

The Rubicon of the Imagination

Rationality is what we do to organize the world, to make it possible to predict. Art is the rehearsal for the inapplicability and failure of that process.¹

– Brian Eno

Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in 49 BCE, an act of defiance that sparked the civil war which eventually led to the fall of the Roman Republic and the rise of the Roman Empire. He uttered his famous phrase “veni, vidi, vici” whilst sitting on a horse, and the legions that he led were armed with swords, spears, and similar weapons.

When the Roman Empire in the West fell in 476 CE, after five centuries as the pre-eminent power in the ancient world, it was to Germanic armies that wielded more or less the same equipment Caesar's legions had fought with. When Belisarius re-captured large parts of the Western Empire in the middle of the 6th century for Emperor Justinian, he too led armies that would not have seemed unfamiliar to Caesar.²

Thus, while there were certainly changes in tactics, and formations, and even to some degree materiel, the armies commanded by Belisarius had not changed in any fundamental way since the period when the Empire had been created, six centuries earlier. This was typical of human technological development for most of our history. Change, when it came, was generally slow and fitful.

¹ Brian Eno, *A Year With Swollen Appendices: Brian Eno's Diary* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 272.

² Lars Brownworth, *Lost to the West: The Forgotten Byzantine Empire That Rescued Western Civilization* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2009); Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Fall of the West: The Death of the Roman Superpower* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009).

Change began to accelerate more rapidly after the Industrial Revolution began in the mid 18th century, but it was in the 20th century that the “game” truly changed. The British Grand Fleet commanded by Admiral Sir John Jellicoe was the foundation of Imperial might at the beginning of the First World War in 1914.³ A single dreadnought would have been sufficient to defeat the combined fleets of the British, French and Spanish navies at Trafalgar just a century earlier. By the time that the Second World War ended in 1945, however, battleships were obsolete. Blockades and great naval battles between surface fleets were meaningless when compared with air power, as demonstrated by the sinking of HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* by the Japanese in 1941, much less the development of atomic weapons and rockets by the end of the war, all of which came to the fore within less than two decades.

Technological change since then has increased at an exponential rate not seen before in human history. My home computer provides a good example. When I founded my film and television production company just twelve years ago, I bought desktop computers for the office and for my home that were near the top of the line, and which were specifically assembled for us by a local company. They each had 20 GB of hard drive space. The mass-produced computer I'm using as I type this in 2012 has 500 gigabytes of hard drive space, and is hooked up to a separate drive that contains another 500 gigabytes. On the shelf nearby is another drive with a terrabyte of space. The difference between the processing speeds is even more pronounced than the relative storage capabilities. I can edit an entire film on this computer, and post it immediately to various places on the Internet, or send it via FTP to someone in Asia, or Europe, things I couldn't have done a decade ago.⁴

³ Robert K. Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany and the Coming of the Great War at Sea* (New York: Random House, 1991), and Robert K. Massie, *Castles of Steel: Britain, Germany and the Winning of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 2003). Just half a century later, a single nuclear-armed submarine could have obliterated the combined fleets at Jutland with a single missile, and without any of the thousands of doomed sailors having any understanding of what had caused the sudden blinding flash of light that was about to destroy them.

⁴ The change can perhaps best be seen in classrooms. When I was a student in 1989

This is really just the beginning, however. “Moore’s Law” states that computer power doubles every eighteen months, an unheard of increase in technological power that permeates every level of our society.⁵ Futurists such as Ray Kurzweil have stated that this model can also be applied to a wide variety of other technologies, in what Kurzweil called “the law of accelerating returns.”⁶ The future as imagined by science fiction writers in the 1960s is already beginning to look not just quaint, but archaic.⁷

All of this has a direct bearing on the paranormal, and any advanced non-human intelligence with whom we might be dealing. When I was in London in May, 2009, I attended a lecture given by theoretical physicist Michio Kaku at the RSA.⁸ He talked for approximately half an hour about his book, *The Physics of the Impossible*, and then there was a period of time for questions and answers. I raised my hand, because I wanted Kaku to elaborate a bit on what he had written about the prospect of communication with an extraterrestrial civilization.⁹

finishing my honors degree in history at Acadia University, there was only one computer in the entire history department, and no student that I knew had a personal computer, much less a lap-top or iPad. I had to pay the department secretary to type my thesis (on the origins of the Second World War in Europe), which I had written out by hand. Today, every student takes some form of computer to class.

⁵ Michio Kaku, *Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 28 – 29.

⁶ Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (New York: Viking, 1999), 30 – 32. “The Law of Accelerating Returns: As order exponentially increases, time exponentially speeds up (that is, the time interval between salient events grows shorter as time passes).”

⁷ For a look at what one analyst predicts the next hundred years or so might have in store for us, I recommend George Friedman, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010). The odds are that Friedman will be wrong about the vast majority of his projections, having erred too far on the side of caution.

⁸ The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, founded in 1754. www.thersa.org/.

⁹ Paul Kimball, “Michio Kaku: A Galactic Conversation,” *The Other Side of Truth*

“You’ve written about the possibility that there’s a galactic conversation going on that we’re not part of, and that’s far beyond us,” I asked. “Two questions: first, what do you think might be the best way of tapping into that conversation, if it’s taking place, and second, how soon do you think we might have the ability or knowledge to do so?”

There were a few snickers in the audience as I finished, but Kaku skipped a couple of other questions and went directly to mine. I think he appreciated that I was interested in a subject that he clearly takes seriously, and also that someone had actually read his book before coming to the lecture.

“Let me try to answer that,” he said. “First, why don’t the aliens visit us, and how do we contact the aliens who are out there? Well, if you’re walking down a country road and you see an ant hill, do you go down to the ants and say, ‘I give you trinkets, I bring you beads, I give you nuclear energy, I give you biotechnology - take me to your ant leader’? Or maybe you step on a few of them.”

I remember thinking at the time that if there was anything that might make people more uncomfortable than the prospect of not being at the top of the food chain, it would be the idea that those further up the chain than us might be as inclined to step on the “ants” as we are, whether by accident or on purpose. I’m sure that explained the few nervous chuckles I heard from the audience.¹⁰

Kaku smiled, and continued. “A galactic civilization that could soar through the galactic space lanes would consider us not too different from an ant hill. Now, let’s say that there’s a ten lane super highway being built right next to the ant hill. Would the ants know how to communicate with the workers? Would they know the frequencies

Podcast. <http://goo.gl/iIijS>.

¹⁰ I also remember thinking Kaku’s analogy was far too simplistic, based on my own personal experience. While I might not stop and try to have a conversation with ants, I’ve always found them fascinating, from my days as a youngster frying them under a microscope (Paul as the ant Satan) to today, where I simply stop to observe them from time to time (Paul as the detached ant God). Occasionally, I’ll put a twig in their path to see how they react to it (Paul as the scientist ant God). While I might not be able to “talk” with them, I can definitely “communicate” with them.

that the workers use? Would the ants even know what a ten lane super highway was, or the purpose of a ten lane super highway?"

"Then you begin to realize," he explained, "that a galactic civilization is about a million years more advanced than us, and on that scale, their frequencies, their culture, their goals, are going to be very, very different from our little ant hill. So how will we make contact with these people?"

He continued for a bit by describing how we're going to detect many Earth-like planets in the years to come. This, he said, would be an existential shock for many people, particularly once they realized that those planets might contain life more advanced than our own. Then he delivered his punch-line.

"We don't know their frequencies, we don't know how they communicate. For example, when you send an e-mail, it's chopped up into many pieces and then re-assembled at the other end, because it was a military weapon. The message was chopped up because in the future Los Angeles may be destroyed, New York may be destroyed, and your e-mail will still get through because it's been chopped up into pieces. Let's say that an alien civilization does the same thing. They take a message, chop it up, and send it through many, many avenues to have it re-assembled at the other end. That's the most efficient and error-free way to send a message. If we were to listen in on alien signals, we'd hear nothing. We'd hear gibberish. So we could be teeming with intergalactic civilizations, and we're simply too stupid to know it."

As I left what was a thoroughly entertaining lecture, I thought to myself that it's quite possible Kaku is right. His views seem to reflect the overwhelming majority opinion amongst the scientific community. But given the way that our own development has gone over the past century, it can't be said that he is *certainly* correct. The technological developments necessary to get us to the stars may not be thousands of years away – they may only be hundreds of years away, or perhaps even less. We just don't know anymore. Indeed, Kaku himself has speculated that a Type-I civilization, which would be a truly planetary society, capable of travel within the solar system, and eventually perhaps even limited interstellar missions, could be

achieved in as little as a century. A Type-II civilization, which would be capable of interstellar flight within our local region of the Milky Way, might only be eight hundred years or so beyond where we are now, according to Kaku.¹¹

To put that in perspective, that's roughly the same period of time that passed between Caesar and Belisarius. To add even more perspective, imagine this: if you had told someone living at the end of the Spanish – American War in 1898 that in less than a century, the United States would possess bombs that could obliterate entire cities, launched not by artillery but by flying machines that could travel several times the speed of sound, all while men walked on the moon, they probably would have locked you up in a rubber room.

In short, predicting the future has always been a tricky thing, and that's never been more true than it is today.

Accordingly, I don't think it's unreasonable to speculate that a civilization in our nearby "galactic neighborhood" could have developed space-faring abilities before us, and made their way here at some point, without having to imagine the aliens as god-like beings so far in advance of us that we wouldn't be able to recognize them, or communicate with them at some level. I also think that it's not unreasonable to imagine that they would have some degree of interest in us. Not in our technology, of course; indeed, probably not for anything in the physical realm in which we place so much stock.

It's therefore quite possible that Kaku has gotten his timeline wrong, and that the more applicable analogy might not be humans in relation to ants, but rather adult humans in relation to the youngest members of our species. After all, while an adult is obviously recognizable to a five-year old child, they have vastly different outlooks on the world, on life, and on each other. Nevertheless, the adult still takes a profound interest in the development of the child, particularly a wayward child prone to self-destruction.

Regardless of the comparative levels that we might be at in terms of development, Kaku has made the more fundamental mistake of viewing contact from the perspective of humans trying to participate in a conversation with an advanced non-human intelligence. The more

¹¹ Kaku, *Visions : How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century*, 323 – 324.

logical way to look at it is from the perspective of the advanced non-human intelligence, whomever or whatever they may be, trying to make themselves understood at some level by us. Any contact is going to take place on their terms, and not ours.

When a parent wants to interact with a baby, for instance, they don't read *War and Peace*, or *King Lear*, in the hopes that the child will understand; rather, they tickle them, and say things like "goochy-goochy coo," and sing them lullabies. Eventually, when the child gets a bit older, the parents will progress to simple illustrated stories like those written by Dr. Seuss. I think we're a long way away from being able to read their version of Tolstoy or Shakespeare, but we might just be developed enough to see them spin the shiny silver ball they've placed above our crib, and listen as they softly sing their version of "Frère Jacques" to us. Maybe a few of us are capable of an even greater understanding. As we've seen in our own species, there are always some precocious children, such as Mozart, who outgrow the cradle more quickly than most.

The great 20th century drama critic George Jean Nathan once wrote that great art is as irrational as great music. "It is mad," he asserted, "with its own loveliness."¹² The same could be said, in many ways, of the paranormal, which almost always seems to possess an element of irrationality to it. This raises a fascinating possibility: what if the paranormal is a form of artistic expression by an advanced non-human intelligence?

For example, one can find similar displays of the lights often ascribed to UFOs in our own culture. Black light theatre is a wonderful example, which I have been fortunate enough to see in person whilst traveling in the Czech Republic. If one were to travel to Nevada for the annual Burning Man festival, one would also see various light displays; so too at almost any Fourth of July celebration, or more than a few minor league baseball games I've attended.

It stands to reason that an advanced non-human intelligence, whether they're from another solar system, another dimension, another time, or even from right here on Earth, may be doing

¹² George Jean Nathan, *The house of Satan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926), 18.

something similar for us, which we perceive as paranormal phenomena. If our art is capable of as many manifestations as there are human beings with imagination and creativity, think of how much more an advanced non-human intelligence might be capable of achieving, particularly if they have the same desire to create as we do, but combined with a greater capacity and much broader experience.

This leads us to another intriguing possibility – that whatever is responsible for the paranormal (and there may be more than one actor involved) has the ability to create art within the subconscious of another species, as a form of communication and enlightenment and perhaps even entertainment.

I think that if we had a chance to interview the advanced non-human intelligence, it might say something like this, by way of introduction:

Hello.

While my species does not really have "names" as you comprehend them, you may call me Vincent, although we have had many such appellations in our long interaction with you.

We find your species to be most interesting, at least from an anthropological point of view, so we decided to make contact, many thousand of your "years" ago (*memo to humans* – your linear concept of time is extremely quaint, but then you are an extremely quaint species, which is why we like you so much).

We have found it best to present ourselves in ways that fit in with the cultural norms of your time. Accordingly, we have actually appeared in many forms (the burning bush was my favorite, with the UFO meme a close second).

We do this using a technology that is far, far beyond your comprehension. You would probably call it magic, or the supernatural. Your species is still confined to your physical reality, or at least what you perceive as "reality," but we operate on different "levels."

I guess the best way to explain it to you is that when we make contact, we do not do it in what you would consider the literal sense, but rather in a more figurative way, using what you call dreams, and the subconscious, and... well, it all gets

rather complicated, I'm afraid.

Suffice it to say, we are far more interested in the mind and spirit than the body (that is what happens when you get to our level of development as a species), and so that is where we make contact. In a sense, we "speak" to you, across the vastness of space. Indeed, once you really understand how things work, you realize that space is not actually that vast after all.

The wonderful thing about this form of communication is that it allows us to participate in your development, and slowly help guide you to a greater level of understanding, not about technology but about yourselves on an individual basis which will hopefully one day add up in the aggregate for you as a species. When you have been around as long as we have, that is what really matters.

I have to admit that it has been a rough haul at times, but some of you seem to "get it," and so we keep trying. Two of my favorites have been Henry Alline and Hildegard of Bingen, but Bach and that McCartney fellow were also very open to the bigger picture, albeit in a different way. Mozart was "out there," even for us, but he was something truly special. And I admit that I have a soft spot for The Smiths, because there is indeed a "light that never goes out." As a result, we have not abandoned the effort.

One final thing. I know many of you spend an inordinate amount of time debating where we are from, to which I can only ask the following: does it really matter whether we are from Zeta Reticuli, or another dimension, or another time, or from your own planet?

Does it even matter if we are *you*?

This scenario is one that I find plausible for a number of reasons. It takes into account the wide range of described encounters with a possible advanced non-human intelligence throughout human history. It makes us *part* of the story, but not necessarily the *center* of the story. Most important, it places the paranormal in its historical context. It provides us with a tremendous opportunity to speculate not

just about the nature of the phenomenon, but also about ourselves and our relationship to it.

Vincent may not have to actually travel from “there” to “here” in a physical sense – he and his kind may be able to make their presence known in other, far more subtle ways within the human mind. Who would be the most receptive people for this kind of communication? In my opinion, it would be those amongst us who have the greatest imagination, many of whom become artists of one sort or another.

Astrologer John Varley reported that his friend, artist and philosopher William Blake, had experienced visions since his childhood, including a vision of a ghost of a flea at a séance the two held in 1819. According to Varley:

As I was anxious to make the most correct investigation in my power, of the truth of these visions, on hearing of this spiritual apparition of a Flea, I asked him if he could draw for me the resemblance of what he saw: he instantly said, 'I see him now before me.' I therefore gave him paper and a pencil with which he drew the portrait... I felt convinced by his mode of proceeding, that he had a real image before him, for he left off, and began on another part of the paper, to make a separate drawing of the mouth of the Flea, which the spirit having opened, he was prevented from proceeding with the first sketch, till he had closed it.¹³

If there really is an advanced non-human intelligence behind the paranormal then I suspect it communicates with us through the kind of visions that William Blake had, particularly if it has developed a much greater understanding of how the mind works than we have. If this is the case, then I believe we would all have the basic ability to receive that communication in some form or another.¹⁴ However, I

¹³ John Varley, quoted in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *The Stranger From Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 377-78.

¹⁴ For example, Paul McCartney famously claimed to have woken up from a dream with the melody to “Yesterday,” one of his greatest songs; Steve Turner, *A Hard Day's Write: The Stories Behind Every Beatles Song*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper

don't think that the vast majority of us have the willingness to access it, largely because we're afraid of what it might represent, namely a loss of control. We want to "fit in" to society as it's structured around us. Unfortunately, by fitting in we may be missing out on something far more important and meaningful – the ability to be truly free. In other words, the “art” may be there, but we choose not to see it.

This state of affairs can perhaps be seen most readily within religion. The more experiential and mystical aspects of Christianity, for example, have always been suppressed by the mainstream churches, which really serve as little more than adjuncts to political authority. This was a theme that Søren Kierkegaard spent his life exploring, and it led to his devastating critiques of organized religion. For Kierkegaard, faith was the most important task to be achieved by a human being, because only on the basis of faith could an individual have a chance to become a true self. It was a matter of individual subjective passion, and it couldn't be mediated by the clergy, nor could it found in a church.¹⁵

All of this reminds me of a conversation I had with my good friend Greg Bishop in January, 2011, wherein we discussed language, communication, and art. I mentioned the idea that “aliens” who are far more advanced than us might not actually be here on Earth in a physical way, but have the ability to send messages through space and time directly to our subconscious. Maybe, I said, we can't quite understand them yet, but they appear to us as dreams, visions, or some sort of phenomena around us.

“Might we be making contact,” I asked, “with some sort of higher intelligence in that manner?”

Greg thought about the question for a moment, and then replied as follows:

Paperbacks, 2005), 83.

¹⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Søren Kierkegaard, *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). For a general look at mysticism within religion, see James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 413 – 468.

I think you've hit on the crux of the thing here. We don't give ourselves nearly enough credit for what we think our perceptions of UFOs are. Our co-creation of what we think UFOs are, I think we're a huge part of that equation, like more than fifty per cent. I'm not saying that there's nothing there. I'm saying there's definitely something there, but we've got so much psychological and cultural baggage that we can't hope to meet it on its own terms for quite a while yet. I think we will eventually, but we're always going to be co-creating with it our perception of what it is, if that makes any sense. We talk about these things, and we don't realize that the whole time we're involved in this huge trap of our own language. Our language traps how we think because it makes us think in certain ways. And then there's the state beyond language, where people will try to describe a mystical experience, or anything having to do with spirituality, or psychology, or a mixture of the two, and once again you're trapped by language. It brings to mind something that Dean Radin told me when I interviewed him years ago, and he was applying it to psychic research. He said that trying to do psychic research with the instruments that we have is like trying to kill a fly with a sledgehammer. That's how I feel about language sometimes when we're talking about this stuff – we're using sledgehammer-like language to try and talk about something that's very subtle, and maybe fleeting, and just not amenable to the tools we have to describe it, which is our language.¹⁶

“It's interesting,” I responded, “because I think the most thoughtful conversations you can have are the ones that you have with yourself, because you're not bound by language in the same way that you are when you're trying to express yourself to someone else. There are so many things that can go on in your own mind when you're not constrained by language, and the filters that it creates.”

¹⁶ Paul Kimball, “Greg Bishop – (Nothing But) Flowers,” *The Other Side of Truth Podcast*, 28 January 2011. <http://goo.gl/ymc3q>.

“Yeah,” replied Greg. “The only thing that I would disagree with you on, sort of, is that you said that when you’re just talking to yourself, or dealing with your thoughts, then you don’t have to worry about the language, but the language that you used to pull in all of those thoughts is still affecting how you deal with them. You’re still thinking in probably a fairly linear fashion, because you’re dealing with ideas that have been communicated to you by language. However, if there’s any way to possibly get out of that it’s by that personal thought process, or by speaking with people who are willing to use the shorthand of the things that you’re talking about, and the ideas that you’re kicking around, to express things that probably can’t be expressed exactly, which is why you get excited when you meet somebody who is basically finishing your sentences, because you know that you have the same shorthand, and you can start dealing on a different level.”

At this point we took a brief break from our conversation, and listened to a song by the Talking Heads. When the song ended, Greg went directly to the subject of communication and art.

“The other thing that came to mind when you mentioned non-verbal communication is art,” he said. “It’s the only way that we really get that anymore, because that’s one of the few ways that we can communicate something to someone else without having to explain it. Just showing them this visual language will cue these feelings and patterns in their mind, and by communicating that to them it becomes personal to them as well, because you meet somewhere emotionally and intellectually at the same time. You’re both contributing to it – the artist, and you as the person looking at the art, which gets us back to the UFO phenomenon. I think that’s where a lot of the true non-verbal communication is happening.”

Artistic expression provides us with the unparalleled potential to transcend the barriers to true communication that language and culture impose on us. It liberates us from the confines of the "here and now," and allows us to *imagine* and to *feel*. It’s a shared experience that provides a vehicle for travel beyond the temporal boundaries of our linear existence.

The artist creates a work and then we then create our

own interpretation. In the process we become a part of the work, and we also become artists ourselves. That the original artist may be long dead is irrelevant, because he or she is still communicating with us through their work.

Marcel Duchamp expounded upon the nature of this relationship when he stated, “Let us consider two important factors, the two poles of the creation of art: the artist on one hand, and on the other the spectator who later becomes the posterity. To all appearances the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing.”¹⁷

In order to receive the message we have to open ourselves up to all of the possibilities that a painting, photograph, poem, or song present to us. As always with art, what it says to me might not be the same thing as what it says to you. The true importance lies in the inner conversation that it inspires us to have with ourselves. This is why I consider art, in all its myriad forms, to be one of the highest of callings in a world desperately in need of *real* communication and a new Enlightenment. Albert Camus had it right when he wrote, “A man's work is nothing but this slow trek to rediscover, through the detours of art, those two or three great and simple images in whose presence his heart first opened.”¹⁸

Filmmakers, painters and photographers know perhaps better than anyone the ability that images have when it comes to communicating an idea and spreading a meme. Indeed, some of the most powerful moments in my own films have come when I have used images to evoke a particular mood or feeling, sometimes in concert with dialogue, and sometimes without dialogue altogether. As the old saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Sound, particularly in the form of music, works the same way. For example, *Rusalka*, the classic opera by Antonín Dvořák, can move people simply by the power of the music and the performances on stage, even if the people watching can't understand Czech, the

¹⁷ Marcel Duchamp, “The Creative Act,” *Art News*, Summer 1957: 28–29.

¹⁸ Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Phillip Malcolm Waller Thody (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 17.

language in which it was written and is most often performed. When I saw a performance at the National Theatre in Prague in 2009, there were many times I simply stopped looking at the translation that was displayed on a screen above the stage because the music and the performances of the cast were enough to convey the meaning of what was happening to me, while at the same time allowing me to place my own interpretation on it. This is a perfect example of what William James was getting at in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* when he wrote, “Music gives us ontological messages which non-musical criticism is unable to contradict... there is a verge of the mind which these things haunt; and whispers therefrom mingle with the operations of our understanding, even as the waters of the infinite ocean send their waves to break among the pebbles that lie upon our shores.”¹⁹

One of my favorite examples of this combination of imagery and music can be found in John Boorman’s wonderful film *Excalibur*, which presented a highly stylized and mystical take on the ancient legend of King Arthur and the quest for the Holy Grail by the Knights of the Round Table. In Boorman’s version, a curse descends upon Arthur and his Kingdom is plagued with famine and disease. He sends his knights on a quest for the Grail in hopes of restoring the land and Sir Perceval encounters Lancelot, now a sort of holy man who preaches to followers that the kingdom has fallen because of “the sin of pride.” Perceval attempts to convince him to come to Arthur’s aid, but Lancelot and his followers throw Perceval into a river. Perceval then has a vision of the Grail during which he finally comes to understand that Arthur and the land are one. This realization allows him to obtain the Grail, which he takes to Arthur, who is near death. Perceval gives the Grail to Arthur, who drinks from it and is revitalized.

“Ready my knights for battle,” Arthur tells his brother Kay. “They will ride with their King once more. I have lived through others far too long. Lancelot carried my honor, and Guinevere my guilt. Mordred bore my sins, and my knights have fought my causes. Now, my brother, I shall be King!”

As Arthur and his knights leave Camelot and ride out into the

¹⁹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 459.

desolate landscape of the surrounding countryside, Carl Orff's "O Fortuna" from *Carmina Burana* begins to play. An extended sequence follows during which the land returns to life as Arthur and his knights travel through it – flowers bloom, the grass turns from brown to green, the clouds part and the sun shines through in a scene that is all imagery and music, tied together in what is in my opinion one of the most powerful and moving sequences in film history. It fires the imagination and the passions of the viewer, and it drives home the point that we may all be linked together, and not just with each other, but with the universe as a whole.²⁰

This idea of the paranormal as art also goes a long way to explaining why there have been so many variations over the years in terms of encounters. As Greg Bishop wrote in 2007:

Whatever it is that is behind the UFOs (and other assorted subjects we assign to the category of the "paranormal") do not want to be pigeonholed. To those that pay attention, the "art exhibit" is ever-changing, and hits close to home: fear, joy, wonder, inquisitiveness, and of course sex are all part of the mix.²¹

We can see something comparable by examining how themes and variations work within music.

In 2003 and 2004 I produced and directed a television series called *The Classical Now* for Bravo here in Canada. The series featured some of Canada's best young classical musicians and composers performing and talking about their lives and their work. In one of the episodes we set up a segment where the host, Will Fraser, stood next to the piano as pianist Ian Parker explained how a single basic melody could be subtly modified by different composers to achieve an entirely new result.

"The one theme that I really love to talk about all the time," Ian stated at the beginning, "is the one that's the most borrowed, and

²⁰ *Excalibur*, directed by John Boorman (Orion Pictures, 1981). Film.

²¹ Greg Bishop, "UFOs as a Cosmic Art Exhibit," *UFO Mystic*, 29 September 2007. www.ufomystic.com/2007/09/29/ufo-art-2/.

that's the twenty-fourth caprice written by the violinist Paganini."

Ian then proceeded to play the short basic theme from the caprice.

"What most often happens with this melody," he explained, "is a set of variations will follow once it's stated. Composers such as Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Liszt, have all borrowed this melody, and written many variations on it."

Ian focused on the 18th variation in D major by Rachmaninoff, which was written for piano and orchestra.

"We always hear this piece when you're on hold trying to book an airplane ticket, or whatever it is, and many people ask, 'so, where did Rachmaninoff get this melody? It's clear that he borrowed Paganini's for most of the piece, but where did this one come from?' For the longest time, I didn't know what to tell them until someone finally told me to turn Paganini's original melody upside down, speed it up a bit, and change the key. This is how Rachmaninoff made the melody – he reversed Paganini's original, majored it, and then moved it up a couple of intervals."

"What about one of the pieces that you're playing in the show today," asked Will. "Does the B Minor sonata by Liszt have themes which work in this way?"

"Great example," replied Ian. "Very near the beginning, there's this diabolical suggestion in the melody, a really, really nasty, devilish little melody in the bass. And then quite soon in the piece, this beautiful, heavenly melody comes in. These are two completely different melodies, but I had a professor who asked me once, 'how are these melodies related?' I didn't see the relationship, and she said, 'Well, why don't you play the pretty one a little faster?' So I did, and then I realized it was the same melody. For the longest time I had been telling my audience that they were melodies 1 and 2, when in fact they were actually melodies 1A and 1B."²²

If there *is* an advanced non-human intelligence behind the paranormal, it may utilize these same tools of imagery and sound to tell a story, or to convey a message, in a way that we are capable of processing at the time, if not always completely understanding. And

²² *The Classical Now*, "Ian Parker," directed by Paul Kimball (Halifax: Redstar Films Limited, 2004). Television. www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHSobdJplco.

as with Ian Parker’s example of Paganini, Rachmaninoff and Liszt, their “art” may change with the times, but the themes remain the same. Perhaps ancient reports of winged flying creatures such as dragons, or something like Ezekiel’s Wheel in the Old Testament, are earlier versions of the same melody as the modern UFO meme, played to a different audience.²³

As a former musician myself, I’m well aware that there is another aspect of this concept of variation in performance. I wrote a song called “Mysterio” that was very popular with local audiences in my hometown of Halifax, and which became a sort of signature tune for both of my bands. After playing it the same way for a couple of years, however, I decided that a new arrangement was needed in order to keep it fresh, both for us and for the audience. We eventually wound up playing it many different ways – slower, faster, longer, shorter, and then in different styles, from country to rock, folk, and even a sort of jazz version at one point. In part it depended on the audience, and in part it depended on our mood, but in many ways every time we played that song there was a co-creation of a new version.

Performance art in many ways goes even further than the power of images or sound. It creates a shared experience between the performer and the observer that is both immediate and unique, because no two performances are ever the same.²⁴ It also transcends the moment

²³ For a thought-provoking look at how ancient Biblical stories may represent contact with an advanced non-human intelligence from elsewhere in the galaxy, see Rev. Barry Downing’s classic study, *The Bible and Flying Saucers* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1968). I also recommend a short clip of an interview I conducted with Rev. Downing in 2001, wherein he discusses UFOs and religion, which I have posted on-line at: <http://goo.gl/3wyOK>.

²⁴ I attended a performance of the hit musical *Wicked* at the Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles in late 2008. At one point in the second act the character of Fiyero is supposed to run on stage and save Elphaba (the green witch). At the performance I saw, Derrick Williams, the actor playing Fiyero, stumbled and fell as he ran out on stage for the scene. You could see him smile, but then he pulled himself up and worked the fall into his performance without breaking character. The other actors went with him as he ad-libbed, and the result was a brilliant and unique moment of forced improvisation that those of us there that night shared with the cast.

because the participatory aspect on the part of the observer indelibly etches the experience in the memory. Actors and musicians who perform on stage know this better than anyone. Frank Zappa got it right when he stated, “Music, in performance, is a type of sculpture. The air in the performance is sculpted into something.”²⁵

I played so many gigs in the 1990s with my bands Tall Poppies and Julia’s Rain that I lost count. While I can still listen to the albums we recorded, because there is a permanence to them, the thrill of playing live is something that only exists in my memory. A couple of those performances were videotaped, but watching them now isn’t the same as having been there at the time. The crowd provided an energy that we fed off as musicians and that was then returned to them by a performance that increased in intensity as a result. It was a true symbiosis. Bruce Springsteen, legendary for his marathon live performances, described those kinds of moments in a 1975 interview. “This music is forever for me,” he stated. “It’s the stage thing, that rush moment that you live for. It never lasts, but that’s what you live for.”²⁶

I did the same thing in 2007 when I adapted and directed for stage a version of Peter Weiss’ play *Marat / Sade*. Coincidentally, a local university dramatic society staged a version of the play just two weeks before ours, so I went to see it with Kris McBride, one of the actors in my version. The students did a standard take on the play where the fourth wall remained intact and the text was treated as sacrosanct.

With my version I threw the original text into a blender and turned the play on its head. I added elements from pop music, Shakespeare, the war poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and myriad other sources, all designed to enhance the revolutionary themes. Then I surrounded the audience itself with the characters so that they were the “street” as the revolution formed around them and amongst them. In one corner, under a red light, I had Kris clad as a prostitute who

²⁵ Frank Zappa, *Music Quotes Homepage & Commentary*, ed. Richard and Bonnett Chandler. <http://goo.gl/o42Vm>.

²⁶ Jay Cocks, “The Backstreet Phantom of Rock.” *Time*, 27 October 1975.

would wander out into the audience and proposition people, even when she wasn't involved in a scene. The characters of Marat and Sade spent most of their time on stage, but when Marat delivered his speech to the National Assembly the actor left the bath-tub in which he spent the majority of the play, walked through the audience to a podium, and then addressed them as if *they* were the Assembly.

There was a scene I added where a General directly quoted the speeches of Patton and Montgomery from the Second World War about honor, loyalty and service. He then encountered a shell-shocked homeless Veteran, whom he brutally beat whilst they stood in the midst of the audience. I wanted the people who paid to see the show to not only hear about the revolution, but to feel like they were part of it in a way that would be relevant to our circumstances today. Not everyone "got" it, but that wasn't the point. I set out to challenge the audience as much as possible, to engage my own artistic impulses (and those of the cast), and to push the boundaries of our collective expectations.²⁷

It's possible that an advanced non-human intelligence "feeds" off this interaction with "the crowd" in the same way that musicians and stage actors do – they perform, we respond, they ramp up the intensity, and the cycle continues. As is the case with all good artists, they change the work over time, and add different interpretations. They also create new works, and perhaps even entirely different genres. Just as I did years ago when I slung a Fender telecaster over my shoulder and hit the first chord on a song, or when I staged a

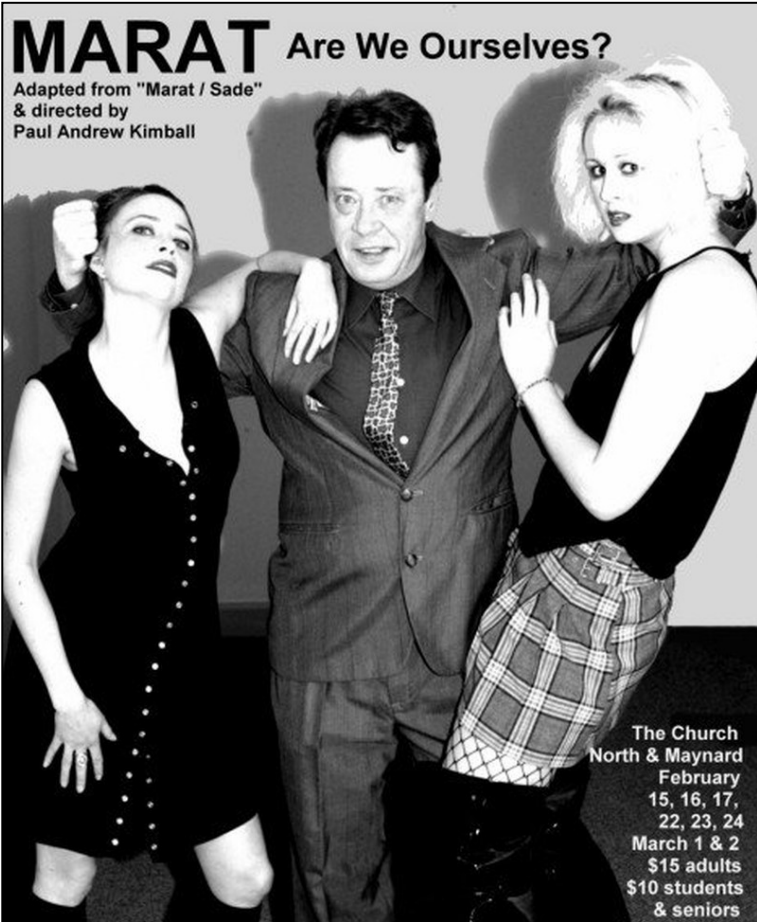
²⁷ Ron Foley MacDonald, "A 21st Century Marat," *InfoMonkey*, 23 February 2007. <http://goo.gl/Hr7wd>. MacDonald wrote: "Director/Adaptor Paul Kimball and Le Theatre de Boheme have drifted sufficiently far enough away from Peter Weiss' famous play Marat/Sade for the production to distill the title down to 'Marat' and drop any pretences of resembling the famous Peter Brook production of the play. The result is a fascinating – and strikingly original – take on what can only be described as one of the great artifacts of 1960s anti-theatre [that] sports some very focused acting, along with quite a bit of inspired direction. By dropping most of the self-conscious bombast, adding pop culture elements from music by Aaron Copland and Ravel to snatches of World War One poetry to speeches from Shakespeare's Henry V and Francis Ford Coppola's script for the movie Patton, Kimball has loosened up the tightly constricting scripture of Marat/Sade... Ultimately, that makes it a much different and far more relevant play."

brutal arrest scene in the midst of the audience in *Marat*, an advanced non-human intelligence could be seeking to elicit a reaction from us, and to even involve us as co-creators in their works of art.

This could be the true nature of “contact.” Maybe they are finishing our sentences for us and starting new ones at the same time, subtly leading us into new and different ways of thinking, all through a form of artistic communication that exists in two places – at a level somewhere between our conscious and our subconscious minds, in dreams and visions, but also right in front of us.

MARAT Are We Ourselves?

Adapted from "Marat / Sade"
& directed by
Paul Andrew Kimball



The Church
North & Maynard
February
15, 16, 17,
22, 23, 24
March 1 & 2
\$15 adults
\$10 students
& seniors

The poster for my adaptation of Peter Weiss' *Marat / Sade*, which was a radical departure from Weiss' original script. Perhaps an advanced non-human intelligence constantly re-invents their "art" in similar ways, and for the same reason – to challenge both the audience and the artist. In the poster, from left to right, are Erin Lynch, Sandy MacLean, and Kris Lee McBride.



A filmmaker has many tools that can be employed to evoke a mood or an emotion without the need for dialogue. In this scene from my feature film *Eternal Kiss*, we used both lighting and wardrobe cues to underscore the essence of Christina Cuffari's character, a sexually and emotionally repressed lawyer who finds herself in the thrall of a vampire. A good actor also has their own non-verbal ways to make an impression on an audience, as Christina did by using her facial expressions and body language. I suspect an advanced non-human intelligence employs similar visual methods when communicating with us.



One of my favorite modern artists is Stephanie Steele, who hails from the small town of Louisbourg, Nova Scotia. Her work is eclectic, and sometimes contains themes with what I see as a hint of a supernatural feel to them. (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Steele)



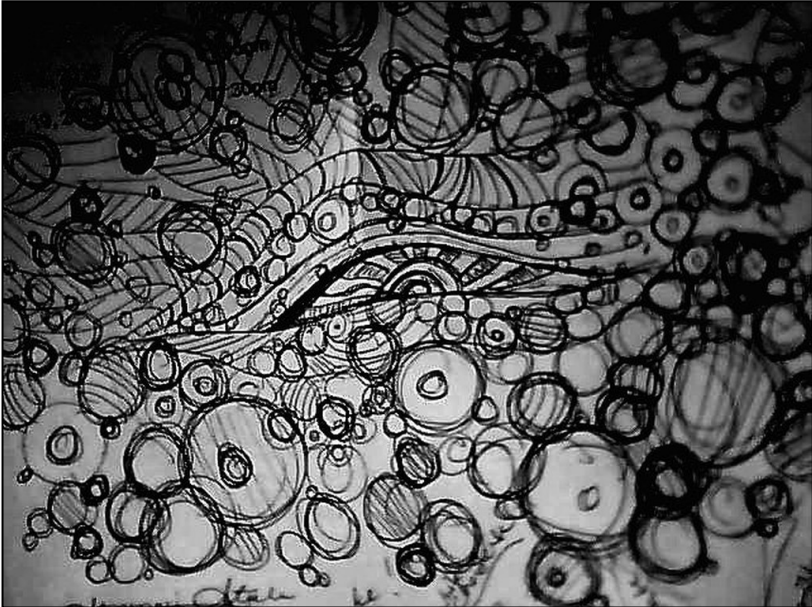
Just a flower... or is it something more? Consider the interaction of the lines and the shapes within the petal. Wheels within wheels. (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Steele)



One of my favorite pieces by Stephanie, a collage of images making use of the word “art” with the message “Another Random Thought.” In the seeming randomness, however, lies a pattern, at least to me – others may see something completely different. (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Steele)



The artist as part of the work itself. Notice how Stephanie tosses the “come hither” look back at the viewer, even as the “graffiti monster” is looking at her. Might not an advanced non-human intelligence insert itself into its art in a similar manner? Would we follow if it did? (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Steele)



Of all the moving parts in this piece by Stephanie which one catches your attention first, and why? Each of us will have different reasons for coming up with a different answer; thus has the artist, through a single painting, underscored both our connectivity (we're all looking at the same thing), and our individuality (we're all seeing something different). I think an advanced non-human intelligence would interact with us in the same way. (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Steele)



Stephanie's representation of the most intimate of human acts. I wonder if something similar happens when an advanced non-human intelligence interacts with us, the ultimate form of artistic co-creation. Do we become ravished by "God," as Henry Alline put it in the late 18th century, or by "aliens," as we might regard them today – and would it happen in the "real" world, or somewhere in our subconscious, perhaps even in our dreams? (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Steele)