2012 | *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (2): 84–104

The resonance of captivity
Aliens and conquest

Susan LEPSELTER, *Indiana University*

The trope of containment forms a persistent undercurrent in dominant discourses of American freedom. This article describes and performs this trope through the intertextual poetics of stories about captivity, focusing on what the author here calls "resonance," especially between historical American Indian captivity narratives and UFO abduction accounts. Throughout this article, the idea of the uncanny is used as a way to think through various ethnographic and mediated examples of American ambivalence about the legacy of empire and colonization. The author argues that a vernacular theory of power emerges in people's sense of ongoing parallels between various narratives of containment in America. The writing mimetically performs, as well as interprets, this narrative resonance.

Keywords: Narrative, poetics, United States, uncanny, resonance, captivity

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Once upon a time, a representative of the United States military went to battle against the charlatan power of alien magic. John G. Bourke, captain of the Third Cavalry of the United States Army, made an ethnological study of what he called "our savage tribes" over twenty-two years of his position in the territories of the Southwest. Only one thing was preventing the Native assimilation to white society: the medicine man's sleights of hand. In 1892 Bourke wrote,

> Notwithstanding the acceptance by the native tribes of many of the improvements in living introduced by civilization, the savage has remained a savage and is still under the control of an influence antagonistic to the rapid absorption of new ideas and the adoption of new customs. ([1892] 2003: 1)

For Bourke, this influence was the medicine man's ability to control the identity of Native people and keep them enslaved to the past. He concluded that taking savage children to live at the boarding schools at Carlisle and Hampton might eventually convince Indians to abandon the miraculous technologies of the medicine man and embrace the miraculous technologies of the modern age

 ISSN 2049-1115 (Online)

instead.[1] Only modern "wonders" could compete with resistant magic (with "these wonders" a category in which "ventriloquism" carries the same weight as "electricity"):

> It will only be after we have thoroughly routed the medicine-men from their entrenchments and made them an object of ridicule that we can hope to bend and train the mind of our Indian wards in the direction of civilization . . . teach the scholars at Carlisle and Hampton some of the wonders of electricity, magnetism, chemistry, the spectroscope, magic lantern, ventriloquism . . . then, when they return to their own people, each will despise the fraud of the medicine men and be a focus of growing antagonism to their pretensions. (Bourke 2003: 144–45)

In short, the savage youth would be kept at boarding school against his will because he was still ignorant of the good it would do him and his people; and in this captivity, he would be converted to the wonders of modernity. Then the Native could return to his people and spread the good news. For he was already, though he did not recognize it, "our . . . ward": a captive who would not acknowledge captivity. The narrative underlying the boarding school policy is a three-part story of removal, conversion, and return. It is, in essence, a policy informed by a naturalized instatement of a genre with deep American roots; it is a captivity narrative. And an extensive body of scholarship has shown us that in the captivity narrative we can see anxieties and desires about colonization, gender, and race.

This article, however, is not really about the captivity narrative genre—though the latter has been compulsively productive from the beginning of American colonization.[2] Rather, this article describes and performs a vernacular poetics, one that gives insight into how many people in the contemporary United States make sense of power. I use the captivity narrative here not primarily as a way to analyze a literary tradition, but rather as an entry into thinking ethnographically about resonant connections that people make between less clearly marked stories, images, and experiences in America. Narratives of many kinds—both in popular media and in tiny throwaway moments of everyday life—revolve around the elaboration of the trope of captivity, worrying over a dialectic of freedom and containment, and revising how those terms relate to power. I therefore focus here not on any single captivity narrative, nor on the shape or limits of the genre, but rather on a feeling of resonance that emerges intertextually between various stories and images of captivity in America. In the parallels between them a vernacular theory of power emerges.

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1. Indian children had been going to the boarding schools for about fourteen years when Bourke published this report.

2. Thousands of captivity narratives have circulated over the course of Euro-American colonization; the popular narrative of Mary Rowlandson may have been our nation's first bestseller (Derounian-Stodola 1998). As Ebersole (1995: 2) writes, "since the seventeenth century, tales of captivity have been used in the Euro-American world in diverse ways as vehicle for reflection on larger social, religious and ideological issues." Severance notes that captivity on the frontier was so common that news reports of Indian abduction "occasioned little if any further commentary in the press" (quoted in Ebersole 1995: 6). However, the *narrative* following the captives' release was eagerly awaited, often going through multiple editions over many years (ibid.).

This vernacular theory, then, is not found in any single narrative, but rather in the buildup of similar tropes and themes over historical time. It emerges in moments of American metadiscourse about what people often call *the weird stuff* in the world: the inexplicable, the uncanny, the things that point to a pattern and structure lying beneath the surface of things. I use the (often overused) term uncanny here to foreground some specific aspects of the classic Freudian term. Primarily, of course, the uncanny suggests how familiar but repressed material reappears in altered forms, how the half-forgotten won't stay down. And it suggests as well a poetics: it gets in to the ways that inexplicable repetition and reiteration create a specific sensation. Noticing the weird patterns between various things in everyday life produces anxiety but also a sense of meaning that is never totally explained, a half-dreaded conviction that some undiscovered agency lurks behind the scenes, creating the reiterative pattern. This aspect of the uncanny speaks to what I am calling resonance here: the sense of meaningfulness emerging from parallels and repetitions. It is, here, completely inseparable from the uneasy sense of haunting, of history's returns, and from the vernacular theory of power in America I want to describe. More important, I use the uncanny in its most deeply social register, attempting to present a real discursive, affective, and poetic process in America, one that is ethnographically describable. The uncanny suggests, here, an ambivalent desire for a redemptive citizenship in America along with an inchoate sense of nostalgia and loss. Numerous anthropologists and other scholars of social life have for decades found in the uncanny a productive way to describe real, unfinalized coconstructions of modernity and nostalgia, and global and local configurations, as they are performed in popular imaginaries and material shifts. Anna Tsing wrote almost two decades ago about people living in "out of the way" places: "My sense is that there is always an uncanny magic involved in imagining . . . the beleaguered community in the heart of the oppressive system. . . . It is a magic that allows groups defined by externally imposed categories of cultural difference simultaneously to resent and to embrace those categories" (1994: 280).

And in some social and discursive worlds in America, from within the borders of the dominant you can hear a similar ambivalence, with a shifting point of identification: from within the dominant there is still the sense of externally imposed categories (from here, the point of view remains always unclear, as I note later; the stories ask: are we the invaders or the invaded?). In the United States, in the "perceptual space caught between apocalyptic expectation and sensory fulfillment" of the nuclear age (Masco 2006: 28), it describes the entire shift of embodied, affective, and epistemological understandings of invasion and invisible threat that began after the bomb. And it performs a sense of multiple historical traumas simultaneously; here we find that ineffable sentiment that Berlant describes: "The trauma produces something in the air without that thing having to be more concrete than a sense of the uncanny—free-floating anxiety in the room, negativity on the street, a scenario seeming to unfold within the ordinary without clear margins, even when a happening is also specific" (Berlant 2011: 80).

The stories I am concerned with shift between the ordinary and the impossible-to-pin-down. Together they produce a layered effect that tells us something about the ambivalent, ongoing project of narrating American identity through conquest. To demonstrate the effect I want to convey, I tell stories throughout this article,

and let them echo against each other. The sense of things here comes from the iterations that build up and resonate. The reiterative accumulation itself creates a larger story. It is in these poetics that you hear this vernacular theory of power.

Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola has famously described most captivity narratives as situations where members of a socially weak or minority group gain control over a member of a majority group (Derounian-Stodola 1998). In part because of this implicit reversal of control, complicated power dynamics surface in these narratives. Most famously, these are stories in which the capturing "minority group" is comprised of Indians kidnapping white settlers, especially women. (Of course, in Puritan-era captivity narratives, the Indian captors are still in the majority of the population, but often the story gives an inkling of the European destiny to prevail.) In their ambivalent memories of encounters with alien others, white captives upon their return at once justified Euro-American expansion, and at the same time, from within their captivity, sometimes achieved a kind of liberation from the naturalized constraints of their own society's gender and racial conventions (Castiglia 1996).

When Bourke wrote his ethnological expose of the medicine man, captivity narratives in which Indians captured whites had been flourishing in America for over two hundred years. When there was a scarcity of fact-based memoirs of whites in captivity, fictive versions rose up to fill the demand (Ebersole 1995), though both factual and fictive stories would bend to the genre's conventional sway. Even when understood to be authentic renditions of material events, the story of Indians capturing a white American was a clearly marked genre in popular culture, an obvious text. From the beginning, though, as Pauline Turner Strong (2000) has described in depth, what was not so clearly texted was the counter-narrative in which whites captured Indians. The episodes that never comprised a popular genre might have included, for instance, stories of early colonizers abducting Indians and taking them aboard their ships. One of the catalysts to King Phillips' war in 1765 (the context of Mary Rowlandson's famous captivity) was the kidnapping by Massachusetts Bay colonists of three Indian children.

In his report, Bourke alludes to "recent deplorable incidents in the . . . Dakotas" ([1892] 2003: 451), which he admonishes, should remind us that despite "improvements" in modernization, Indians are still savages. Thinking of "incidents" in the Dakotas might lead us to recall Wovoka, the Paiute from Nevada who as a youth had been adopted by whites. His visions of Native revitalization were a catalyst for the Ghost Dance religion; that revitalization movement led to the massacre at Wounded Knee. People were dancing the ghosts back into the world; the white man would vanish, the buffalo would fill the prairie again, the ancestors would return, it would all become whole again. But when Wovoka was four years old, a conflict erupted between the Paiute and a militia of white miners at Pyramid Lake and eventually hundreds of Paiutes were killed. It began when white traders captured a couple of Paiute women. The experience of these female Paiute captives did not enter into the texted, genred world of Indian captivity narratives. It was just another scuffle between savages and rough-edged pioneering men. But the pervasive story of Indians kidnapping whites became, as Strong puts it, a hegemonic tradition in Raymond Williams' sense, taking shape through a "radically selective" process of making tradition (2000: 4); the recognizable generic form that we recognize as a captivity narrative emerged only

as all other possible elements were excluded. And the exclusion—the unspoken forgetting—itself made meaning as surely as did the foregrounded story.

When the captor is the savage, the trauma of confinement is dramatized at the surface of the captive's experience. It is a clearly marked ordeal, with discrete points that mark its narrative beginning and end,[3] the specific details of the explicit ordeals, and responses in a life. But when the captor is the state itself, then its acts of containment are told through images of paternal or civic benevolence: health, sanitation, progress, enlightenment. At the time Bourke's report appeared, the Ghost Dance had already failed its desperate dancers; the massacre at Wounded Knee had already taken place, the United States military had already proven its physical power. Now, in keeping with plans to convince the enemy of the "wonders" of modernity, Bourke was advocating no more slaughter but a civilized containment of alien people: incorporation where possible and separation when it proved not to be.

Nor, of course, did a sense of genre accrue to the hegemonic form into which the white captivity narrative, and its accompanying conversion narrative, gently evolved: the state's self-proclaimed benevolence, its taking of wards. This was to be seen not as a story, but as a policy unfolding ineluctably in the realms of civilization and health, "wonder" technologies, the unfortunate but rational eradication of anachronistic savage ways via the containment of the reservation, and the boarding school. This kind of containment was not, of course, to be read as a constructed narrative, shaped by selective omissions. It was increasingly just part of the progress of everyday life.

Another story

Once upon a time, aliens starting coming down from space to colonize the earth and abduct human beings.[4] They followed the bomb, and the bomb had changed what was possible to think (cf. Masco 2006). For some years before that, UFOs had been witnessed skipping in the sky, as the first news report put it, like saucers. When in 1947 one crashed in the New Mexico desert near Roswell, local people found the futuristic debris out in the desert. The military came to the people's houses in the night, some say, and told them not to speak. Later people told of seeing alien bodies killed in that crash. The bodies were small as children, but strangely formed like terrifying radiation experiments with huge heads and weird

3. Of course, some captivity narratives did not "end" with the captive's return or even with her or his death; most famously, perhaps, Mary Jemison, captured by the Seneca in the eighteenth century, eventually was given the opportunity to return home but chose to stay with the tribe after having children with a Seneca husband, knowing that white society would reject her dark-skinned children.

4. Others have also noticed the connection between alien abduction and Indian captivity narratives. UFO abduction is mentioned by Derounian-Stodola (1998) in a list of captivity narratives types; Sturma (2002) thoroughly outlines many of the parallels between the two. In a very nuanced and compelling article, Barbeito (2005) writes about the UFO abduction story's connection to Indian captivity, focusing especially insightfully on the trope of the body's invasion in each genre.

hands.[5] And later, investigative journalist Annie Jacobsen (2011) believed that, in fact, these "alien" bodies were the result of Soviet human experimentation, performed in the wake of Nazi medical experiments, and made to look like existing American movie images of aliens.

At the time Roswell was the only military base with an atomic bomber unit. By 1947 everyone knew the gruesome deformities caused by nuclear exposure. The bombs had been dropped in Japan, and the fallout of nightmarish signs had drifted across the ocean. But these weren't people found and covered up in the desert. They were aliens. Some say the government shipped the aliens out of New Mexico, first to Ohio and then to a secret place called Area 51 on the edge of the Nevada test site. The *powers that be* hushed it all up about the UFO.[6] Then they started working with the aliens. The aliens' big heads were filled with technology so advanced it seemed to be magic. They were invading the natural borders of our bodies and our land. But human powers wanted the wonders of alien technology to use in our wars.

The aliens began to abduct people, to harvest our reproductive material, to make hybrids between aliens and humans. And the powers that be gave the aliens a green light, but made sure that abductees would forget it all when they returned. Abductees would miss what was taken—their sperm, their eggs, and their time—but they wouldn't know what had been lost. It was a conspiracy: Let us think it was only a dream.

In Roswell, an industry grew around the secret of the crashed UFO like a pearl around a grain of sand. Movies, books, a huge internationally-visited UFO museum, a few smaller UFO museums, a yearly summer festival that stuffs the town so full of travelers they spill into the desert, all centered over the decades on Roswell. One day at the Roswell International UFO Museum I asked a young woman selling souvenirs what the people here thought of the UFO obsession surrounding her town. She said thoughtfully, "Well, it's been good, since the bus factory started laying people off." The bus factory in Roswell closed in 2002. The military base at Roswell has also been closed, since the late 1960s. But Roswell is a big town with an air of cheerful industriousness.

After the UFO museum, my companion and I strolled its main street, stopping in here and there to chat with clerks in shops, which, though they sold ordinary household goods, had aliens in the window. Some of the clerks had grown up around here. Others had headed here from back east to be near the UFO action, or to join communities (mainly of white people) who were into Native American spirit quests and healing rituals.

Who lived here, before the pioneers came? Who knew this land long before the Roswell military base opened and closed, taking jobs with it, before the UFO museum brought more jobs back again? None of our UFO tourist brochures told

5. This account incorporates many circulating popular stories about Roswell, both written and oral, too numerous to cite. Perhaps the most popular and prolific writer on Roswell is Stanton Friedman. See Don Berliner's and Stanton Friedman's 1997 *Crash at Corona: The US military's retrieval and cover-up of a UFO.*

6. See especially Dean (1998) for a very incisive analysis of the idea of "the powers that be" and the problem of the real in UFO discourses.

us that. On the road out of there, as we drove north through the changing landscapes, we saw people selling trinkets from roadside carts. They sold things that together created an indexical field of the "American West": Indian arrowheads supposedly found in these parts, UFO guidebooks, alien dolls, pioneer old-timey tools, and papoose dolls of no specific tribe wrapped in cellophane, the faces pressed up against the plastic like stillborns. One cart had a hand-lettered sign: FRIENDLY INDIANS.

At one point we drove out to the desert to find the famous UFO "crash site." Walking off the dirt road into the hills, we were high-spirited until for some reason the air seemed to shift. Things felt weighted with a kind of half-meaning. I felt the sense of an evaporated history, the disturbing absence created by one world conquering another.

Ghosts

Once upon a time, I was watching a video on YouTube. It is 2008. The video is called "Indian Aliens"[7] and its context is as opaque as anything else on YouTube. We see only the face of an unidentified teenage girl who seems to be Native American. Her presence as a performer is strong: a half-submerged smile, hinting at without quite breaking into irony. The background paneling and couch suggests a modest home. She seems to be reading her lines from another computer off screen.

The video begins with a tinkling sound, evoking "spaceships." Then the girl begins to perform with a spoken introduction:

> . . . Do you think there are aliens waaaa-aaay out there in space?
>
> I don't know, buddy. All I know is, I'm not scared.
>
> Because I went to *boarding school!*

Soon, up comes a synthesized drumming. She nods along and begins to rap. She raps the desire to fly off with the aliens into space, leaving behind the "dusty res," the "tribal politics," and "the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs]," as well as comic annoyances on the reservation, such as a "crazy" local character. She dreams that the spaceship will fly her to a place beyond *all this*, a place where you don't hear about "soldiers killed today" on the news. She raps that even "Grandma" is planning to go; this Grandma character says that everyone in Washington "is drunk with power today." The girl raps that "grandma's put her spacesuit on," a spacesuit that was "banned by the BIA."

This spaceship is not the sinister vehicle of a clinical alien plotting to steal reproductive material with high-tech magic. Rather it is the vehicle of fantastic and transcendent rescue, taking Natives away from the captivities of ordinary existence and flying off to the "rings of Saturn with ease." Soon she modulates from the rap into a Hollywood-style iconic "Indian" minor key beat, humorously inviting all Native friends to "pack up your fry bread, and a brick of commodity cheese"—and to escape with the aliens. These aliens are not conquerors, but rather a means for overcoming the already-conquered world and its troubles. She emphasizes: "boarding school survivors, you're welcome on this flight."

7. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6iMsfsoVG4√, accessed 2008.

Next she shifts to a nostalgic recuperation of a past. The song now dreams a time before the "dusty res," before the BIA, and before the Indian boarding school, but nonetheless a past that takes place in the imaginary of outer space. The song dreams a time and place where all Natives might be united in what it calls "cosmic powwows, way out there in space." The image summons a comic, YouTube-era echo of the Ghost Dance. Maybe, the song muses, space aliens in their futuristic spaceships will take us backward, back to a time before things got the way they are. There will be "no soldiers killed today," no Indian kids signing up for a stint in the ordinary US military, but instead we will meet unconquered Indian warriors from yesterday, recuperating and revising the one war that really mattered. The song, then, comically dreams a timespace that revitalizes the future and redeems the past:

> And if we should go back in time
>
> I wanna see Custer there.
>
> Running' from the Indians
>
> Trying to keep his yellow hair.
>
> (Minor key Indian beat)
>
> Hey–ya! Hey–ya!
>
> (Spoken):
>
> . . . No way, John Wayne.
>
> I'm not scared.

John Wayne and Custer appear together in this revised imaginary landscape: the "cowboy actor" whose characters are fictive and the "historical figure" of material fact are collapsed into the song's recognition of one, inescapable story—a story implicitly understood to be coproduced by both fictional representations and historical events. Under the larger American framework of alien abduction, the historical captivities of the past become new.

I wonder if she's written the song herself, or if it has circulated on Native networks on the Internet, or been passed from hand to hand. But some Googling lets me know that she's Inupiat, and goes to high school in Kaktovik, Alaska. Kaktovik is not the "dusty res" that this song both embraces as a rooted place and wants to transcend. Nor is Kaktovik a place, apparently, where "fry bread" would be typically eaten (Fox, personal correspondence). But something comes together with these images—a narrativized sense of historical Native experience, politicized and poeticized in its memory of Custer; in "dust" and "fry bread" as recognizable, representative signs of modern indigenous American life; and in the shared imaginary of a comic/cosmic revitalization. The white fear of alien abduction is nothing compared to the abductions of history, and so dread is replaced here by both desire and deadpan humor—*I'm not scared [of alien abduction], I went to boarding school.*

Here, then, the real abduction narrative is the boarding school story, and the true captivity is on earth—not as a necessary spiritual condition, not as an irrevocable plot by supernatural aliens, but as a wrong turn in the contingency of the historical and the political. It's clear that boarding school is an abduction too,

and a trauma that inoculates its captives against the contemporary terror of alien abduction. In a small, jokey YouTube video, myths intersect and make a new story. The UFO—the ultimate sign of the other—here reverses and redeems the Indian captivity narrative, taking the earthly other into a chronotope of revision, revitalization, and redemption on YouTube.

Comments appear below the video, some of which are meant to shock and sully in the typical way of anonymous online misogynistic comments. I hope the girl does not read them. And after a while, the YouTube video is simply gone too. Did she take it down because of the comments? There is no way to know the story of its circulation or disappearance. I am glad I saw it, that I transcribed the song while the video was still posted. The performance is, perhaps, now fittingly thought of as another ghost, resonating still with those who saw it after its vanishing.

A vanishing

Once upon a time, on November 5, 1975, in Arizona's Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, seven men returning through the woods from a logging job saw a UFO descend from the sky and hover above the trees. One of the men, Travis Walton, got out of the truck to get a better look. And there in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, Travis Walton, like generations of other whites in Indian forest stories, became, as his website puts it, "an unwilling captive of an alien race" (http://www.travis-walton.com/witness.html). He went missing for five days. Then he mysteriously reappeared, dumped back on a nearby rural road.

The story has been told and retold for three decades; it was the first abduction story told to me at the first major UFO convention I attended in the early 1990s.[8] Walton is zapped unconscious by the beam of light and wakens in the UFO. He thinks, at first, he is in a hospital: "There was nothing I recognized, but some of the chrome-like objects reminded me of those in a laboratory or doctor's office" (ibid.). That is what the UFO most looks like, a hospital or a lab, with rows of things that Walton calls simply "instruments," indexing a scene of "science." He sees the aliens approach. They are silent. They are bald while his hair is a sign of naturalness, unruly excess. They have no fingernails either; the hands that clinically reach for him are pure white, with no seams or knuckles, as if their very hands have become surgical gloves, and it is as if their faces, which reveal only the eyes, have become surgical masks. But this is no hospital; this is a nightmare negative image of a hospital. Or, you might say, the uncanny partly reveals the hidden, terrifying aspect of knowledge and power.

This hyperclinical nightmare articulates the implicit terrors of everyday life and its unspoken structures (see Brown 2007 for the most thorough and insightful elaboration of medicalized imagery and the body in alien abduction narratives). The clean well-lighted space, the ordinary venue for containing trauma, becomes the generator of trauma. Travis Walton tries to smash up the instruments, he says, like an animal that has gotten loose in a lab. But, fantastically, or through the "wonders" of some new technology, nothing breaks. Here you might inevitably

8. Although I am citing his website, the story was originally presented in his 1978 book *The Walton experience* (and in the 1993 film made of his book, *Fire in the Sky*, a highly revised version of the story).

think of a Foucaultian sense of medicalization. But here Foucault has fallen down a rabbit hole.

There is so much here, drifting from piles of memory and history, and settling into a story that tells an unfinished feeling about power and containment. There is the Nazi-influenced imagery—the nightmare of the medical experiment that drifts into UFO abductions from the beginning, and then overlaps with images of atomic experiments on human and animal bodies;[9] there is the oddly resonant idea of what Walton calls his own "superhuman strength of a trapped animal"—that is, the animal nature of the human compared with an alien. And so the "superhuman" element of the self here is not the brain but the body, which struggles and fights its captivity.

Here is where the rabbit hole twists into a Mobius strip. You can hear the first American literary genre, the Indian captivity narrative, layered inside this uncanny, unfinalized UFO abduction story like sediment. But in the first story it is the Indian who is the savage, the devil, the wild animal, the natural man, the strong-bodied but, ultimately, the technology-weak other. It is also the Indian who is the abductor. It is *Indians* who should appear in the forest and make you what Walton calls "an unwilling captive of an alien race." But here the Indian forest becomes the Apache-Sitgreaves national forest; it belongs now to the nation. And in this contained forest, and inside the UFO, the abducting "alien race" is an intensified image of the white man: now this pale, high-tech, clinical alien race is descending upon what has become Walton's land, conquering what is in this narrative *his* native place, his earth. In terms of narrative identification, the abductee has traded places: once the captor was less technological, more "natural." But it is now the captive who claims "native" rights to the place being invaded—the earth.

The resonance of the clinical

Once upon a time, Saddam Hussein was rooted out of his lair and abducted by the forces of the US military. After so much pursuit and evasion he was at last a captive. A photo appeared in many newspapers and websites nearly a decade ago. The image went viral as it epitomized the American triumph. It is still surfacing in individual JPEG images across the Internet.

In the 2003 photograph, Saddam Hussein is not being tortured or killed. When the journalist Daniel Pearl was abducted by radical Pakistani liberation group in 2002, the photograph that was circulated in the media showed him in chains with a gun to his head. It was an image full of pain and the knowledge of imminent death. His torture was obvious. A propaganda video released by the group was circulated on the Internet as well, showing Pearl being harshly interrogated, and then the terrible beheading.

In direct opposition, Saddam Hussein's photograph in American captivity shows a different kind of spectacle: the clinical display of the superpower. The compelling image shows Saddam Hussein being examined by a doctor. It was understood that the physical brutality in the Pearl image shows the captors' ability to kill. The display of the American force shows the superpower's ability to capture

9. Jacobsen (2011) asserts that the Soviet project of creating human "alien" bodies followed the medical experimentation developed by Nazi scientists.

the subject at a deeper level. What is not necessary, of course, is a display of physical force, since Iraq had already, at the time of this photo, been thoroughly and visibly bombed to bring their people into democracy.

But in the photo, Saddam Hussein's head is tipped back, and his mouth is open to a glowing wand, the light of medical inspection. The beam of light illuminates the inner tissue of Saddam's mouth, showing us the red, intimate vulnerability of the fallen dictator's soft palate. We look, with the point of view of the observer, into Saddam's face, and see not an equal or greater opponent, not a formidable agent, but the face of a patient. The doctor, in this photo, is the agent; he looks at his patient, but Saddam Hussein's eyes look off to the side, to a spot on the ceiling. He has unruly hair and a beard. The doctor has a smooth, bald head, smooth gloves, and a barely discernable face whose only distinguishable feature seems to be eyeglasses. In fact, this military doctor looks a lot like one of Travis Walton's aliens: bald, surgically gloved fingers without nails, amplified eyes, a smooth garment without seams, doing an exam of the captive.

How might this image from a military invasion relate to so many previous scores of alien abduction images? We can't say here, of course, that anything was directly "copied" from anything else. These images pile up from such disparate domains. One image comes from a vernacular realm outside the unanimously agreed-upon real, while the other is from a realm of clear historical and political impact. But they arise nonetheless in a shared field of both latent and explicit signs. Despite the marginal cultural capital of Travis Walton's story, it is still part of the field in which our social world takes root and circulates, makes dreams and fantasies, becomes myth, and happens in real material life.

Everyone knows that modern aliens are clinical abductors. But one day, when I am doing research with a group of UFO experiencers, there is tiny moment of narrative negotiation. A woman tells about her alien memory. She summons the dreamlike image and presents it to the room, the thing she has felt slipping for decades between the ordinary memories of her life. She tells us this was not a dream, but neither does she insist it has some objective reality outside her own experience; instead, she carefully clarifies, *I'm saying I'm aware that this happened to me.* And she tells us she was aware that "beings," as she calls them, were doing *something* to her body. Another member of the group begins to put her story into its generic place from the standard accounts of alien abduction: he tells her the aliens were performing medical procedures upon her to advance their genetic mission. *No,* she says, *they were not. That's not what they were doing. Yes,* he assures her. They each take hold of one end of her story and pull for a few minutes while the others in the group watch. He tugs toward finalizing her tale into the well-known track of medicalized alien abduction; she pulls it back toward an idiosyncratic and open memory, a centrifugal story that resonates with too many details to pin down. Everyone listens; soon the moment between them passes. But this little negotiation over the memory's definition becomes part of the larger story.

Another story

The "first modern abduction," as people call it, occurred in 1961 with Betty and Barney Hill, an interracial married couple: "Most everyone knows the story of how Betty and Barney saw a UFO while driving through the White Mountains of New Hampshire late on the night of September 19, 1961 and were taken aboard it and

given medical examinations by aliens" (Lawhon 2000). Like women's Indian captivity narratives, UFO abductions began in the East and then migrated west across the country. Now "most everyone knows the story."

The Hills' is the story whose narrative elements became the foundation on which subsequent abduction accounts could be judged by a growing body of investigators who wanted to align themselves with mainstream science and psychology. Serious abduction researchers, as they often designated themselves, began trying to distinguish what they considered to be real abductions, where narratively atypical abduction testimonials, especially those remembered without the benefit of hypnosis, were dismissed as "confabulation" (Jacobs 1992). It was sometimes said that the pure "wheat" consisted of narratives that contained elements such as clinical procedures on the body, and other, seemingly wilder or less classifiable stories could be safely put aside as the "chaff." As in the Hills' case, many stories that began to comprise the genre were forgotten and recovered to memory later. In these stories, memory itself became the subject of a secondary captivity story: memory was stolen away, converted in captivity with false images or "screen memories," then through the help of professionals, released. But even while memory was in captivity, strange fears and feelings remained behind as traces. Detached from their own referents but pointing toward them though a dense field of semiotic distractions, mysterious signs of the trauma mimic the cultural process of uncanny memory itself. As became typical in later cases, the abducted memory-of-abduction was patched together from eerie hints. Then, through hypnosis, the recovered trauma was funneled into a single narrative from the amorphous flow of impressionistic feeling. Through hypnosis the therapist could go into the scene of the captivity, taking the abductee along on an inner journey to relive the experience. The story, this way, became a type, and the teller's original amnesia of that story was one of its key motifs. Then you can see that the UFO abduction story is itself a trace in the life of the social, an uneasy sign pointing to a half-forgotten disturbance beyond the individual's story. In social life as on the body of an abductee, "horror leaves its traces" in strange, eerie events (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). But what is that "something," what is that original horror?

Betty was from an old Yankee family, and Barney was an African American postal employee. The fact of their mixed race (unusual in a married couple at the time) is always a marked point of the story—it's not a detail crucial to the UFO abduction itself, but it is crucial to the story *as* a story, a mark of specificity, a particularizing fact, and more than that, something key that resonates implicitly with the themes of race and hybridity in captivity narratives of the past, and abduction stories to come. (For incisive discussions of race and hybridity in this and other UFO stories see Roth 2005, Brown 2007, Barbeito 2005.)

Driving their Chrysler on a lonely road, the Hills saw what seemed to be a star coming closer and closer until finally it was no star at all but a UFO, and Barney could see strange "living beings" gazing back through the windows of the spaceship. Barney yelled, "We're going to be captured!" like a pioneer in an old cowboy and Indian movie. There was no way to escape: the aliens came closer and closer over the horizon, spread in a line across the road, and then they captured Betty and Barney near Indian Hill.

It's like a dream, with these signs poking up as iconic landmarks to remind you of a nagging other thing just off-stage. (But what is that other thing?) It doesn't

make much sense on its own, this trail of signs, each sign like a single ember that must have floated in from a bonfire burning beyond the frame of the scene at hand. Each ember is a clue to the bigger fire that launched and connects them. Take the story's place names. Look at it like a conspiracy theorist would, stringing the embers together so your necklace glows in triumph. There are the White Mountains, there is Indian Hill, and the last name of the couple is also Hill, and the double occurrence of "hill" seems to factor each hill out and leave you with the resonance of the words "Indian" and "White."

Yes, these are real names and real places. And yet thrust into the charged and fantastic narrative, with its constant begging for the reading of clues, the names become signs that underscore the theme of a troubled unspoken history. The words "White" and "Indian" might remind you implicitly of other, historically material abduction stories that are nested inside this strange one. (Barbeito 2005 also notices the symbolic place names in this narrative.) The place names tell us, of course, not that these narratives are somehow texted by an invisible author making symbolic choices, but rather how ordinary and unmarked and yet unresolved are the legacies of theft and desire in the ubiquitous white use of Native American place names in everyday life (see Samuels 2001). The abduction story *partially* marks these names again as troubled indices to a story of invasion, letting both the historical and the potential story resonate together and generate a feeling of uncanny return.

The couple's mixed race status might give that theme an extra jolt of trouble, a sense of race as part of a larger structure of things whose workings aren't always visible at the surface (Roth 2005). And then, when you think of race, the missing time also half-evokes a kind of "middle passage" in a spaceship: its bewildered passengers are immobilized with invisible, uncanny chains, in a terror of possibly leaving their own world and becoming the possessions of these technologically dominating others. Different troubled American histories layer up inside the feeling of their connection.

As signs, the names point *to a something*; and on one level at least that something is the mimetic accumulation of invasions. For in the dreamlike story of alien captivity, the polysemous quality of signs begins to pulse with the uncanny light of meaningful fluke. They seem to refer to something urgent but obscure. *Weird, isn't it*, a white guy at a UFO group might say—because in many social worlds where people think together about UFOs, the work is piecing together the iconicities in things, the coinciding motifs in everyone's memories, dreams, books, road signs, numbers, and seeing a pattern. *Weird* that the first abduction was at a place called Indian Hill. After everything we did to the Indians. "We were like aliens to them," I have often heard UFO experiencers say. "We invaded their land." Or: "When the Spanish came to the new world, no one knew who *they* were either." Here "we" are the Indians in a native land, and the familiar patriotic origin story of the discovery of the Americas has shifted.

Barney Hill died an untimely middle-aged death, haunted to destruction, some said, by his irresolvable trauma, but Betty lived until a couple of years ago, a salty New England lady who made appearances at UFO conferences and was periodically interviewed about her abduction. Shortly before her death, her local newspaper in New Hampshire interviewed her again. The reporter Dennis Robinson was clearly delighted by Betty's eccentricities. But what she said

surprised him. His story recounts that Betty is growing tired of representing the mystery of UFOs. She tells him she does not want to be known as the abductee any more. She brings out her research. She is studying her own genealogy now instead of UFOs, and is completely immersed in an old family story: she wants the reporter to know that one of her Pilgrim ancestors was captured by Indians. This is what Betty Hill wants to be known for, instead of her alien abduction: the Indian captivity narrative lying dormant in her genealogy of abduction stories.

More stories

Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative from 1682 is generally considered to be the "origin" of the genre. In seventeenth-century Puritan captivity narratives, it isn't clear that one day things will shift and that the Indians will become the defeated minority. Or that, as the Puritan captive fears for her life in captivity among savage "hell-hounds" (Rowlandson 1998) her symbolic position of power within an official agenda of genocide will have to be reconciled with her powerlessness as a woman. But these implicit ironies grow closer to the surface later on in the American colonizing project. By the nineteenth century, when whites had clearly gained power and federal policies of genocide had cleared the way for folklore and nostalgia, one reads a gap opening up between what is known and what has been more obviously obscured.

In the earliest captivity narratives, the moral structure of things is cleaner. Mary Rowlandson, for example, abducted into unknown wilderness, begins to explore what becomes a spiritually unknown space, conquering fear and vulnerability through each step of her survival. Her sense of God's intervention at each juncture underlines her position as a stranger in a strange land. She has entered an otherworldly journey; and the point of this narrative is the journey of her soul, which has to emerge on the other side of an odyssey filled with demonic perils, tests, and moments of divine grace. Everything signifies a real beyond itself, for early colonial captivity narratives took seed and grew within a larger climate coming out of seventeenth-century stories, testimonials that matter-of-factly incorporated accounts of the supernatural, stories whose strange manifestations could easily be compatible with truth claims. "After all," wrote Richard Dorson of the narratives of this era, "America itself was hard to believe, and the borderline between strange fact and colored fiction could not be neatly staked" (1950: 5). Part of a deeper social and imaginative zone in which the strangeness of the expanding world was part of God's creation, "the whole tradition of the medieval bestiary with its fabulous zoology, and the natural history of the ancients strewn with the incredible, lay behind the descriptions of the early travelers" (ibid.).

And therefore it's worth noticing that in Dorson's comprehensive collection of early American writing, among the marvels of strange, new-world beasts, and unbelievably survived "accidents" involving spikes to the head; among the terrible enchantments of savage magic, and the ongoing, palpable struggle for God and salvation from the devil's incarnation in Indian flesh—there comes also from Cotton Mather this story, understood generically in his own time as a "true tale."

Once upon a time, Cotton Mather (whose son, Increase Mather, wrote the introduction to Mary Rowlandson's narrative) told his flock about a sign in the sky of an unidentified flying object. He wrote that he had heard from the "pen of the reverend person who is now the Pastor of New Haven" (Mather quoted in Dorson

1950: 161) that a ship bound back to England had not returned the following spring. The New Haven pastor wrote to Mather about something strange: "REVEREND AND DEAR SIR [wrote the pastor]: In compliance with your desires, I now give you the relation of that APPARITION OF A SHIP IN THE AIR, which I have received from the most credible, judicious, and curious surviving observers of it" (ibid., emphasis in the original). "Reader," confesses Cotton Mather, "there being yet living so many credible gentlemen that were eyewitnesses of this wonderful thing, I venture to publish it for a thing as undoubted as tis wonderful" (quoted in Dorson 1950: 161).

And so here is a seventeenth-century airship off the coast of New England. It is an object that begins its flight as "unidentified" but resolves into a clear picture of a ghost ship, carrying the souls of those voyagers going backwards to the Old World from the New World. The colonists return to heaven in clouds of glory, in an echo of Revelation that seems to solidify the spiritual standing of the colonies so far from their English home. Here, already, is an American narrative in which an otherworldly flying craft haunts the ambiguous process of crossing worlds.

You could say that the voyage across the sea to the New World was already an image that shaped the imaginations of those who later headed West into the new world of the territories. You could also say that the vast sea was something like the vastness of space into which, a few centuries later, ventured astronauts, and out of which came new incarnations of ghosts, alien creatures, and new stories of captivity. But while UFOs are always forever unidentified, the colonial flying object is quickly identified. First of all it is defined: it *is* an apparition. Second of all, it is a direct copy of the known ship. Unlike the modern UFO, which indexes the unfinalizable, this sign's referent is clear. And unlike ghosts that haunt profane realms, ghosts in this kind of religious context are signs that often have a singular referent (cf. Gordon 1997); the direct link between signifier and signified speaks of an orderly world. The airship is, without hesitation, incorporated into a tight fabric of cosmological and semiotic meaning. This haunting, then, is not disturbing or disruptive but rather a marvelously affirming sign of God; and thus Cotton Mather justifies "to publish it for a thing as undoubted as tis wonderful."

Later of course, in the intimation of their vanishing, the imagined Indian became less a figure in a powerful Puritan demonology than a symbol of new ways to access spiritual worlds; and Native religion seems less an aspect of black magic or evil witchery, and more a positive spiritual alternative to be appropriated for white personal growth that remains in New Age religions today. At the same time that a rationalist discourse advocated eradicating Indian religion, for example, Shakers in the mid-nineteenth century invited hundreds of "unidentified spirit-Indians" and a thousand Chippewas to participate in their trances in upstate New York, and the famous late nineteenth-century Boston spiritualist Lenora Piper summoned the spirit of an "Indian maiden with the unlikely name of Chlorine" to meet séance participants such as William James (Brown 1997: 162–3).

To those "discourses of the vanishing" (Ivy 1995) that pricked the dominant imagination in the course of changing power relations between whites and Indians, you could add the inescapable climate of moral ambiguity with contemporary discourses about race, slavery, and abolition. You could layer in ambivalent romantic discourses about industrialization as, more and more, Indians became central to a cluster of symbols about a marked nature becoming "entextualized"

(Bauman and Briggs 1990). And, of course, you could trace the construction of nostalgic settlement of wild western land—land that becomes, of course, the fantastically texted landscape of both American colonization and uncanny conspiracies, the "West."

Once upon a time, in Texas in the 1990s, I sit with people who are deeply immersed in thinking about all kinds of uncanny experiences, and the talk drifts to speculate about our possible Native ancestors. I am a graduate student doing fieldwork with UFO experiencers, most of whom are white. It is a time before antigovernment conspiracy theory has a mainstream political platform, before Fox News, the Tea Party, or the Birthers. There is just an inchoate feeling coming into greater focus, a sense that *something isn't right*. There is a sense that something ineffable has been taken away. A few people say they feel they've got Indian blood, and of course many Americans do have Indian ancestors they cannot name, stories of white-Native interaction, violence, and engagement most white Americans cannot know. But some UFO experiencers talk about the fact that long ago, space aliens came first to visit Indians in a kind of annunciation. Those aliens who came through space or time to the Indians weren't these clinical, cold abductors. They did not experiment on human bodies. They did not steal our vital, physical bounty, the birthright of our natural selves. Those aliens who visited the earth *back then* before the Europeans arrived are sometimes said to have been wise and spiritual, sharing secrets of the universe with a worthy people.

Things are different now, people say; those long-ago aliens aren't necessarily the same little gray aliens who take abductees now. Now, because of modernity and its violent thefts, those otherworldly secrets are mostly lost. In the twentieth century, the government conspired with these gray aliens so we could get their technology, some say. And so some people dream a connection with a world ripped out from beneath the feet of other people long ago. "We screwed the Indians out of their land and then we ruined nature," a woman in the group says. Now, many people say, the clinical aliens are doing it to us.

UFO talk is not alone in the way it often cathects American Indians, not as specific peoples with diverse histories, but as indices to a traumatic encounter with a power that still feels present. UFO talk conjures a lost time when the earth was still unbroken, its relationship to humans untraumatized. On one level UFO talk converges with other, New Age discourses that appropriate and commodify some fabrication of Native American things as pure, spiritual indicies to the sign of the earth. Both UFO believers and New Agers in general talk often about shamanism and the channeling of spirits from the past (Brown 1997). People at UFO gatherings sometimes talk about how space aliens can be found in ancient Indian cave drawings, how the Indians know the truth. Someone hands me a flyer at a UFO meeting. *Do you have an interest in Native Americans, or maybe some Native American blood? It could be a sign that you've been abducted by aliens. . . .* In UFO talk, as in New Age discourses, Aboriginal peoples of the world can become a sign of potential recovery, of freedom from the captivities of modernity—pointing backward toward innocence and forward toward apocalypse or redemption. It is of course a vast trope of guilt and desire, emerging in various iterations from personal speculative chitchat to Hollywood movies like *Avatar*.

On one level you might critique this discourse as a familiar trope that romanticizes the other, its drive to mimesis eliding complexity and politics and

history (cf. Taussig 1993). Sometimes it conflates all "tribal" peoples into a spiritual synchrony. At the same time, the people speaking to each other here about *the weird stuff* in the world are not, themselves, the powers that be. They too are caught up, trying to trace invisible lines of power from some untraceable source. The white UFO believers here would cheer in agreement with the Native American "Grandma" character in the Inupiat girl's YouTube rap, the grandmother who sees "everyone in Washington is drunk with power today." But who, they wonder, holds the strings?

One of my friends in a UFO community is a self-proclaimed conspiracy theorist, he says it many times: *We are all enslaved. Don't think for a minute that we are not.* The source of enslavement is too vast, too deep to point to as a single thing. He is compelled to try to understand the powers that he knows exist but that no one can ever really pin down. What he feels has happened cannot be simply linked to the legacy of American slavery that gives him his emotional metaphor, or just to colonization. It is not just the tropes of dreadful medicalization leaking in from images of Nazi doctors or pictures of animal experimentation, or mysterious animals cut in the desert like experiments, or the inchoate feelings of disempowerment in doctors' offices. And it is not just his, or anyone's youthful experience of leaving a warm rural town with no work to be had for the containments of a cold factory city up north. He layers it up: the resonance that emanates from many half-remembered signs, letting him know that there is *more* to power than what meets the eye.

I have spent much of this article telling overlapping stories from mediated sources. But the narrative effect in this article performs an ethnographic observation: that vernacular theories of power and captivity in America often work through a deep sense of resonance. This is how many people make their poetic, epistemological, and social worlds: by tuning in to the half rhyme, the near-correlation, the parallel tropes that intimate a pattern. And then, in metatalk about that pattern, you spin it back out again into the world to meet up with another story, to make another rhyme. It makes sense, and remains mysterious at the same time. This effect produces rushes of feeling, like the "static state filled with vibratory motion or resonance" that pulses suddenly in ordinary unspoken moments (Stewart 2007). Like an art object, a sense of wonder resonates out from the story itself, moving beyond its borders; "for resonance, like nostalgia, is impure, a hybrid forged in . . . barely acknowledged gaps (Greenblatt 1990: 27). Here, in many social worlds where people talk about UFOs and *all the weird stuff* that happens in the world, resonance is the subject matter. It is the way things work deep down, below the appearance of the random, the contingent, the meaningless. Seeing and naming inexplicable parallels between things is a way to articulate hard-to-name structures of feeling. They become artful and meaningful through narrative and poetic utterances.

My object of ethnographic inquiry, here, has not been Indian captivity narratives or UFO abduction narratives. It has not been a single specific performance or place. Still, as in a more traditional ethnography, the object here is still something that I observed and have participated in making. As Debbora

Battaglia (2012) has observed in a very different context,[10] we can find artfulness in utterances that are not intended to be art, especially "when description is congruent with the strange reality it seeks to relate, when it iterates as . . . 'defamiliarization' or 'enstrangement'" (Battaglia 2012: 1093). Like most art forms, here it is expressive, and it produces feeling, sociability, meaning, and an embodied, patterned sense of aesthetic rightness, and a kind of "groove" (Feld 1995). It creates a *feeling* of pattern and structure, the way "the reiterative figure of sound" does for Jakobson's poetic function of language (1960). The "reiterative figure" here is not sound per se but rather image, trope, or theme. And so the ethnographic object one might explore, here, is not a single story, myth, or poem form. Instead it is the intertextual, poetic *process* of how people recognize the resemblances and patterns between events and stories, and how they use that chime to cast a new story about powers that seems too big to name. The reiterative figure produces and reproduces a sense of resonance that exceeds whatever is there. And in the impact of these resonant chimes that people feel down to their feet, they say: *the weird stuff* is out there, *the weird stuff* makes things seem to come together but never be a final story.

In many times and places, uncanny repetitions, and the hauntings of *a before,* can speak to both the colonizing imagination and to the experience of those whose labor fuels it. Keeping us alert to the potential for the accidental, and to the uneasiness of recognizing a native mind whose differences might not be different enough, these repetitions disrupt the dream of a smoothly safe modernity with "the abruptly reawakened memory of forgotten danger . . . the uncanny sensation of something known all along but routinely suppressed" (Pemberton 2003: 85). And UFO discourse performs the middle of a long, troubled American story of conquest, a shifting, unstable desire trying to construct and express a different point of identification—one that just doesn't feel at one with the order of the world as it is. The weird, overdetermined feeling here can give us insight into other contingent American desires, a projected longing for a *something* that is not fulfilled. This desire can wind up taking multiple directions in affects surrounding encounters with power, from right wing, antigovernment conspiracy to the liberatory; it wants to set up camp on the imaginary bank of the other side, whatever that is, and hopes there is some different kind of force lurking there, beyond the ache of any ordinary life made captive by powers that always seem too overwhelming to pin down to a single story.

Acknowledgements

For helping me think through this essay over many years, I would like to thank too many people to name here. I would like to acknowledge especially the input I received from members of my dissertation committee chaired by Kathleen Stewart; the University of Chicago Workshop on US Locations; commenters at Ethnographic Dreamworlds, led by Allen Shelton at Buffalo State University; the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University; the anonymous

10. The different context can be found in the journals of a Soviet cosmonaut, who as an "ethnographer" of outer space describes his own experiences of defamiliarization.

reviewers at HAU; the members of the former UFO experiencers group of Austin, TX, and the people of Rachel, NV.

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La résonance de la captivité: Les "aliens" et la conquête

Résumé : Cet article examine la notion du confinement aux Etats-Unis. L'auteur se penche sur la manière dont le « confinement » (*containment*) décrit et met en scène la poétique intertextuelle des histoires de captivité, s'axant sur ce qu'elle dénomme la « résonance », en particulier celle qui existe entre les discours portant sur la captivité et les récits d'enlèvements extraterrestre. Dans cet article, l'idée de l'inquiétante étrangeté est utilisée comme outil de réflexion sur divers exemples ethnographiques portant sur l'ambivalence américaine concernant l'héritage de l'empire et de la colonisation. L'auteur soutient qu'une théorie vernaculaire du pouvoir émerge du sentiment de possibles parallèles entre différents récits de confinement en Amérique. L'écriture procède par mimétisme pour montrer comme interpréter cette résonance narrative.

Susan LEPSELTER is an Assistant Professor in the departments of Communication and Culture and American Studies at Indiana University in Bloomington.