

TONY OURSLER, UFOS, AND EFFIGIES
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FIG. 2: UPI PHOTO, NGUYEN NGOC ANH, SAIGON, 1972.

IN MANY UFO PHOTOGRAPHS A MARKED BLURRINESS OR GRAININESS. THESE ALSO BECOME STYLISTIC FEATURES OF THE GENRE, WITH SKIES THAT MAY BE LIKENED TO WHAT ROBERT SMITHSON ONCE MEMORABLY DESCRIBED AS "A SUBTLE NEWSPRINT GREY."^[2] THE GRANULAR TEXTURE OF MANY UFO PHOTOGRAPHS, WHICH SOMETIMES APPROACHES EFFECTS AKIN TO ANDY WARHOL'S SILK-SCREEN PAINTINGS, ADDS TO AND ENCAPSULATES THE GENRE'S "COOL" VISUAL SENSIBILITY.

BY CONTRAST, THE VAST MAJORITY OF EFFIGY PHOTOGRAPHS ARE "HOT." WHILE VIEWERS MAY REMAIN SKEPTICAL OF THE FLYING SAUCER PHOTOS, THE VERACITY OF THE EFFIGIES, NEARLY ALL ATTRIBUTED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS, IS NEVER IN QUESTION. EACH CAPTURES THE SUBJECTION OF A HUMAN SIMULACRA TO SOME SORT OF VIOLENCE, WHETHER IT IS HANGED,

2. ROBERT SMITHSON, "A TOUR OF THE MONUMENTS OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY," IN *COLLECTED WRITINGS*, ED. JACK FLAM (BERKELEY: UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 1996), 69.

BURNED, OR PARADED ABOUT AS AN OBJECT OF PUBLIC RIDICULE, SHAME, OR SCORN. IN ALL CASES, THE PHOTOGRAPH'S CLINICAL OBJECTIVITY—THE VERY SAME CLAIM TO REPRESENTATIONAL FACTICITY THAT IN UFO PHOTOGRAPHY "PROVES" THE EXISTENCE OF FLYING SAUCERS—HEIGHTENS THE EFFIGIES' REALISM, DIMINISHING THE PERCEPTUAL AND AFFECTIVE DISTANCE SEPARATING AN ACTUAL HUMAN BODY FROM A COUNTERFACTUAL ONE AND UNCOMFORTABLY AUGMENTING THE APPARENT VIOLENCE OF DEPICTED EVENTS. AS VIEWERS, SUCH IMAGES "PRICK" OR "BRUISE" US, TO BORROW TERMS FROM ROLAND BARTHES, INCITING SHUDDERS AKIN TO THOSE ELICITED BY IMAGES OF BRUTALITY TO REAL, FLESH-AND-BLOOD INDIVIDUALS.^[3] IN THIS WAY, THE PHOTOGRAPHIC GENRES OF UFOS AND EFFIGIES ACT AS EQUAL OPPOSITES. EACH STRAINS AGAINST THE OUTER EDGES OF THE TRUTH CLAIMS THAT WERE CULTURALLY INVESTED IN PHOTOGRAPHY UNTIL THE ADVENT OF MORE EASILY MANIPULABLE DIGITAL PROCESSING (EVEN THOUGH THE VERY EXISTENCE OF UFO PHOTOGRAPHS DISPLAYS, TO NONBELIEVERS, THE INHERENT MANIPULABILITY OF PREDIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY AS WELL).

MOST OF THE EFFIGY PHOTOGRAPHS IN OURSLER'S COLLECTION DOCUMENT EXPRESSLY POLITICAL EVENTS, AND ALL (EVEN IF ONLY OF A RIVAL FOOTBALL TEAM'S COACH) ARE REDOLENT WITH TRACES OF NATIONAL AND HISTORICAL TRAUMAS, FROM HANGINGS, TO LYNCHINGS, TO MILITARY REPRISALS, TO BURNINGS AT THE STAKE. LESS EVIDENTLY, BUT NO LESS IMPORTANTLY, THE UFO PHOTOGRAPHS ALSO INVOKE ISSUES OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA AND POLITICS. THE CONTEMPORARY WAVE OF UFO SIGHTINGS SEEMS TO HAVE BEGUN IN 1947, TWO YEARS AFTER THE UNITED STATES' DETONATION OF THE ATOMIC BOMBS IN HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI. THE LINK BETWEEN THESE TWO PHENOMENA WAS MADE EXPLICIT IN THE CAPTION ATTACHED TO THE IMAGE OF AN ATOMIC

3. ROLAND BARTHES, *CAMERA LUCIDA: REFLECTIONS ON PHOTOGRAPHY*, TRANS. RICHARD HOWARD (NEW YORK: FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX, 1981), 27.

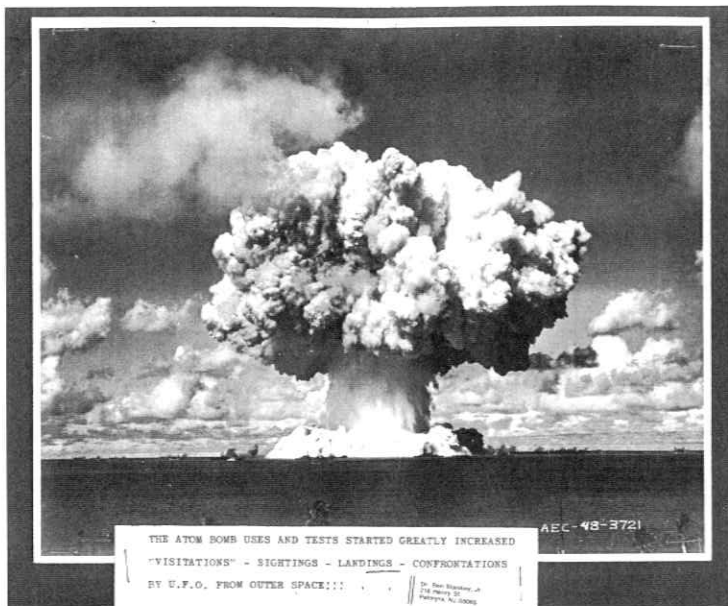


FIG. 3: ATOM BOMB TEST, UNIDENTIFIED PHOTOGRAPHER, PASTE-UP BY BEN STANKEY JR., DATE UNKNOWN (NOT IN EXHIBITION).

MUSHROOM CLOUD FOUND IN OURSLER'S COLLECTION: "THE ATOM BOMB USES AND TESTS STARTED GREATLY INCREASED 'VISITATIONS'—SIGHTINGS—LANDINGS—CONFRONTATIONS BY U.F.O. [SIC] FROM OUTER SPACE!!!" THE YEAR 1947 ALSO MARKS THE BEGINNING OF THE COLD WAR, WHEREBY THE WORLD WAS EFFECTIVELY DIVIDED BY THE US AND THE SOVIET UNION INTO TWO COMPETING SPHERES OF MILITARY AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE.[4] ARGUABLY, THE DISCOURSE SURROUNDING UFOS WAS FOSTERED BY A WIDESPREAD CULTURAL ETHOS OF SUSPICION REGARDING THE INTENTIONS AND TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITIES OF BOTH THE US

4. THE ORIGIN OF THE COLD WAR MAY BE DATED TO 1947-48, WHEN THE US PROVIDED AID TO WESTERN EUROPE UNDER THE MARSHALL PLAN WHILE THE SOVIET UNION INSTALLED OPENLY COMMUNIST REGIMES IN THE EASTERN HALF OF THE CONTINENT. THE ORIGIN OF THE TERM IS OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO FINANCIER BERNARD BARUCH'S APRIL 16, 1947 SPEECH DESCRIBING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE US AND THE USSR.



FIG. 4: ROBERT BARRY, INERT GAS SERIES, HELIUM (2 CUBIC FEET), 1969 (NOT IN EXHIBITION).

AND THE USSR (INCLUDING BOTH COUNTRIES' RELATIONSHIP TO THE RESEARCH OF SCIENTISTS FROM THE FORMER NAZI GERMANY). FOR BELIEVERS, CONCERNS ABOUT INFORMATION BEING HIDDEN FROM THE GENERAL PUBLIC—IN ORDER TO STAVE OFF WIDESPREAD PANIC OR ON ACCOUNT OF THE NEED TO CONCEAL FROM THE SOVIETS POSSIBLE TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES GLEANED FROM FLYING SAUCERS—POSITED VAST AREAS OF GOVERNMENT SECRECY AND REASONS FOR DENYING THE EXISTENCE OF INTERPLANETARY CRAFT DESPITE EVER-GROWING AMOUNTS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC "EVIDENCE."

TAKEN IN REMOTE DESERT LANDSCAPES DEVOID OF CARS, BUILDINGS, AND PEOPLE, A SUBSET OF OURSLER'S UFO PHOTOS RECALLS CONCEPTUAL ARTIST ROBERT BARRY'S *INERT GAS SERIES: HELIUM* (1969), WHICH DOCUMENTED THE RELEASE OF TWO CUBIC FEET OF HELIUM INTO THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE MOJAVE DESERT. HELIUM BEING ENTIRELY INVISIBLE, THE ONLY INDICATOR OF THE EVENT IS A DISCRETELY SITUATED GAS CANISTER. THE RESEMBLANCE BETWEEN BARRY'S WORK OF CONCEPTUAL ART AND CERTAIN UFO PHOTOGRAPHS DERIVES ALMOST CERTAINLY NOT FROM DIRECT INFLUENCE, BUT RATHER FROM THE MANNER IN WHICH BOTH PRACTICES RELY UPON

THE EVIDENTIARY STATUS OF SUPPOSEDLY UNCOMPOSED SNAPSHOTS. THE PHOTOGRAPH'S INDEXICAL QUALITY—THE FACT THAT ITS IMAGE IS CAUSALLY CONNECTED TO THE DEPICTED SCENE VIA LIGHT WAVES PASSING THROUGH THE LENS—SERVES TO ATTEST TO, IF NOT GUARANTEE, THE OCCURRENCE OF AN EVENT THAT CANNOT BE SEEN (IN THE CASE OF BARRY'S RELEASE OF HELIUM) OR THAT DEFIES CREDULITY (IN THE CASE OF UFO SIGHTINGS). [5] BOTH PRACTICES, DESPITE THEIR EVIDENT DIFFERENCES, STRETCH THE RHETORICAL TRUTH VALUE OF THE PHOTOGRAPH TO EXTREMES. POTENTIALLY EVEN MORE STRUCTURALLY SIMILAR TO BARRY'S *INERT GAS SERIES* IS A SUB-GENRE OF UFO-RELATED PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY IN WHICH SUPPOSED WITNESSES POINT TO THE LOCATION OF A SIGHTING, EVEN THOUGH NOTHING IS ANY LONGER VISIBLE. HERE, THE INDEXICAL QUALITY OF THE POINTING GESTURE AUGMENTS THE INDEXICALITY OF THE PHOTOGRAPH, DOUBLY BEARING WITNESS TO THE "FACTUALITY" OF AN EVENT ENTIRELY ABSENT FROM THE VISUAL FIELD.

THE ANALOGIES BETWEEN CONCEPTUALISM AND OURSLER'S COLLECTION OF UFO PHOTOGRAPHS CONTINUE IN A SERIES OF PASTE-UPS IN WHICH ONE OR MORE IMAGES HAVE BEEN MOUNTED WITH CAPTIONS ONTO A BACKING VIA THE USE OF TAPE, GLUE, AND STAPLES. CLEARLY INTENDED FOR DISPLAY AND CIRCULATION (AS INDICATED BY THE PROMINENT ADDITION OF RETURN ADDRESS LABELS), THESE SOMEWHAT MALADROIT CONSTRUCTIONS—MOSTLY BY BEN STANKEY, JR.—RESEMBLE SIGNATURE CONCEPTUAL TEXT-IMAGE PIECES SUCH AS DOUGLAS HEUBLER'S *ALTERNATIVE PIECE #4(S), PARIS, FRANCE* (1970). THEIR INSISTENTLY HAND-MADE QUALITIES LEND THEM AN IMPRESSION THAT OURSLER HAS CHARACTERIZED AS "FOLK ART CONCEPTUALISM."

5. SEE ROSALIND E. KRAUSS, "NOTES ON THE INDEX: PART 1," IN *THE ORIGINALITY OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND OTHER MODERNIST MYTHS* (CAMBRIDGE: MIT PRESS, 1985), 196-209.

EPF 080202 ERIE PA. Charity of strange markings found in sand near ver-
UFO sighting, Air Force Major William S. Hall, of Youngstown, Points
to puzzling "ULW" formation. UPI WIREPHOTO-WICU TV OUT 1526271

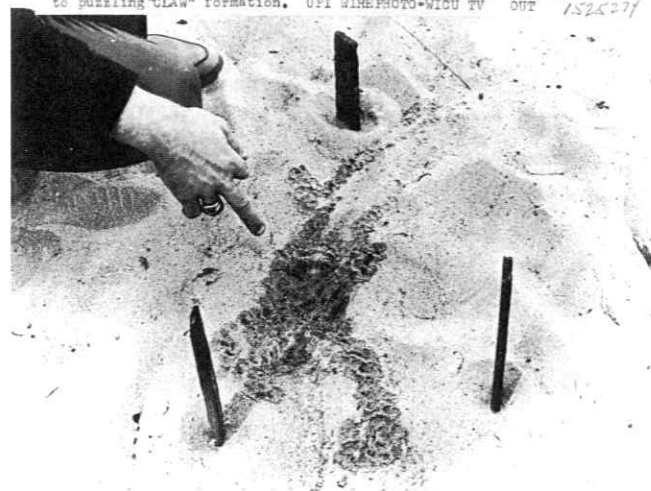


FIG. 5: UPI PHOTO, DATE UNKNOWN (NOT IN EXHIBITION)

ACCORDING TO VILÉM FLUSSER, THE PHOTOGRAPH REPRESENTS THE "FIRST OF ALL POST-INDUSTRIAL OBJECTS" AND, AS SUCH, IS VALUABLE ONLY FOR THE INFORMATION CONVEYED AND NOT AT ALL IN ITS PHYSICALITY: "AS AN OBJECT, AS A THING, THE PHOTOGRAPH IS PRACTICALLY WITHOUT VALUE; A FLYER AND NO MORE." [6] FLUSSER'S SUPPOSITION SEEMS DISPROVEN BY EVEN A CURSORY GLANCE AT THE BACKS OF MANY OF THE IMAGES ASSEMBLED HERE. ALTHOUGH PHOTOGRAPHS ARE TECHNICALLY ALMOST INFINITELY REPRODUCIBLE, IN THE PREDIGITAL ERA, WHEN IMAGES CIRCULATED AS HARD COPIES AND DUPLICATION NECES-SITATED BULKIER PHYSICAL EQUIPMENT (CAMERAS, FILM ROLLS, POSSIBLY COPY STANDS AND LIGHTING) AND GREATER AMOUNTS OF TIME (FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PRINTING) THAN THEY DO TODAY, EVEN THE MOST PRACTICAL PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTS WERE PRECIOUS IN WAYS SCARCELY ANY LONGER IMAGINABLE.

THE VERSOS OF MANY OF OURSLER'S UFO PHOTOGRAPHS ARE COVERED WITH TYPED AND/OR HANDWRITTEN

6. VILÉM FLUSSER, *TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF PHOTOGRAPHY* (LONDON: REAKTION BOOKS, 2000), 51.

CAPTIONS AND ANNOTATIONS, DATE STAMPS, CROP MARKS AND OTHER REPRODUCTION INSTRUCTIONS, AND CLAIMS TO AUTHORSHIP AND OWNERSHIP. IN SEVERAL INSTANCES, ANXIETIES OVER AUTHORSHIP OR OWNERSHIP SPILL ONTO THE FRONT OF THE IMAGES AS WELL. INFORMATION IS PROMINENTLY INSERTED INTO THE PICTURE (AS IN THE NATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE ON AERIAL PHENOMENA [NICAP] PHOTO SETS) OR COLLAGED ATOP IT (IN STANKEY'S PASTE-UPS) SO AS TO RENDER REPRODUCTION WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION DIFFICULT. SUCH PRACTICES CAN BE TRACED BACK AT LEAST AS FAR AS THE INFAMOUS 1951-1952 UFO PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE ADAMSKI, SEVERAL OF WHICH ARE INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION, WHO PROMINENTLY INSCRIBED COPYRIGHT SYMBOLS ONTO THE PICTURES HE PUBLISHED IN *FLYING SAUCERS HAVE LANDED*. [7] THE MANY INSTANCES OF UFO PHOTOS THAT HAVE BEEN SHOT FROM OTHER PICTURES (OFTEN REVERSED AND/OR CROPPED IN THE PROCESS OF REPHOTOGRAPHY AND, IN SOME CASES, CLEARLY CONVEYING THEIR SOURCE IN ALREADY-PUBLISHED BOOKS) FURTHER ATTEST TO THE PHYSICAL NATURE OF THE PRE-INTERNET REPRODUCTION AND CIRCULATION OF PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS.

IN ADDITION TO REPRESENTING TWO APPARENT EXTREMES OF PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGERY, THE CATEGORIES OF UFOS AND EFFIGIES ALSO ILLUSTRATE TWO OF THE MANY DIVERSE SUBJECTS WITHIN OURSLER'S SUBSTANTIAL AND MULTIFACETED PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES. OTHER AREAS OF OURSLER'S COLLECTING INCLUDE SPIRITUALIST PHOTOGRAPHY, TRICK PHOTOGRAPHY, IMAGES OF CULTS AND COMMUNES, VIENNESE ACTIONIST IMAGES, HOUDINI PARAPHERNALIA, AND SCIENCE FICTION. WHILE THE EFFIGIES RESEMBLE CERTAIN OF OURSLER'S VIDEO PROJECTION FIGURINES, BOTH SERIES EQUALLY DRAW UPON AND RELATE TO THE TYPES OF POPULAR AND SUBCULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

7. DESMOND LESLIE AND GEORGE ADAMSKI, *FLYING SAUCERS HAVE LANDED* (NEW YORK: BRITISH BOOK CENTRE, 1953).

THAT HAVE LONG MOTIVATED ASPECTS OF HIS ART. INDEED, OURSLER EXPLICITLY INCORPORATED THE FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF AN ALIEN ABDUCTEE INTO THE VIDEO INSTALLATION *L7-L5* (1983).

OURSLER'S VARIOUS PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES FUNCTION, HOWEVER, LESS AS DIRECT SOURCE MATERIAL THAN AS ASSOCIATED IMAGE DOSSIERS AKIN TO THE PARA-ARTISTIC PROJECTS OF GERHARD RICHTER'S *ATLAS* OR ELLSWORTH KELLY'S *TABLET*. LIKE BOTH RICHTER'S AND KELLY'S UNDERTAKINGS, THERE IS A COMPONENT OF THE ALEATORY TO OURSLER'S IMAGE STOCKPILES, WHICH ARE NEITHER COMPREHENSIVE NOR EXHAUSTIVELY ENCYCLOPEDIAIC. YET, OURSLER'S PHOTO ARCHIVES OF UFOS, EFFIGIES, AND OTHER PHENOMENA DO NOT SO MUCH REFLECT THE OVERALL ANOMIE OF CONTEMPORARY COMMERCIAL CULTURE (AS HAS BEEN ARGUED WITH REGARD TO RICHTER'S *ATLAS*) AS THEY POINT TO DEEP AND PERSISTENT RESERVES OF POPULAR CUSTOMS AND PARANORMAL BELIEFS. [8] IN THIS, OURSLER'S COLLECTING PRACTICE RELATES TO THOSE OF SEVERAL OF HIS ARTISTIC PEERS, INCLUDING MIKE KELLEY, JIM SHAW, AND CAMERON JAMIE AND INFORMS WORKS SUCH AS HIS VIDEO *OFF* (1999), A TOUR THROUGH THE DESIRES MANIFEST ON PUBLIC-ACCESS CABLE, AND *INFLUENCE MACHINE* (2000), AN INVESTIGATION OF PARANORMAL ENERGIES HAUNTING OUR CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTIONS OF MEDIA. THE TITLE OF THE CURRENT EXHIBITION, WHICH RENDERS THE WORDS "TONY OURSLER" AMBIGUOUS AS TO WHETHER THEY DESIGNATE AN AUTHOR OR PART OF THE EXHIBITED CONTENT, REFLECTS THE FACT THAT OURSLER'S ARTISTIC PROCESSES AND IMAGINATION ARE AS MUCH AT ISSUE HERE AS ARE HIS PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTIONS.

FOR THIS EXHIBITION, OURSLER HAS PRODUCED A NEW VIDEO INSTALLATION COMPOSED ENTIRELY OF UFO AND EFFIGY IMAGERY DRAWN FROM YOUTUBE. AS IN *INFLUENCE MACHINE* AND *OFF*, WHICH LOOK BACK

8. BENJAMIN H.D. BUCHLOH, "GERHARD RICHTER'S *ATLAS*: THE ANOMIC ARCHIVE," *OCTOBER* 88 (SPRING 1999): 117-145.

TO OUTMODED VISUAL TECHNOLOGIES FROM EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PHANTASMAGORIA TO PUBLIC ACCESS TELEVISION, OURSLER'S NEW PIECE EMBRACES ONE MEDIUM (STREAMING DIGITAL VIDEO) IN ORDER TO REFLECT UPON THE LOSS OF ANOTHER (PRE-DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY). IN SO DOING, IT SUGGESTS A DIALECTIC BETWEEN THE PERSISTENCE OF POPULAR CUSTOMS AND MODES OF BELIEF AND THE MUTABILITY OF THE MEANS AND MEDIA BY WHICH THEY ARE CULTURALLY EMBODIED AND COMMUNICATED.

INSIDE FRONT AND BACK COVERS: FOTO GIEGEL ONST, 1963.

FRONT AND BACK COVERS: UFO INTERNATIONAL, FROM SAUCER SET NO. 4, PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, DATE UNKNOWN.

