

**Piotr URBANOWICZ**

*Performativity Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland*

## MESSIANISM AND UFO SIGHTINGS AS COUNTERFACTUAL STRATEGIES OF ENCHANTMENT OF THE WORLD

**Summary.** In this text, I argue that there are numerous affinities between 19<sup>th</sup> century messianism and testimonies of UFO sightings, both of which I regarded as forms of secular millennialism. The common denominator for the comparison was Max Weber's concept of "disenchantment of the world" in the wake of the Industrial Revolution which initiated the era of the dominance of rational thinking and technological progress. However, the period's counterfactual narratives of enchantment did not repudiate technology as the source of all social and political evil—on the contrary, they variously redefined its function, imagining a possibility of a new world order. In this context, I analysed the social projects put forward by Polish Romantics in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with emphasis on the role of technology as an agent of social change. Similarly, the imaginary technology described by UFO contactees often has a redemptive function and is supposed to bring solution to humanity's most dangerous problems.

**Keywords:** messianism, millennialism, Romanticism, UFO, disenchantment of the world.

### INTRODUCTION: PERSPECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND BASIC DEFINITIONS

In the present paper, I attempt to trace the relationship between Polish messianism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and testimonies of UFO sightings. The former was a philosophical strand, originating in Polish Romanticism and merging historicism, utopian thinking, and futurological speculation. Born in the time of the partition of the country and the failure of the Polish national project, messianism, in many respects, evinced counterfactual features. Messianists, ignoring facts, attempted to establish "objective truths", thus aiming to create an alternative reality. It might seem controversial to seek correspondences between messianic philosophy and UFO testimonies from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I will go in the direction indicated by Michael Barkun, who compared conspiracy theories about UFO to both religious and secular forms of millennialism.<sup>1</sup> However, in this context I would like to introduce reflection on media and the changes of modernity, in order to understand the function of counterfactual strategies. This comparison provides a background against which I would like to discuss

that which, drawing on Max Weber's concept, I understand as "enchantment of the world"—a discursive strategy originating in Romanticism and still present in today's culture. Therefore, although concentrating on a narrow range of phenomena, I address a wider topic: I show how Romanticism keeps on living, exerts its influence on contemporary culture, and engenders social phenomena. To demonstrate this continuity, I also give attention to contemporary digital media which have come to function as a major outlet for new messianic ideologies. I believe that by taking media into account it is possible to trace the genealogy of contemporary counterfactual tendencies (as manifested, for example, in testimonies of UFO sightings) to Romantic strategies of the "enchantment of the world".

To provide a background for drawing parallels between the two historically distant phenomena, I will start by analysing some aspects of technological determinism in a comparative perspective. The question of technology is crucial to understanding the process of disenchantment as defined by Weber.<sup>2</sup> The dissemination of inventions introduced during the scientific revolution and wide acceptance of the

capitalist system led to reification and quantification of the world. Consequently, as Weber argues, all “irrational” social relations were negated in the process called “rationalization”.<sup>3</sup> Science, which uses abstract notions and ratiocination, acquired a new cultural value, with technology as its crowning achievement. The scientific revolution and capitalism turned rational calculation into a widespread method of social communication, simultaneously marginalizing the formerly dominant religious ethics. Weber, however, noticed that the sphere of the sacred did not entirely disappear from cultural practices. Rather, it was assimilated and integrated within modernity. Rationality became firmly rooted in the modern paradigm of rationalization because of sacralisation of scientific and capitalist procedures by protestant denominations.<sup>4</sup>

The salient presence of technology in social life provided a point of departure for messianic programs which attempted to integrate technology into social life and thus to “re-enchanted” it. Polish Romanticism, which, as is commonly accepted<sup>5</sup>, lasted from 1822 until 1864, coincides with the Industrial Revolution and shares with it numerous characteristics. From reestablishment of institutions of higher education to new methods of work management and slow industrialisation of the partitioned country—all these phenomena were reflected in utopian messianic programs. Likewise, the question of technology is also critical for understanding the UFO sightings in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unidentified flying objects were allegedly sighted all around the globe, but the phenomenon became particularly widespread in the United States right after the second world war. I am particularly interested in the common trait of messianism and testimonies about UFO sightings: the idea of machines as a medium of historical change. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the function of such imaginary visions was primarily to alleviate anxiety in the face of the risk of nuclear war<sup>6</sup>, which the American society experienced during the Cold War.

My argument is that both the 19<sup>th</sup> century messianism and 20<sup>th</sup> century UFO sightings were consequences of rapid reorganisation of social life due to technological development. I would like to stress that I do not consider these two phenomena

“irrational”. Rather, they should be treated as compensatory interpretative strategies, indicative of cultural crises. Agata Bielick-Robson has pointed out that it was Romanticism which faced the “rationalization” crisis and expressed the need to create new machines, inventions, and scientific theories within the framework of a new philosophy of subjectivity:

Right from the outset, Romanticism was a model of modern identity, driven not so much by a vision of a return to the pre-modern era—or, as the Enlightenment tradition would have it, of negation of modernisation—but rather a vision of what it means to be a modern human.<sup>7</sup>

This quote from Bielick-Robson’s work resonates with Andrzej Walicki’s statement that Polish messianism was a secular form of millennialism which tried to embrace new experiences caused by rapid civilizational development during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>8</sup> Polish messianism, with its counterfactual vision of Poland as a messiah of nations, resembles closely the messianic agenda underlying the first UFO sightings in the United States. This parallel, which places Romantic messianism at the root of contemporary secular millennialist movements, can be regarded as supportive of Michael Barkun’s claim that “disenchantment of the world” began with dissolution of religious monoliths in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to him, millennialism lost its religious character in response to challenges of modernity:

By the late eighteenth century, however, a second form of millennialism was developing, unconnected to religious concepts. This consisted of secular visions of a perfect future—ideas propelled by faith in transcendent but not conventionally religious forces. These forces were sometimes identified with reason, and sometimes with science or history.<sup>9</sup>

The American scholar present contemporary accounts of UFO sightings as forms of millennialism.<sup>10</sup> This post-religious character of UFO correlates to Weber’s claim that the religious sphere reinstated itself in the empirical world. This argument is further corroborated by Bronislaw

Szerszynski, who espoused Michel Foucault's theory of biopolitics to demonstrate that, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, a process of administering biological life was taking place, aiming at "perpetuation of biological existence, of life itself, which became the location of the sacred."<sup>11</sup> According to Szerszynski, the transcendent axis—a critical concept in monotheistic religions—was not so much expelled beyond secular culture as pulled into the assumedly empirical world which came into being by its ejection.<sup>12</sup> The shift of the transcendent axis from the level of social norms to the individual one was particularly salient in discourses about nature and technology. As Szerszynski argues:

(...) the sublimity of the monotheistic God—his supra-human grandeur, his indifference to the interests and projects of individual humans—is transferred not only to nature but also on technology, as the human capacity to transform the world starts to be seen not just as the ability to meet empirical needs but a quasi-salvational collective project.<sup>13</sup>

This description applies to many messianists who created utopian visions of technological progress. Endowing technology with the ability to transgress the empirical order of things is characteristic of the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century, while transcendence of rational order featured prominently as a theme in Romantic literature. Suffice it to mention Adam Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* (1822), a play which was a significant reference point for messianists in the 1840s. In this play in four parts, a figure of a ghost appears as an expression of faith in the possibility of transcendental transgression of the existing order to institute historical justice. In messianism, these ghosts will take a more palpable, technological shape. Ghost-media, which make it possible to introduce order in chaos, are forerunners of 20<sup>th</sup>-century aliens. This continuity further supports the validity of a comparative analysis of messianism and UFO sightings.

Before I go on to characterize the significance of contemporary media for both messianists and UFO witnesses, I should define my understanding of counterfactuality. I draw on the concept of modern identity put forward by Anthony Giddens

because some aspects of "disenchantment of the world" can be identified in his theory. When defining modernity, Giddens emphasizes that in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when societies fully embraced the developments of the industrial revolution and capitalism found stable ground, processes began which uprooted the individual from local forms of social life.<sup>14</sup> Such phenomena as the ousting of local circulations of knowledge in favour of expert systems, the onset of new symbolic values (such as capital), and the separation of time from space initiated the process of globalisation and radically altered human identity.<sup>15</sup> What is particularly significant for Giddens is that people came to experience the world in a mediated way – not by tools or language, but by special caste of experts governing the risk. That mediation is experienced as discontinuity. Drawing on Ulrich Beck's works<sup>16</sup>, he argues that social risk replaced the firm foundations of knowledge about social and natural world, a change which "is not only disturbing to philosophers but is existentially troubling for ordinary individuals."<sup>17</sup> Existential anxiety caused by the upheaval of traditional order based on certainty is characteristic of an individual's functioning in the modern world. Lack of trust in expert systems, caused by fear of losing control and influence over one's own life, leads to "counterfactual speculation" among non-experts; according to Giddens, "the self becomes a reflexive project."<sup>18</sup> It means that the self bases its choices on autonomous decisions.

Giddens draws on the notion of "providential reason"<sup>19</sup>, which characterized premodern civilisation. He juxtaposes it with the concept of risk, typical of modernity. The latter took the place of belief that "the course of events is in some way preordained"<sup>20</sup>. Although Giddens does not discuss this concept in detail, it is crucial for my argument. In my view providential reason links with counterfactuality. It is a psychological strategy which counters risk and, by creating a vision of a super-empirical order, restores a sense of security in a subject. However, in the world of risk, self-management is not rational—it depends on affect, oftentimes originates in fear, and makes an individual independently look for explanations, which leads to speculation. In broad terms, such counterfactuality consists in using personal

knowledge to speculate about historical, economic, and political processes. Speculation restores peace of mind because it alleviates anxiety. Counterfactual thinking therefore becomes a means of defence against expert systems. It compensates for overreliance on experts and creates an effect of freedom. Moreover, speculative thinking is at its root directed against teleology of sciences and endows existence with meaning and aim due to “providential reason”. Looking for providential logic in a given sequence of historical events was typical of messianists, who tried to endow the demise of Polish statehood at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with counterfactual meaning.

#### COUNTERFACTUAL STRATEGIES OF POLISH MESSIANISTS

Let us take a closer look at Antoni Bukaty, the figure most representative of the fate of messianists and their worldview. Born in 1808, he took part in the Polish November Uprising of 1830 and then emigrated to Paris, where he studied in the School of Roads and Bridges. For a while, he worked in Canada, building railways. After his return to Paris he became a disciple of Józef Hoene-Wroński, a mathematician and philosopher who, from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, developed messianic ideas founded on a doctrine of unification of scientific knowledge based on mathematical principles. In Bukaty’s biography, the fundamental characteristics of messianic ideologies come together: metaphysical historicism, concern about national community, and belief in technological progress. All three converged in his project of locomobiles on caterpillar track—arguably a prototype of tanks—which he submitted to Prince Adam Czartoryski in 1841, hoping that the invention might have a potential military use. The project developed from another design, the “live wheel”, on which Hoene-Wroński had worked since the early 1830s. Bukaty drew not only on Wroński’s ideas but also on his synthetic approach to science. He imagined that inventing a new weapon should give Poland the upper hand over the occupying countries and thus lead to liberation.<sup>21</sup>

The animisation in the name “live wheel” exemplifies a strategy adopted by messianists who emphasised

the roles of both technology at the service of nations and science contributing to the development of humankind. A case in point is Bukaty’s work *Pol-ska w apostazji i apoteozie* (*Poland in Apostasy and Apotheosis*), published in Paris in 1842. Any interpretation of this text is not an easy task, because the author uses numerous neologisms, his argument is permeated with emotional rhetoric, and he claims that all his philosophical insights result from an epiphany. The book is devoted to a vague “ethnological problem”, which can be summarised as the question of relationships between nations which make it impossible to reach Goodness and Truth, desired endpoints of civilizational progress.<sup>22</sup> To understand Bukaty’s views, one needs to remember that he worked in a situation of considerable political repressions after the fall of the November Uprising. The partitioning of Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the most telling example of this arrested progress of history. Bukaty connected abstract ideas with his experience of life as an immigrant. His hostility towards Russians who forced him to emigrate to the West is expressed in the “ethnographic” thesis about the superiority of Polish over Russian nation. This conflict between Poland and the superpowers that occupied it was for Bukaty a universal problem. The process of reaching the awareness that Poles are predestined to revitalize the existing international relations based on violence is identified with the process of universalisation observable on multiple levels. Firstly, universalisation takes place naturally, it is an autonomous force of history. Secondly, Bukaty thought of universalisation as ascent of Humans towards Humanity, with ascent of Nation towards Humanity as an intermediary stage. He considered a nation to be a proper representation of a human being. Only the morally superior can understand the universal truth: Poland must be liberated at any cost. For this reason, Bukaty claimed that the moment of full universalisation is a secularised moment of the Apocalypse. This notion, just like many others, was a result of merging theological and scientific terminologies, both inscribed in transcendental logic. A choice of such hybrid narrative is also strictly connected with the mission which Bukaty entrusts to language:



Nation equalized with Humanity must work on its Language, so as to get elevated by it ... up to the point of determined elevated movement in Humanity—to reach absolute identification of Nation with It: therefore, it has to develop until it determines itself in a mathematical-logical way, with respect to the universality of representation meeting the conditions of sufficiency for equalizing Nation with Humanity. Obviously, mathematical-vocal language should suffice for this task.<sup>23</sup>

Accordingly, we can conclude that this mathematical language is instrumental in conducting a moral revolution and to understand universal laws governing the “ethnologic” hierarchy of nations. Bukaty, drawing on Johann Fichte’s philosophy, claimed that a human being can only become an autonomous subject in an act of self-knowledge, in which the sensual self is merged with the absolute self, also called “virtual”.<sup>24</sup> He wrote: “The ultimate aim of man is self-creation.”<sup>25</sup> Self-creation must become a massive phenomenon, so that it gains historical agency. For this reason, Bukaty emphasised Nation as a natural and primal form of collectivity. For a prophet, it is language that becomes instrumental in reaching transcendence, on condition that it first undergoes radical reform. Universalizing language—the postulate that Bukaty, according to himself, carried out with a vengeance—allowed him to put into practice other postulates concerning the process of universalisation. Polish language was to fulfil this function. In a quite convoluted passage, Bukaty draws a distinction between Polish and Russian languages. The former expresses “the ‘I’ which spreads the absolute,” whereas the latter expresses the “‘you’ that gives ground to despotism.”<sup>26</sup> This opposition provided ideological justification for the political agenda of Polish emigrants gathered in a patriotic organisation Hotel Lambert, which strove to weaken the power of the Russian Empire. This “scientific” concept sanctioned political practices. Bukaty was convinced that introduction of precisely defined concepts from the fields of building construction and economics should morally ennoble the nation. Mathematization of language

was supposed to provide a link between earthly life and the sphere of the absolute. When using symbols and scientific concepts, human beings get closer to the Universum, which Bukaty regarded as a set of principles governing the universe. The new language could also be instrumental in carrying out the planned reform of Science. As Bukaty wrote, the aim of the reform was to “universalize all branches of Science and give up the conviction that abstruse, wild, and dead specialisation is human destiny.”<sup>27</sup> In this veiled manner, Bukaty seems to announce a serious crisis of representation. While advocating “mathematical precision”,<sup>28</sup> he also criticises “unbridled lawlessness of principles” and “bloody rage of individual laws.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, his plan of reform of education also expresses his faith in moral reawakening through mathematization of language.

Bukaty’s conceptual framework provides an example of a strategy of treating *a posteriori* knowledge as *a priori* knowledge, a typical attitude of all messianists of his era. A need to introduce Slavs into international political arena motivated Bukaty and other thinkers, among them Adam Mickiewicz, to present subjective opinions as deriving from *The Supreme Law* (Hoene-Wroński used this notion and even tried to provide it with mathematical proof). No “real” knowledge can be gained if it is not grounded in this Law. Bukaty’s comparative analysis of Polish and Russian languages provides a good illustration of *The Supreme Law*. Although it seems obvious that he was primarily driven by enmity towards the occupying nation, he claimed that his reasoning was based on scientific evaluation. *The Supreme Law* was to provide a *sine qua non* condition for the existence of every branch of science, and it was accessible only through divine revelation. Bukaty created a counterfactual world in which a prophet was the ultimate guardian of law.

*The Supreme Law* was supposed to lie at the core of the system of knowledge legitimized by Slavs, which should also have practical use. For this reason, messianists highly valued inventions. For example, Adam Mickiewicz, the leading Polish Romantic poet, quite unlike Heone-Wroński, Bukaty, and other Polish messianists, did not design actual inventions but included them in his poetic visions. Most

probably, he wrote about them in his *History of the Past*, a book that was lost and never found. We can only hypothesise about its contents based on what Antoni Odyniec, Mickiewicz's friend, wrote about it in his letters. Mickiewicz extolled the advantages of railway and imagined that by the year 2000 entire Europe will be covered by a network of rails: "All Earth will be covered by a network of rail... which, as Adam believes, has a great future in front of it and will undoubtedly change the world."<sup>30</sup> Mickiewicz was not alone in his excitement about railway. On the contrary, he expressed quite a common view—that railway offers a chance for European integration. The press of that period often ascribed it a crucial role in annulling both geopolitical and mental borders. One of the articles published at that time opined that "a great deal of inconveniences resulting from our geographic location will disappear, and human reason will triumph over obstacles which until recently seemed insurmountable."<sup>31</sup> The voice of romantic mysticism, which opted for erasure of borders and aimed for metaphysical unity, resonated with the enthusiasm of those who praised the potential of railway as the latest invention. These technological advancements (flying machines, telegraph, telescopes) were supposed to enhance communication, and it was Slavs who had been entrusted with this mission.

In his lectures given in the Parisian Collège de France, Mickiewicz also entrusted the Slavic nations with this mission. This series of lectures was "an ambitious attempt at reconciling religious spiritualism with a scientific world of 'matter and numbers.'"<sup>32</sup> Mickiewicz wanted to synthesise moral and philosophical teachings with achievements of sciences and historiography, which he conceived of in messianic terms. According to him, understanding the past makes it possible to foresee the future. The awaited European integration should come about as a result of an inevitable conflict of Slavic nations with Western Europe. In Parisian lectures, the mission of the Slavs is described as "bringing the primal tradition of 'the inborn sense of deity' to degenerate Europe."<sup>33</sup> Mickiewicz regarded the alienation to which Western world condemns its citizens as a result of the rejection of the idea of synthesis of human knowledge with morality:

Do not be seduced by the doctrine of specialisation, according to which our youth should strive only to improve the workings of industry. No one more than me is in awe of the miracles of industry and its glorious power which will ultimately reign supreme in the world. However, a much more significant matter is at stake: what spirit will make use of those immense industrial means, what spirit will rule the world.<sup>34</sup>

Mickiewicz, like Bukaty, postulated that all branches of industry should be ruled by Slavic spirit. Both believed that Slavs had a moral right to lead a rejuvenated and united European community. Both were convinced that this project should be carried out in the field of engineering, which can provide political advantage in a highly technologized world. Trying to put his ideas into practice, Mickiewicz took part in organising Polish Legions in Rome during the revolutions of 1848. Having returned to Paris, where he remained under supervision of police, in 1852 he secured a large part of his savings by entrusting them to a gifted Polish engineer. As Marek Dybizbański writes:

[Adam Mickiewicz] provided a loan guarantee in the Bank of Polish Emigration for Rudolf Majewski, who worked on a "machine for lighting and heating." As the poet's son claimed, giving the inventor his money (which he initially saved to buy a house on the outskirts of Paris!), Mickiewicz believed that "these inventions will make Poland famous."<sup>35</sup>

By the end of his life, Mickiewicz planned a revolution in Turkey, over which he tried to assume technological patronage. He also strongly supported the idea of synthesis of various branches of knowledge under Slavic supervision.

According to Bukaty, messianism could gain authority and power, if it joined forces with modern science. He regarded reform of scientific learning as instrumental in achieving the goal of Goodness and Truth. This should lead to a necessary Evaluation of nations—a secular, millenarian Last Judgement, which will provide an opportunity to recreate Poland.

Messiah was supposed to be a scientist who knows the Supreme Law. Bukaty tried very hard to convince his readers that this Law can be learned by scientific means, however, at the same time, he claimed that it is apprehended in epiphany. This brand of messianism was fundamentally reformulated from a scientific point of view and regarded technological development as the ultimate goal of all nations. For Mickiewicz, the hope of the coming of a messiah is grounded in historiosophy and literature. It should be an actual person, a great personality, a Slavic politician equal to Napoleon, capable of uniting all human knowledge. The supreme transcendental law can be accessed only by a prophet, therefore any attempt at presenting it in objective terms is condemned to failure. This feature of Polish Romanticism has been commented on by Agata Bielik-Robson:

The primeval fear of the influence of disenchanted world gave way to a full rhetorical compensation in the form of an idealist language of a triumphant subject. Romanticism, as an almost painful symptom of an illness, healed itself, finding cure in a prideful transcendental subjectivity.<sup>36</sup>

The prideful transcendental subjectivity was also a characteristic trait of American UFO prophets in the 1950s. Messianic epiphany was replaced by avowedly rational observation; however, just like in Bukaty's treatise, it resulted from counterfactuality, that is a reflexive use of "providential reason". The messianists awaited a quasi-divine saviour-engineer, a descendant of Slavs, while UFO-contactees regard UFOs as a (technological) power which should shake humanity out of its existential lethargy. Giddens's theory suggests a principle which makes it possible to explain why both messianism and testimonials of UFO sightings can be treated as counterfactual. In a secularised world, where information disjointed from time and space becomes the main medium shaping human experiences, what soars is mistrust of expert systems whose aim is to stabilize representation. Compartmentalisation of discourses of knowledge and means of legitimising them provokes the existentially weak subject to create visions which neutralise plurality and introduce

a holistic narrative about imminent liberation of the world. This, in turn, leads to a rise of alternative, metaphysical systems of knowledge.

#### POST-WAR UFO SIGHTINGS: ORFEO ANGELUCCI

My approach to UFO narratives has been influenced in equal measure by Michael Barkun and Carl Gustav Jung. As already mentioned, the former, analysing theories about UFOs, concluded that proponents of their existence are organized in structures reminiscent of sects which believe in an approaching Apocalypse. As Micheal Barkun argues, before the figure of an evil alien came into being—for example, in stories about abductions, rapes, and experiments on people, which appeared in press or television reports—UFOs were represented by contactees in a positive light. It symbolised a modern messiah who can tell good from evil and possesses technology which can prevent bloodshed. Considering the Cold War tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, UFO sightings, like modern-day epiphanies, might result from a counterfactual strategy of contactees, employed to alleviate anxieties. Such stories seem to make sense in the context of post-war arms race and threat of nuclear conflict.

Jung analysed the phenomenon of UFO in terms of projection, understood as representation which human psyche creates in place of conscious experience. As Jung argues, UFO "sheds light on the psychic compensation of the collective fear weighing on our hearts."<sup>37</sup> He adds that, after the Second World War, collective mental balance was lost, and anxiety rose. People looked at the sky in search of peace of mind and freedom from earthly dangers. Jung is convinced that man needs a coherent world-view, free from contradictions which cause psychological tension (and lead to mental problems). Therefore, he concludes, UFO is a new myth, because it reconciles opposites and provides a compensatory sense of closure. The drive towards closure functions as an effort to confirm the "metaphysical significance of the individual."<sup>38</sup> According to Jung, the shape of alien spaceships in stories about UFO sightings proves that these testimonies express a metaphysical need for closure. Typically, they are round like

archetypal mandala in the Hindu tradition, “as the «protective» or apotropaic circle, whether in the form of the prehistoric «sun wheel», or the magic circle, or the alchemical microcosm, or a modern symbol of order, which organizes and embraces the psychic totality.”<sup>39</sup> The function of mandala is to reconcile internal contradictions resulting from human fears and cognitive dissonances.

First testimonies of UFO sightings reminded of millenarian scenarios. A story told by Orfeo Angelucci, a contactee, is a representative case. The contact took place in May 1952. Angelucci saw a round, red spaceship in the sky. Realising that he is seeing a UFO, about which he knew from popular culture, he approached the object, which hovered above ground in a deserted area. When Angelucci was close to the vessel, it speedily steered away, leaving two smaller discs in its wake:

These objects were definitely circular in shape and of a soft, fluorescent green color. They streaked down directly in front of my car and hovered only a few feet away. I judged each to be about three feet in diameter. (...) Then, apparently coming from between those two eerie balls of green fire, I heard a masculine voice in strong, well-modulated tones and speaking perfect English (...) “Don’t be afraid, Orfeo, we are friends!”<sup>40</sup>

A friendly voice suggests that Angelucci drinks from a cup which emerges from behind the discs. The drink is not only delicious but also makes fear and pain go away. Angelucci recounts that between the discs, “within the luminous screen there appeared images of the heads and shoulders of two persons, as though in a cinema close-up. (...) Those two figures struck me as being the ultimate of perfection.”<sup>41</sup>

Significant in this story is the impact of cinema on Angelucci’s imagination. The figures which appeared on the screen seemed to observe him, but he clearly felt that their gaze is friendly, while the projection was to make him feel comfortable. Apparently, cinema greatly influenced the way the contactee represented aliens. As Cyndy Hendershot<sup>42</sup> and Susan Sontag<sup>43</sup> argued, in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, science-fiction cinema

had a particularly strong formative influence on social imagination. Cinema became a powerful medium of fantasies about possible scenarios of dissolving the war tension. The success of some of these narratives can be explained by their effectiveness in addressing the fantasies of cinemagoers about Soviet invasion and communist infiltration, fused with those about UFOs. Cinema provided metaphors and mythical scenarios which relieved the tension caused by the Cold War. Film industry used generic plotlines, conventional artistic strategies, and stereotypical figures of aliens. This type of cinema was to alleviate the fear of massive destruction, which atomic weaponry had caused and could potentially cause in the future. As Wiesław Godzic argues, this subject was extensively covered by film theorists after the Second World War, particularly by the French critics Serge Lebovici and Edgar Morin.<sup>44</sup> The former compared the spectator, who sits in an enclosed space confronted with imaginary scenes, to a dreamer. The latter, in his book *The Stars*, wrote: “the movies, machines for doubling life, summon the heroic and amorous myths to incarnation on the screen, start again the old imaginary processes of identification and projection from which gods are born.”<sup>45</sup> In this passage he compares film stars to gods, suggesting that the new cinematic culture, originating in Hollywood, draws on mythological scenarios. Godzic encapsulates this problem in the following way:

According to Edgar Morin’s concept, the mechanism of projection and identification is the fundamental driving force of the cinema: what he calls natural human perception projects desires and fears onto objects and people. In cinema this projection, a fundamental phenomenon of human psyche, is additionally strengthened and directed.<sup>46</sup>

In his story, Angelucci used motifs from the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, which premièred a year before, in 1951. It tells a story of a representative of an alien civilisation, named Klaatu, who comes to Earth to warn humanity against the pernicious politics of violence after the Second World War. This is a clear reference to the arms race which began in 1949, when Soviets carried out their first successful nuclear test, letting the world know that they take



up the challenge posed by Harry Truman's administration. In the film, Klaatu warns humans that all civilisations have agreed on a code of conduct according to which all planets which reject peaceful coexistence shall be destroyed. The similarities between this fictional character and Neptune, the alien from Angelucci's story, are obvious:

When he turned I saw his face, the same wonderful, expressive countenance I had seen on the luminous screen. I again noticed especially his extremely large, dark and expressive eyes and nobility and beauty of his features which actually seemed to radiate warmth and kindness. Then I noticed that he was wearing a kind of uniform, bluish in color, perfectly tailored and tightly fitted to the outlines of his body. But it was apparently without seams, buttons, pockets, trimmings or design of any sort. In fact it fitted so perfectly that it was almost like a part of his body.<sup>47</sup>

Both aliens are impeccably dressed and speak perfect English, which they learned solely for the purpose of communicating with humans, observing them from afar for many years. They went to such lengths to warn the inhabitants of Earth and to reveal to them the meaning of life. The story about the destiny of humankind, which Neptune told to Angelucci, is nearly identical to the one from the film:

That planet was the original home of Earthlings. In their native home they knew no pain, sorrow, suffering, sickness or death. But in the glory and wonder of their world they grew proud and arrogant. They made war among themselves and finally turned against the Great Giver of Life. Ultimately they destroyed their own planet which today exists only as a sterile and barren ring of asteroids and debris in the solar system. In order that those entities might gain understanding, compassion and brotherly love they were born into the animalistic, material evolution of a lesser planet, Earth. Suffering, sorrow, frustration and death became their teacher. ... They will have learned understanding, compassion and true love for God and their fellows.<sup>48</sup>

Just like Klaatu said, peace is the condition of the further existence of the planet. Otherwise, it will be destroyed. However, in Angelucci's story, an eschatological motif appears. Contrary to the alien from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, Neptune does not resemble a representative of the United Nations—he is more like a messiah who has come to Earth to remind humans about Christian ethos and, at the same time, assure them that their souls will break free from the atomic prison that their planet has turned into.

Summing up, despite all differences between messianism and testimonies of UFO sightings, they can be both treated as attempts at "enchaining the world". This category should not be identified with return to nature and rejection of technology. The relationship between technology and subjectivity in messianic philosophy and 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology is much more complex. Messianists regarded technology as a significant element of their utopian visions and an instrument of salvation. This way of describing technology is typical of contemporary testimonies of UFO sightings, which can be understood as a strategy of romanticising technology. The very name Unidentified Flying Object points to limitations of rational and empirical scientific methodologies. Therefore, UFOs are a phenomenon typical of risk societies, and they are born the moment science cannot protect human existence. In contactees' testimonies, technology gains sacred meaning which provides consolation and certainty, and brings them close to Bukaty's and Mickiewicz's messianic epiphanies.

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- <sup>6</sup> Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture At the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Cyndy Hendershot, *Paranoia, the Bomb and the 1950's Science-Fiction Films* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999); Susan Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster” *Commentary* (October 1965), 42–48.
- <sup>7</sup> Agata Bielik-Robson, *Duch powierzchni. Rewizja romantyczna i filozofia* (Cracow: Universitas, 2004), 50.
- <sup>8</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *Filozofia a mesjanizm. Studia z dziejów filozofii i myśli społeczno-religijnej romantyzmu polskiego*, (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1970), 292.
- <sup>9</sup> Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy. Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (University of California Press, 2003), 16.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: chapter “Millennialism, Conspiracy, and Stigmatized Knowledge”.
- <sup>11</sup> Bronisław Szerszynski, *Nature, Technology and the Sacred* (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 21.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.
- <sup>14</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 22.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>16</sup> Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, transl. by Mark Ritter (Sage Publications 1992).
- <sup>17</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 32.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>21</sup> „Antoni Bukaty” in *Filozofia i myśl społeczna w latach 1831–1864*, ed. by Andrzej Walicki, Adam Sikora (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe 1977), 171.
- <sup>22</sup> Antoni Bukaty, *Polska w apostazji, czyli w tak zwanym russo-sławianizmie i w apoteozie czyli w tak zwanym gallo-kosmopolityzmie jako warunkach założenia i rozwiązywania problemu etnologicznego w praktyce i wiedzy* (Paryż: L. Niedźwiedzki, 1842), 8.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.
- <sup>30</sup> Antoni Odyniec, *Listy z podróży*, ed. Marian Toporowski (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1961), 42.
- <sup>31</sup> Quoted in Wojciech Tomasik, *Inna droga. Romantycy i kolej* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2012), 33.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy. Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (University of California Press, 2003).
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- <sup>32</sup> Marek Dybizbański, *Romantyczna futurologia* (Kraków: TPPK, 2005), 268.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.
- <sup>34</sup> Zofia Trojanowiczowa, „Uwagi o Mickiewiczowskich wizjach przyszłości” in *Romantyzm. Od poetyki do polityki. Interpretacje i materiały* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 263.
- <sup>35</sup> Dybizbański, 277–278.
- <sup>36</sup> Agata Bielik-Robson, „Syndrom romantyczny: Stanisław Brzozowski i rewizja romantyzmu” *Słupskie Prace Filologiczne. Seria Filologia Polska* vol. 5 (2007), 59.
- <sup>37</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, *Flying Saucers. A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Skies* [1958] transl. Richard F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 81.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.
- <sup>40</sup> Orfeo Angelucci, *The Secret of the Saucers*, red. Ray Palmer (Amherst Press, 1955), 3–5.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>42</sup> Cyndy Hendershot, *Paranoia, the Bomb and the 1950's Science-Fiction Films* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999).
- <sup>43</sup> Susan Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster” *Commentary* (October 1965), 42–48.
- <sup>44</sup> Wiesław Godzic, *Film i psychoanaliza: problem widza* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1991), 23–48.
- <sup>45</sup> Edgar Morin, *The Stars* [1957], transl. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 82.
- <sup>46</sup> Wiesław Godzic, 40.
- <sup>47</sup> Orfeo Angelucci, 42.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

**Piotr URBANOWICZ**

*Jogailos universitetas, Krokuva, Lenkija*

## MESIANIZMAS IR NSO KAIP KONTR(A)FAKTINĖ ŽAVĖJIMOSI PASAULIU STRATEGIJA

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad XIX amžiaus mesianizmą ir NSO stebėjimų liudijimus sieja giminingas ryšys, tad teksto autorius šiuos du reiškinius traktuoja kaip pasaulinį (visa apimantį) atgimimą ir atpirkimą. Straipsnyje aktualizuojamas teiginys gali būti lyginamas su Maxo Weberio nuoroda, jog industrinės revoliucijos pradžioje pasaulis praranda savo žavesį, pradeda dominuoti racionalus mąstymas bei sukonstruojamas technologinio progreso konceptas. Vis dėlto kontr(a)faktiniais naratyvais, kuriais prieštaraujama šiam žavėjimosi pasauliu nyksmui, nepripažįstama, jog technologija yra visa apimantis socialinio ir politinio blogio šaltinis. Priešingai, šiais kontr(a)faktiniais naratyvais siekiama iš naujo suformuoti suvokimą apie žavesio praradimą šiuolaikiniuose kontekstuose, apibrėžti ir performuoti funkcijas, kartu kuriant ir naujojo pasaulio tvarką. Taigi šiame straipsnyje analizuojami socialiniai projektai, aktualizuojantys XIX a. pirmosios pusės lenkų romantizmą, ypač akcentuojant technologijos vaidmenį socialinių pokyčių perspektyvose. Pažymėtina, kad įsivaizduojamoms technologijoms, pastebimoms susidūrimų su NSO atvejais, taip pat priskiriama atpirkimo funkcija, kurianti išgelbėjimo iš pavojingiausių žmonijos problemų iliuziją.

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** mesianizmas, tūkstantmetis, romantizmas, NSO, žavėjimosi pasauliu praradimas.

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Piotr URBANOWICZ

Piotr Urbanowicz is a PhD candidate at Faculty of Polish Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków. His research focuses on the history of Polish Romanticism in the context of science studies.

E-mail: piourbanowicz@gmail.com