

Missing Time

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“I must love being nothing. How horrible it would be if I were something! I must love my nothingness, love being a nothingness. I must love with that part of the soul which is on the other side of the curtain, for the part of the soul which is perceptible to consciousness cannot love nothingness.”

—Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*

- a. In May 1950, *Life* magazine hosted a photograph by Paul and Evelyn Trent of an *unidentified flying object* witnessed eleven miles from McMinnville, Oregon. Taken from the backyard of their farm home, the photos quickly spread across the whole nation. Within the next few decades, reports of UFO sightings gradually took a shift in their narrative form, substantiated by people claiming to have been abducted by aliens. Various verbal, photographic, and forensic evidence from the victims testified to the existence of aliens that were not only strange and unfamiliar, but also possessing technological intelligence far beyond human capability.
- b. Among the cases of abductees, a great many complained of an initial amnesia, which they referred to as “missing time”, and they were treated with hypnosis to recover their lost memory.¹ Budd Hopkins, artist and ufologist, supported the phenomenon and its related research, publishing several books on the topic. He writes, “anyone could have been abducted, with no memory of it”, and that hypnotic regression can help “unlock the forgotten period of time”.²
- c. In *Sight Unseen*, Hopkins recounts his visit to Brisbane to meet the Washburn family, who also claimed they were affected by aliens. Curiously, they brought out four photographs which, at first glance, appeared to be unremarkable shots of an empty playground. “The thing about these pictures,” says Jenny Washburn, “is that we’re supposed to be in them, and we’re not.”³ What she presented as evidence was an image of the invisible, of a mysterious disappearance of the subject.
- d. Released by NASA/JPL in 1976, a photo taken by the Viking Mars Orbiter in the Cydonia region exposed an uncanny chiaroscuro of a human face found on the surface of the planet. The face, emerging from the terrain, exudes a sphinx-like poise. One could even be convinced it is a relief by Polyclitus. Could it be an abducted victim buried in the dust of mars? Or a sign of extraterrestrial life? Alas, it’s a mirage, a mere placeholder for collective imagination..

¹ Bader, Chris D. “The UFO Contact Movement from the 1950s to the Present.” *Studies in Popular Culture* 17, no. 2 (1995): 73-90.

² Hopkins, Budd. 1981. *Missing Time: A Documented Study of UFO Abductions*. New York: Richard Marek Publishers.

³ Hopkins, Budd; Rainy, Carol. 2003. *Sight Unseen: Science, UFO Invisibility, and Transgenic Beings*. New York: Atria Books.

- e. Scientist Carl Sagan dismissed the affair as a tabloid sellout, calling it a “trick of light and shadow”.⁴ The austere face nonetheless persists, looking at us without seeing. What is found in the photograph is a profound nothingness with the face of something, something immediately alien, something which betrays our reality.
- f. In the Victorian era, spirit photography proffered an image of a lingering past, the past as undead. Alien photography departs from this in one crucial way: if the ghosts had guaranteed a survival of the past in the present, the aliens are to us the humanoid other in the looming future of science. The recurrent themes of loss, invisibility and absence altogether point to an inexplicable void, a wicked spell. Regarding the question of the alien image, there exists simultaneously the symptom of a disappearing subject, and every image bears the weight of her death.
- g. Besides his extraterrestrial passions, Hopkins was also involved in the abstract expressionist movement of the 1950s. However, his later works displayed influences of graphic design, combining Motherwell's brute strokes with Mondrian's neoplastic geometries. Roberta Smith wrote in a review in 1975, “This isn't a paradox, it's pastiche. These parts aren't integrated into a complex believable whole; they're simply stuck together and they're easily undone.”⁵ Leaving abstract expressionism in the past, what Hopkins had rather been more interested, both in painting and ufology, was in the gap, the disjunctive space between conflicting matters.
- h. It has now become quite a common practice in painting to refer to the image as opposed to *plein air*. This does not only mean to paint from photos—a cheat sheet that has existed since the impressionists—but also to actively adopt the mechanical image as a point of reference.⁶ This type of painting is pastiche. It is always referential, and deliberately so. The painting alternates between abstract and figurative, as it portrays a subject which does not exist, and hence abstraction is simply the circumstantial, alien derivative of the image.
- i. To paint from an image is to pay attention to the alien in the image, the alien existing in place of a subject. While the existence of an alien hinges on the very lack of a subject, the image–painting traces the footsteps, the negative imprints of the missing. The non–presence of the subject is that which promises the continuation of aliens and paintings alike, both born from the void in the image. What you see in the painting is an alien, but what you do *not* see is the lingering shadow of the dead. To paint an image is also to paint its *nothing*.

⁴ Wikipedia contributors, “Cydonia (Mars),” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cydonia_\(Mars\)&oldid=1161873954](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cydonia_(Mars)&oldid=1161873954) (accessed October 16, 2023)

⁵ Smith, Roberta. “Bud Hopkins.” *Art Forum (1950-)* 14 no. 1 (1975)

⁶ Crimp, Douglas. “Positive/Negative: A Note on Degas's Photographs.” *October* 5 (1978): 89-100.