic 12 for the first time. External evidence is unable to verify that this meeting ever occurred³¹.

August 1955: Lockheed Martin begins test flights of the U-2 spy plane. This high-altitude plane, commissioned by the CIA, was designed to survey the Soviet Union from an altitude of 60,000 feet (three times that of standard craft at the time).³² These flights corresponded with a spike in UFO sightings, and Blue Book “personnel were able to attribute many UFO sightings to U-2 flights.³³” Due to the sensitive nature of these flights, Blue Book was unable to explain these sightings publicly, and could only offer unsatisfying explanations which challenged the credibility of observers. “This led the Air Force to make misleading and deceptive statements to the public in order to allay public fears and to protect an extraordinarily sensitive national security project.³⁴”

If this source, found on the Defense Technical Information Center website, is to be believed, then UFOs remained a perfect cover for advanced aerospace tests throughout the height of the Cold War. UFOs kept conversations away from the possibility of advanced terrestrial material, but they themselves had to be explained away with dubious stories. They were diversions that needed diversions. The result was something that appeared to be a coverup because it actually

³⁰ “UFOS,” Air Force Declassification Office, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.secretsdeclassified.af.mil/Top-Flight-Documents/Unidentified-Flying-Objects/>.

³¹ “Majestic 12 or ‘MJ-12’ Reference Report,” National Archives, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/air-force/ufos#mj12>.

³² Haines, “CIA’s Role,” 73.

³³ Ibid., 73.

³⁴ Ibid., 73.

was a coverup. This may seem unfortunate, but it's certainly a better issue for the Air Force to have citizens suspect they're hiding the existence of aliens, not covert spy operations.

There is, however, always the possibility that the .mil source is an elaborate form of perception management; that the quasi-academic writing about their alleged exploitation of UFOs was actually a way to further dissuade the public from knowing the truth of alien contact. This management would then trickle down into all of the documents that cite it, and uncertainty would continue to grow.

Unknown Date, 1959: Commercial Xerox machines are introduced on the market. For the first time ever, multiple copies of already made documents could be made quickly and easily. The documents so often used as evidence of Government involvement with UFOs have the appearance of being photocopied many times. Though the process diminishes the quality of the material, it suggests authenticity by way of protected originals and inter-departmentally circulated memos. In the forged documents that make up *The Majic Research Group* archive, the photocopier is the final filter that they must go through. After this process they no longer look like something photoshopped, and can simply join the rank-in-file of documents taken from official sources. When coupled with redactions, unable to be removed from their photocopied surfaces, they are forever solidified as off-limits information. They are, in essence, “an iconic representation of that which is withheld from view.³⁵” Blocked off in this way these black boxes, smudges, and highly contrasted courier font, work from the legitimized position of the obscured bureaucratic source.

May 1st, 1960: A U-2 Spy Plane is shot down over the Soviet Union. When faced with the accusation of espionage, U.S. Government officials claim the plane was “conducting a routine weather flight but experienced a malfunction of its oxygen delivery system that had caused the pilot to black out and drift over Soviet airspace.³⁶” The weather excuse does not hold; Cold War tensions increase.

³⁵Pamela M Lee, “Open Secret: The Work of Art Between Disclosure and Redaction,” *Art Forum*, 2011, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201105/open-secret-the-work-of-art-between-disclosure-and-redaction-28060>

³⁶ Office of the Historian, “National Security Act of 1947,” accessed April 6, 2023, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/u2-incident>

Unknown Date, 1962: Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* is published. Split into three parts, the story of this novel unfolds in the introduction and footnotes of the 999-line titular poem. The text is all written by a man named Kinbote, who has³⁷ obtained the final text of a famous poet through clearly dishonest means. He takes every opportunity to tell his own story by way of his "explanation" of the poem. It is a postmodern masterpiece concerned with challenging the seeming objectivity of footnotes and introductions. Excerpts of *Pale Fire* make up the redacted text in the magic lantern slide cabinets of *The Majic Research Group*.

Nabokov's method of exploring a character in the footnotes is a primary inspiration for *The Majic Research Group*. It erases and explores the self in the margins of an artwork³⁸. *The MRG* is wholly dependent on the personage of its archivist, but it also demands that artistic labor is hidden under the guise of an institution. The archivist plays the role of the white male bureaucrat whose existence is subsumed and whose identity is assumed. Through erasure the work can speak to "objectivity" while being deeply subjective.

March 14th to the 21st, 1966: A UFO flap occurs in eastern Michigan. Police officers see bright, irregular lights on the 16th in Lima, a family sees a saucer with lights low above their property on the 20th in Dexter, and several college students with a police officer see lights on the 21st in Hillsdale³⁹. Blue Book is called in to investigate.

March 25th, 1966: J. Allen Hynek, lead investigator of Project Blue Book, delivers a press conference in Michigan. He attributes the sightings to swamp gas, a phenomenon in which decaying plants in the proper weather conditions can create a strange glow over marshy areas. To make matters worse, he adds that "a dismal swamp is a most unlikely place for a visit from outer space."⁴⁰ The people of Michigan are justifiably upset.

³⁷ allegedly.

³⁸ This extends even into the naming of the group. MRG is both Mr. G and a mixed up Robert M. George.

³⁹ Lara Zielin, "Flying Saucers and Swamp Gas," Bentley Historical Library, accessed April 20th, 2023, <https://bentley.umich.edu/news-events/magazine/flying-saucers-and-swamp-gas/>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

March 28th, 1966: Gerald Ford, House Minority Leader and Michigan State Representative, writes a letter to U.S. Representatives expressing his displeasure with the handling of this situation. He expresses a belief that “the American people are entitled to a more thorough explanation than has been given them by the Air Force to date,” and calls for “hearings on the subject of UFO[s].⁴¹” No congressional hearing occurs.

October 7th, 1966: Following Gerald Ford’s outrage over Blue Book’s response to the Michigan flap, an independent study is called to determine the value of continued research into the UFO topic⁴². The University of Colorado is selected as the investigating institution. The scientific study is to be led by Dr. Edward Condon, a former Manhattan Project physicist, and Robert Low, a dean at the university. Low will be the topic of controversy when a memo he created in August of ‘66 dismissing the topic of UFOs as not based in reality is published⁴³. Though this will spark controversy in the community of believers, it will have no bearing on the broader perceived legitimacy of the investigation.

Unknown Date, 1968: Erich Von Däniken’s *Chariots of the Gods?* is published. The book puts forth the ancient astronaut theory, which suggests that early human culture had direct contact with aliens. These aliens were interpreted as Gods, and gave early humans the inspiration, knowledge, and technology they needed in order to advance culture and erect their impressive monuments. This theory will eventually go on to inspire the television show *Ancient Aliens*, which will be criticized for the racist implications that these non-western cultures would need alien inspiration to make their impressive cultural impact.

Ancient aliens are represented in the archive of the Majic Research Group. As the theory built steam throughout the years of their organization, Majic researchers considered the legitimacy of these theories. Their understanding of the phenomenon grew beyond the normal stopping point of ancient astronaut theories; it went on to examine the aesthetics of modern and

⁴¹ Gerald Ford, ““Ford Press Releases - UFO, 1966,” Ford Library Museum, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0054/4525586.pdf>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Phillip J. Klass, “The Condon UFO Study: A Trick or A Conspiracy?,” *Skeptical Inquirer* Volume 10, No. 4 (Summer, 1986): 338, <https://cdn.centerforinquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/1986/07/22165324/p42.pdf>.

contemporary art for their potential inspiration from alien sources. Selections from their archive appear in a curated form in *The Majic Research Group*. In this slide collage, graphic connections between “primitive” art (Stonehenge, Easter Island heads) and faux “primitive” art (Spiral Jetty, Giacometti sculptures) are juxtaposed with UFOs and significant moments in UFO history (Bikini Atoll, Roswell Crash). In *The Majic Research Group*, these slides critique both the theory that has become synonymous with UFOs and also the issue of modern art’s basis in cultural theft.

January 1969: The University of Colorado UFO Project releases *The Scientific Study of Unidentified Flying Objects*. Though it contains several unidentified cases with photographic evidence, such as the Trent photo from McMinnville, Oregon, it ultimately calls for a cessation of the scientific study of UFOs.

December 17th, 1969: Project Blue Book closes. Upon its closure, they had “12,618 sightings reported to [them],” of which “701 remained unidentified.⁴⁴” The U.S. government will not officially investigate UFO cases again until 2007.

December 21st, 1969: Founding of the Majic Research Group. With the official release of the Condon Report, the writing was on the wall for all who cared to notice. A group of high-powered scientists, military officers, civilian researchers, and law enforcement officials decided to form the Majic Research Group. Its mission was to pick up where Project Blue Book left off, and to continue to learn what they could about the UFO phenomenon. As a private body, they were not beholden to the public eye, and were able to learn without providing answers to a population who could not handle the truth of top secret jets and potential contact events. Their secret network of researchers investigated reports deftly and with the utmost discretion. They did not help the growing myths of potential coverups.

September 19th, 1976: Two Iranian F-4 Phantom IIs engage a Flying Saucer over Iranian airspace. Attempts to fire on the craft fail as a result of issues with thermal missile locks. The day

⁴⁴ “Unidentified Flying Objects and Air Force Project Blue Book,” Air Force, <https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104590/unidentified-flying-objects-and-air-force-project-blue-book/>.

after the incident, men from the U.S. Government appear and investigate the sighting. There are no known Government sponsored UFO investigative bodies at this point in time⁴⁵. No mention of direct investigation can be found in the Majic Research Group archive.

November 16th, 1977: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* premieres. The film explores parallel narratives surrounding a UFO flap in the American heartland. One narrative follows Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) after a close encounter that has left him slightly delirious and strangely compelled to create sculptures of Devils Tower; the other narrative follows Claude Lacombe (Francois Truffaut) as he and his Blue Bookesque researchers study this phenomenon across the country. Abductions occur and strange evidence is left by the aliens. The film's climax happens at Devils Tower, WY when Roy and the Blue Book analogue (complete with a cameo by J. Allen Hynek) have their first encounter with the aliens. The film ends as Roy joins a crew of humans on a willing voyage with the aliens.

Part of the film's tension is built upon the inevitable reveal of what the aliens will end up looking like. For those who saw the film well after it came out, this reveal is ultimately uninteresting: the aliens look like gray aliens. At this time, however, their appearance is revolutionary. People had seen⁴⁶ beings similar to grays before, with characteristically large heads, large black eyes, and thin mouths, but they were by no means the standard. In fact alien contact events were a relatively rare occurrence until an influx in 1973, but those aliens were inconsistent and strange. After *Close Encounters*, aliens began to take on an appearance exactly like the beings in the film. Abductions, like the unwilling ones in the film, began to exponentially grow in the years that follow.

December 1st, 1977: Lockheed's Have Blue, the precursor to the F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter, flies out of the Tonopah test range (adjacent to Area 51) for the first time⁴⁷. Its black triangular shape will be the precursor to a changing geometry of the flying "saucer".

⁴⁵Leslie Kean, *UFOs: Generals, Pilots, and Government Officials Go on the Record* (New York, New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 90.

⁴⁶ allegedly

⁴⁷ Peter W. Merlin, *Images of Aviation: Area 51*, (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2011), 104.

July 1979: Paul Bennewitz, a veteran and entrepreneur, begins filming strange lights over Kirtland AFB from his home in Albuquerque, NM. Concerned with the secrecy of these potential test flights, Bennewitz reports his findings to the base and is eventually put into contact with a man named Richard Doty. Doty claims to work for OSI, and by his own admission provides Bennewitz with false breadcrumbs of an alien coverup being executed by the Government. Bennewitz becomes a dedicated researcher and begins to uncover information which will soon become mainstays of UFO culture. He becomes a known figure in the community before eventually experiencing a mental breakdown under the pressures of his experiences.

In the 2013 documentary *Mirage Men*, Doty will speak proudly of his actions. He will discuss the ease by which information can be fed into the UFO community and then percolate and mutate over a period of many years. It is suggested that the UFO craze that eventually leads to *The X-Files* induced mega alien fascination is the result of Doty's adept efforts.

Doty is a figure whose performance is highly influential to the archivist of *The Majic Research Group*. He claims to tell the truth but also states that he is telling 80% lies. The 20% of reality is never known. In *The Majic Research Group*, lies and truth flow in a way that is polarizing but instructive. It is the language of intelligence officials and perception managers of all stripes. When faced with information in this way, people become further entrenched in their beliefs, and their biases overpower the external points of (il)logic. To try to understand the information that is being shared is a maddening experience marked by reversals and misdirections.

October 1980: Charles Berlitz and William L. Moore's *The Roswell Incident* is published. Before this book, the Roswell crash had all but faded from the collective consciousness. The authors organically spark renewed interest in the incident at a time when Doty is fabricating new mythology. This interplay between "good" and "bad" actors complicates the growing zeitgeist as they feed into each other's energy and collectively amplify interest. This, unfortunately, does little to help growing concerns about the relationship between truth and fiction.

December 1984: Jaime Shandera, a Ufologist in California, receives an exposed roll of Kodak Tri-X pan film from an anonymous sender in Albuquerque, NM⁴⁸. The film is developed, and it is revealed to contain copies of “the Eisenhower Briefing Document.” Allegedly made in 1952, this memo briefed President elect Dwight D. Eisenhower about the Majestic-12.

Upon closer examination, the report appears to be part of an elaborate hoax. The document contains minor inconsistencies with documents confirmed to be of that era. The strange thing, however, is that other documents relating to the Majic 12 were found within the National Archive. Someone with either direct access - or adept deceptive skills - had planted false documents within a secure government facility. The National Archive has gone to great lengths to verify the illegitimacy of these documents found within their records⁴⁹. The FBI and Air Force have both publicly dismissed the reality of the text⁵⁰ (with the FBI going so far as to only have PDFs on their website with “BOGUS” handwritten across the documents). Speculation remains as to where these documents originated, but known Air Force PsyOp Richard Doty⁵¹ seems as good a culprit as any.

The Majic Research Group is directly inspired by the *real* hoax of the Majic 12. The suspected governmental origin of this hoax marks it as one of the strangest moments in the real history of the UFO phenomenon. Its mythos shaped belief in UFOs for many years before it was determined by almost all of the involved parties to be completely fabricated. Some content that originated in these documents remains within the greater UFO mythology, and it has become difficult to extricate it. In this sense it is an effective hoax, sent into an echo chamber where it will never cease to resonate.

Conceptually, the connection between these groups can be understood as the primary organizing principle of the work in *The Majic Research Group*. No matter how far-fetched the work within the archive seems, it is always grounded within a reality which *allegedly* happened.

⁴⁸ *Ancient Aliens*, season 12, episode 9, “The Majestic 12,” written by Max Thompson, aired July 7, 2017 on History Channel, 00:01 to 00:02, <https://www.hulu.com/series/ancient-aliens-23f08859-38d7-4183-9aed-f17ebb300c3c>.

⁴⁹ “Majestic 12 or ‘MJ-12’ Reference Report,” National Archives, accessed April 12, 2023, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/air-force/ufos#mj12>.

⁵⁰ Anonymous, “Majestic 12,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://vault.fbi.gov/Majestic%2012/Majestic%2012%20Part%201%20of%201/view>

⁵¹ *Mirage Men*, dir. By John Lundberg, (Perception Management Production, 2013), 1hr., 32 min. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srtrRbt77AE>.

Though this may do very little for connecting the work to truth, it is the truth that is claimed and may have never happened. It is the “truth” of photography, of representation of all kinds.

Unknown Date, 1988: Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman’s *Manufacturing Consent* is published. The book is an analysis of the ways in which PR and media corporations shape public perception towards the goals of hegemonic power. In part, this control is achieved through close knit relationships between Pentagon/State Department sources and the journalists who get their information from them. Their initiatives, funded by taxpayer money, make it so that the “citizenry pays to be propagandized [to].⁵²” Dissenting voices are restricted from this flow of propaganda, and those who publish contrary information are met with threats and denouncements from those with “prestige and importance to the media.⁵³” By using these media sources to publish this information “willingly,” the Government is able to assert dominance and skirt the claims of outright propaganda leveled at countries without “free” speech.

In one particularly relevant portion of the text, the authors note that the USAF’s “public-relations effort in 1968 involved 1,305 full-time employees, exclusive of additional thousands that ‘have public functions collateral to other duties.⁵⁴’” These men could have been employed in the effort of massaging the reality around Project Blue Book and shaping the balance of dis/information. Even a small portion of these men acting like Richard Doty could wreak havoc on the status of truth within the information systems. Regardless, their performance engaged in a form of representation essential to art of all sorts. Their real-fake press releases and promotional photo shoots present a false reality where the efforts of the military industrial complex are of genuine importance to the American people. They work within a realm of bureaucratic persuasion which the archivist of *The Majic Research Group* can only pretend to do. Even if their efforts were not directly art, then “there is [at least] something artful about the mechanisms of contemporary secrecy—principally, by establishing what might be thought of as an aesthetics of the think tank, that *sine qua non* of cold-war secrecy.⁵⁵” Their PR perception

⁵² Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York, New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁵ Lee, “Open Secret.”

shifting reshapes the way that people experience the world - a direct artistic intervention of dire significance.

February 19th, 1990: Photoshop is released to the public. Though it will be a while before hitting a point of cultural saturation, this moment is a catalyst for the wider understanding of the erosion of truth. In reality, the program, especially in the earliest iterations, does little in expanding the manipulative capability that skilled hands could always have done to retouch in a darkroom or with an airbrush. Photoshop just lowered the bar for entry into manipulation. The issue of Photoshop is that it implies that issues of truth were not *always* present in photography. Images predating this moment are just as feasibly faked, but to many they don't seem this way. The analogue aesthetics of *The Majic Research Group* are based not on their status as fetish, but in a cultural interest in the potential of distorting truth through the veil of time. With the exception of the found archival materials, inkjet prints, and Polaroids present in the archive, *The Majic Research Group* photographs - even those made with AI - are digitally manipulated, printed digitally, shot on film, and then printed in the darkroom onto expired materials. Passing through this analog filter, they appear to be from a time in which wariness made people more media savvy.

September 10th, 1993: *The X Files* airs on Fox for the first time. It will further amplify the pop cultural interest in UFOs. The show centers around two FBI agents, Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), assigned to the unsolved, paranormal cases known as the X Files. They work from a basement office, tucked away and festooned with file cabinets of evidence, photographs of famous alien encounters, and UFO ephemera. Their investigations take them to different locales around the U.S..⁵⁶ Mulder almost always has some hunch formed by research into the never-ending X-Files, and Scully is almost always aware of some potential scientific answer which is almost always wrong. Over the course of the show, Mulder's fanatical belief in the existence of the supernatural is routinely undercut by Scully's assurance in a rational explanation for the strange things they encounter.

The Majic Research Group exists between the horseshoe of their two polls; containing the appearance of Mulder's steadfast belief and a theoretical undercurrent of Scully's desire for a

⁵⁶ Played by Vancouver.

rational explanation. Duchovny's performance, gray flannel clad in monotone brilliance, finds a delicate balance between bureaucratic G-man and unhinged conspiracy theorist. He "demonstrates a will to 'connect what cannot be connected,' akin to the paranoid's ability to make connections among disparate points, always with him- or herself at the center.⁵⁷" He is the clear aesthetic influence on the archivist of *The Majic Research Group*. For his research motivations are selfish - driven by a blinding desire to know what happened when aliens abducted his sister - that he will risk life and limb of all who are close to him in order to find the answer. Mulder is always concerned with the truth; he is blindingly convinced in its existence amongst a web of governmental lies that, to all external parties, he would appear to be a part of.

In the aesthetics of *The Majic Research Group*, *The X-Files*' most prominent influence can be observed. Temporally the show is on the cusp of modes - computer based image analysis creeps into the role of slide projector presentations. The presence of the physical in the dawning of the digital gives a strange cultural juxtaposition where the forms of new truth get called into question. When viewed from the modern lens, the appearance of the analogue files become immediately connotated with a truth that is always on the cusp of fading away. This cultural moment lends *The X-Files* the airs of a hauntological document. The omnipresence of the physical files of "materialised memory⁵⁸" in a time where they're fading away connotes the "truth" of these documents with something slipping into obscurity. As such, *The Majic Research Group* office, like theirs, is packed with files, books, and the physical forms of photographs. An archive of media stored in forms easily forgotten, and resuscitated within an academic bureaucracy whose assured existence justifies their validity.

August 28th, 1995: Fox airs *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction*⁵⁹. This sensationalized television special shares documentary footage of the autopsy of an alien from the Roswell crash. It is a convincing piece of footage, which becomes a minor cultural fad at a high point of interest in the

⁵⁷ Claire Bishop, "Information Overload," *Artforum International Magazine*, April 2023, <https://www.artforum.com/print/202304/claire-bishop-on-the-superabundance-of-research-based-art-90274>.

⁵⁸ Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology, and Lost Futures*, (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014), 21.

⁵⁹Forrest Burgess and Scott Philbrook, "Ep 186: Alien Autopsy? Part 1," *Astonishing Legends*, podcast audio, August 23, 2020, <https://www.astonishinglegends.com/al-podcasts/2020/8/23/ep-186-alien-autopsy-part-1>

phenomenon. No comment is made about the film's legitimacy until 2006 when the producer, Ray Santilli, claims that the footage is a faked version of an original, degraded film. He also claims that this recreation is so perfect that frames from the original exist inter-spliced into the recreation.

No further comment is given as to the film's legitimacy until 2020 when a man named Spyros Melaris begins publicly explaining his role in hoaxing the film. Melaris claims that he was hired by Santilli to make a convincing fake of this footage, which was made possible by BBC effects artist John Humphreys. Melaris will go into great detail as to how he faked this footage on the *Astonishing Legends* podcast. Painstaking care went into the fabrication of this document and the process that got it verified enough to be believed by many. Perhaps most notable being the sleight of hand magic used to trick Kodak scientists into verifying that film from 1994 was shot in 1947. It is a masterclass in hoaxing. Melaris's appearance will go on to be a direct influence on *The Majic Research Group* and the potential for creating effective hoaxes.

June 5th, 1997: Robert M. George is born.

September 11th, 2001: Four planes are hijacked on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Two destroy the Twin Towers, one hits the Pentagon, and the final plane crashes in Stonycreek Township, PA. The events, and their immediate aftermath, change global history. The PATRIOT Act erodes the freedom of all Americans, and the "war on terror" unjustly ends the lives of over a million people in Iraq and Afghanistan. The dire circumstances of the war on terror will directly dampen the conspiratorial interest in UFOs of the 1990s. There is little time to distrust a government who is actively striving to protect the lives of its people.

September 12th, 2001: This is the first memory that I can specifically date. I am standing in the driveway of my childhood home talking with my neighbor. I am four years old, and she is five. She has just started kindergarten, so I am asking her what school is like. She is sitting on top of the *Buffalo News* box that the papers my older sisters deliver are kept in. During our conversation my sister comes over and pulls out one of the newspapers; I am struck by the explosion on the cover. I do not remember what my neighbor said about kindergarten.

Unknown Date, 2002: I am in kindergarten, and I have checked out a book about ghosts from the library. There is a story about a haunted restaurant that I want to have a copy of. I ask my mom if she can type it up for me, but she tells me to do it myself. I sit at the computer for what feels like hours and stop halfway through the second paragraph. I have no record of these efforts.

March 20th, 2003: The United States invades Iraq. It is spring break and my family is on a Caribbean cruise. We are in the lobby of a hotel in Florida, and I see the announcement on the TV that we are at war. There's footage of Humvees driving. I am more concerned with the potential of our cruise ship hitting an iceberg.

Unknown Date, 2005: Wolfgang Tillmans begins his *Truth Study Center* series. This project, mutating in content between gallery appearances, "consists of slim wooden tables ... on which are displayed articles, ephemera, the occasional photo by Tillmans, and texts that locate the present moment in relation to a historical event."⁶⁰ They present overloads of information, which even to the engaged are difficult not to gloss over. They are emblematic of the overflow of information in the digital age but made manifest in a physical form for museum consumption. *Truth Study Center* serves as inspiration for *The Majic Research Group* - not only in appearance, but also in the interest in "research as a matter of 'authority' and 'truth.'⁶¹" Tillmans project is more concerned with the news media's relationship to truth than with the government's involvement in truth. Regardless, both projects explore the experience of a media saturated culture where one must question authorities on their insistence on an externally verifiable truth.

Unknown Date, 2006: I am in the fourth grade, and my ghost obsession has transformed into an alien one. I am obsessed with the UFOs but am terrified of the gray aliens I know to be occupying them. I have difficulty sleeping for fear that I may be abducted. My ELA exam essay is about an encounter. I write about their "inverted teardrop heads with almond eyes." That same year my teacher let me read a story I am excited about to our class - it is about a bus full of people getting abducted by aliens.

⁶⁰ Bishop, "Information Overload."

⁶¹ Bishop, "Information Overload."

January 28th, 2007: *I Could Tell You but Then You Would Have to Be Destroyed by Me* by Trevor Paglen is published. The book is an examination of deep state government “black projects” tracked only by holes in the DoD budget and patches owned by their members. Paglen collects the latter and uses them as an exploration of the bounds of the former. His research attempts to demystify the strangeness of the “black world” of the Pentagon. For the most part, these patches originate from top secret Air Force facilities like Groom Lake (Area 51), Edwards AFB, and other obscure reconnaissance sites⁶². *I Could Tell You* is a secret history as told through semiotic analysis of the strange symbols used to show pride in something that cannot be known to the public at large. Paglen collected these items through intense research and by forming relationships in bars frequented by test pilots and other operators.

In this project, Paglen does the sort of “real” research that *The Majic Research Group* appears to be doing. The archivist plays the role of Paglen in attempting to enlighten the audience of a hidden truth through the curation of documents directly related to this occluded reality. It is under this guise of displaying found documents that *The Majic Research Group* can operate as an MFA thesis show without giving away the larger deception. Unlike Paglen’s work, however, the information that *The M.R.G.* seeks to share is outweighed by disinformation of a similar tone. Its “Paglen” is just another one of the psychological operations officers that the real Paglen seems to know so many of.

Unknown Date, 2007: The Advanced Aerospace Threat Identified Program (AATIP) is founded. Based in the Pentagon, AATIP investigates UAP sightings and materials including “alloys and compounds purportedly attained from UFOs.”⁶³ They focus exclusively on sightings of UAP by service men and women, and possess videos and photographs made by these witnesses. They’re run by Luis Elizondo, a counterintelligence⁶⁴ officer with a background in immunology. Little is known about their day-to-day operations.

⁶²Trevor Paglen, *I Could Tell You But Then You Would Have to Be Destroyed by Me: Emblems from the Pentagon's Black World*, (Brooklyn, New York: Melville House, 2007).

⁶³ Barbara A. Schreiber, “Other investigations of UFOs” in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 8, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/unidentified-flying-object/Other-investigations-of-UFOs>.

⁶⁴Washington Post Live, “UFOs & National Security with Luis Elizondo, Former Director, Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program,” *Washington Post*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/washington-post-live/2021/06/08/ufos-national-security-with-luis-elizondo-former-director-advanced-aerospace-threat-identification-program-aatip/>

October 2007: My mother takes me to a production of *The Phantom of the Opera* in Syracuse, NY. As we are driving back home on the I-90, we encounter a UFO. The craft has four bright lights in a square formation, and it hovers on our left a few hundred feet above the ground. It makes no sound that we can hear, and does not appear to move. I remember craning my neck to get a good look at it. We were both extremely confused but kept on driving. I have since driven this route many times and have been unable to pinpoint a possible culprit.

December 6th, 2007: Dissolution of the Majic Research Group. With the formation of AATIP, the members of the M.R.G. no longer believe their group to be necessary. A letter is sent to the President, and the group's operations cease immediately.

Spring 2008: I am shown the film *Zeitgeist* by my oldest sister. Along with purporting the mythological nature of Jesus Christ, the film presents a conspiratorial reading of the September 11th attacks. Both ideas stick.

Unknown Date, 2012: AATIP closes. As far as the public is aware, there is no longer an official investigative body. The Majic Research Group, for whatever reason, does not start back up at this time. Insiders allege that AATIP may have simply become another secret program at this point, but no evidence exists within the archive to back up these claims.

March 21st, 2014: Driving home from my High School Production of *Anything Goes*, my mother and I witness a triangular UFO over the East Side of Buffalo. It hovers for a few moments as we observe it from the thruway, and it eventually moves slowly in a direction parallel to us. We drive away before it can disappear into the distance. One year later I will report this sighting to MUFON. Cheryl Costa will write about the sighting in her "New York Skies: A UFO Blog" in *The Syracuse New Times*. She will anonymize me as Cathy⁶⁵.

⁶⁵Cherly Costa, "The Buffalo Black Triangle UFO," *The Syracuse New Times*, November 20, 2015, <https://syracusenewtimes.com/the-buffalo-black-triangle-ufo/>.

June 12th, 2014: Ned Leslie and I witness a triangular UFO while on a family vacation in Sedona, Arizona. We are observing stars in the condo parking lot, and the silhouette of a black triangle with three red lights silently crosses over us. We run inside to tell everyone about it, but no one believed us.

June 18th, 2016 : Tony Oursler's *Imponderable* opens at MOMA⁶⁶. This exhibition consists of Oursler's personal archive of paranormal ephemera, a more extensive version of which exists in the *Imponderable: The Archives of Tony Oursler* exhibition catalog. The objects cover ghosts, psychics, magicians, and UFOs across an eclectic collection of books, drawings, ephemera, and photographs. As indicators of reality, most of these documents do not depict events that likely occurred. There is a distortion of reality in which ghosts and flying saucers appear in double exposures and models, but these documents are not props. They were not made to fill the set of *The X-Files*, but to speak to a reality that someone *claimed* was true. In this way they are authentically related to belief, not truth.

Imponderable attests to reality in much the same way that the Shroud of Turin, a copy of which is present in the archive, confirms the existence of Christ. Scientifically the claims of the shroud fall apart under the scrutiny of carbon dating, but the shroud contains within it a power of belief that minimizes the importance of this scientific evidence⁶⁷. The shroud, along with Oursler's other objects, constitute a vernacular of belief. The qualities that can be observed in so many of these documents suggest a creation that is less concerned with an aestheticized outcome and more on an attempt to attest to something having been seen. This non-aesthetic in turn creates an aesthetic where the hallmarks of uncertainty - off-kilter, soft-focus and festooned with some sort of contextualizing text. These documents stand as an important metric by which the objects in *The Majic Research Group* may be measured against. Even if, "few 'authentic' photos of UFOs seem to exist,⁶⁸" there is a difference between ones that are able to be seen as such and ones where the appearance of nonfiction falls flat. For the work to work, the former is the goal.

⁶⁶MoMA, "Tony Oursler: Imponderable," accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1650>.

⁶⁷ Strauss, *Photography and Belief*, 18-25.

⁶⁸ Jung, *Flying Saucers*, 27.

November 8th, 2016: Donald J. Trump is elected president of the United States of America. So begins the “Post Truth” era of polarized thought and conspiratorial distrust.

June 9th, 2017: The podcast *Oh No, Ross and Carrie* releases the episode “Ross and Carrie and the Ozark UFOs (Part 2): Downloaded from Aliens.” The show follows Carrie Poppy and Ross Blocher’s investigations into groups practicing “fringe science, spirituality, and claims of the paranormal.”⁶⁹ The pair are as curious as they are skeptical, and they approach their topics in a humorous and intelligent way.

I will become a fan of their show a few weeks after this episode is released. I will be forever changed by their discussion of hypno-therapy in this episode. In my young life spent as a UFO believer, I had never heard anyone clearly and effectively explain that alien abduction claims bolstered by hypnosis were likely fabricated in the highly suggestible state of hypnotic regression. Understanding this simple fact made me stop believing in the existence of UFOs, and it completely eradicated my fear of aliens. I felt that, for the first time in a long time, I could close my eyes at night and not have to worry about opening them and seeing a being from another world. It made me into a skeptic.

December 16th, 2017: The *New York Times* releases the watershed article “Glowing Auras and ‘Black Money’: The Pentagon’s Mysterious U.F.O. Program.”⁷⁰ AATIP is announced to the public. Included in this article are two videos that have never been shared with the public, “Go Fast” and the “Nimitz Encounter.” Both filmed from the cockpits of Navy F-18s, these videos are both perplexing and underwhelming. They’re grainy and partially filmed in IR, the sides of their frames are filled with data that is difficult to extrapolate information from. In part these videos have been made public with “To The Stars Academy of Arts and Sciences,” a UFO entertainment and research group run by Tom DeLonge of Blink-182. His fascination with the alien topic has afforded him connections with members of the deep state including Lou Elizondo of AATIP. To

⁶⁹ Ross Blocher and Carrie Poppy, “Ross and Carrie and the Ozark UFOs (Part 2): Downloaded from Aliens,” *Oh No, Ross and Carrie*, June 9th, 2017, <https://ohnopodcast.com/investigations/2017/6/8/ross-and-carrie-and-the-ozark-ufos-part-2-downloaded-from-aliens>.

⁷⁰ Helene Cooper, Ralph Blumenthal, and Leslie Kean, “Glowing Auras and ‘Black Money’: The Pentagon’s Mysterious U.F.O. Program,” *The New York Times*, December 16, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/16/us/politics/pentagon-program-ufo-harry-reid.html>.

some these efforts are a big step in the eventual disclosure of truth, but to others they are just the next step in continued disinformation.

June 25th, 2021: The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) releases *Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena*. This change in official terminology allegedly occurs to allow for a greater allowance in explanation, but many attest that it is a way of removing the UFO connection from this new era of investigation. This report is an initial investigation of 144 cases of UAP from 2004 to 2021. Of these 144 cases, they “were able to identify one reported UAP with high confidence. ... The others remain unexplained.”⁷¹ They also claim, for the first time, that UAP present a potential threat to national security and the safety of our air space.

November 23rd, 2021: The Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronization Group (AOIMSG) is founded⁷². It is a Department of Defense run group intended to investigate UAP reports.

April 1st, 2022: *After the Charm: Chasing Chemistry*, the SUNY at Buffalo first year MFA show, opens at CEPA Gallery in Buffalo, NY. I show ten photographs of Flying Saucers: five of which are made by me, and five have been appropriated from famous sightings. During the opening I am approached by an anonymous staff member from UB’s special collections. They mention a recent accession of UFO related material that they think I may be interested in. This material will eventually make up the archival element of *The Majic Research Group*.

May 17th, 2022: The first congressional hearing since the closure of Project Blue Book is held in Washington, DC. Navy and Pentagon officials address UAP as potential threats to U.S. safety. New videos are officially released, but all had been previously put out by reliable sources within

⁷¹Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “Preliminary Assessment: Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon,” June 25, 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Preliminary-Assessment-UAP-20210625.pdf>.

⁷² U.S. Department of Defense, “DoD Announces the Establishment of the Airborne Object Identification and Management Synchronization Group (AOIMSG),” November 23, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2853121/dod-announces-the-establishment-of-the-airborne-object-identification-and-manag/>.

the UAP community. Little ground is covered beyond the ODNI report from the previous June. It is decided that a comprehensive report will be released by the end of October.

July 20th, 2022: AOIMSG changes its name to the All-Domain Anomaly Research Office (AARO)⁷³. This shortened name allows for a broader scope of phenomenon to be investigated under the UAP umbrella.

October 28th, 2022: Days before the projected release of the UAP report, the *New York Times* releases the article “Many Military U.F.O. Reports Are Just Foreign Spying or Airborne Trash.” The article goes on to suggest that the new report will go against the previous ODNI report and explain away the sightings which were originally mysterious. The article mentions the connection between the U-2 plane and UFO sightings,⁷⁴ but goes on to say that “intelligence officials concluded long ago that using conspiracy theories as cover for classified programs sows distrust in the American government and paranoia.”⁷⁵

January 12th, 2023: Over two months past its due date, ODNI releases the *2022 Annual Report on Unidentified Aerial Phenomena*. This updated evaluation addresses improvements and advances in the continued research into UAP. Of particular note are the number of cases that were evaluated: of the 510 total cases that they have evaluated, 171 of them remain unexplained. Of those 171, “some of these uncharacterized UAP appear to have demonstrated unusual flight characteristics or performance capabilities, and require further analysis.”⁷⁶ While it is true to say that “many” “are just foreign spying or airborne trash,” having 33% of the cases remain unexplained seems a far more significant fact to make a headline of.

⁷³ U.S. Department of Defense, “DoD Announces the Establishment of the All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office,” July 20, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3100053/dod-announces-the-establishment-of-the-all-domain-anomaly-resolution-office/>.

⁷⁴ As discussed in the August, 1955 entry.

⁷⁵ Julian E. Barnes, “Many Military U.F.O. Reports Are Just Foreign Spying or Airborne Trash,” *The New York Times*, October 28, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/28/us/politics/ufo-military-reports.html>.

⁷⁶Office of the Director of National Intelligence, “2022 Annual Report on Unidentified Aerial Phenomenon,” January 12, 2023, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/Unclassified-2022-Annual-Report-UAP.pdf>.

February 4th to 14th, 2023: The U.S. Government shoots down four high altitude objects over American and Canadian airspace. The first object is confirmed to be a Chinese Spy Balloon - the next three remain unconfirmed. Their wreckage is unable to be found. The gun camera videos, recorded by modern jet fighters whenever they're in use, are not released for any of these encounters.

April 14th, 2023: *The Majic Research Group* opens in Clemens 506 on the North Campus of the University at Buffalo. It is a performance and installation piece in which visitors can engage with the skewed reality of the Majic Research Group. As an installation it appears to be a slightly forgotten office space, filled with documents of the M.R.G. archive. Fake photographs and documents are framed by found objects, books, ephemera, and models. The performance, led by the archivist, flows through the history of Ufology from 1947 to the present in much the same way that this document does. Though connected to real moments, the content of the presentation is laced with disinformation. The objects of the installation serve as evidence of the history that is being shared with the audience; they are props of misdirection.

At the conclusion of the tour, there is always a moment of uncertainty that occurs between the audience and the archivist. At times this uncertainty springs about from complete disbelief in all that has been shared, even in the points of reality. When this occurs, the archivist slowly creeps away and the illusion begins to falter. The performance ends and the conversation about reality as manipulated by the government begins. These skeptical minds are rewarded with an awareness that there is more than what meets the eye in the experience of history. In the other instances, however, when the audience falls for the trick, the conversation takes another form. To these people, there is a formation of distrust in the archivist. They feel lied to, confused, and sometimes hurt. Again, the performance ends, but this time the work begins in channeling this distrust onto the third party whose work the performance is based on. The archivist becomes an archetype that the audience should know to distrust from that point forward.

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