

# INTRODUCTION

## GENERATION X: THE X-FILES AND THE CULTURAL MOMENT

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The Cold War is absent from *The X-Files*, replaced by a more cosmic paranoia. The show reflects the end of the millennium, the flip side of the New Age. Beneath the soothing cover of incense, mantras, and Tibetan chants, rude beasts are awakening—Gnosticism reborn.

James Wolcott, "'X' Factor"

The most unsettling thing about *The X-Files* is how inviting, how lulling this slightly alien world looks. The curtain of what we accept as reality seems to have torn, allowing Mulder and Scully to search for meanings usually obscured. Week after week, this elegant twilight zone beckons like the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Charles Taylor, "Truth Decay: Sleuths After Reagan"

### I. Given X . . .

Psychohistorians, those curious scholarly investigators who attempt to read (and understand) historical subjects as psychological phenomena, motivated/driven/governed by unconscious factors, have not paid all that much attention to popular culture, though to do so might be highly productive and revealing. Why, for example, does a successful television show "happen" when it does? Is there a connection between the coming (and the going) of *Twin Peaks* in the early 1990s and the Bush presidency? Is *The X-Files* in some way a Clinton-era phenomenon, a product of psychohistorical factors operative in the mid-90s? Is this series which, as Paula Vitaris has noted, is "akin to one of its own mutant characters, with its own eclectic genetic heritage" ("part police procedural, part suspense thriller, part action adventure, part medical drama, part science fiction and part horror" ) ("*X-Files*" 17), a product of its cultural moment?

In an insightful essay in millennium pop, Charles Taylor offers a discerning answer to just this question. Calling *The X-Files* "the most subversive show to hit American television since *Wiseguy*," Taylor then links it to the contemporary cultural/political scene. *The X-Files* is a product of its time, not because it holds a mirror up to reality, but because it reflects the mindset of its era:

What links up the show to the zeitgeist is that Mulder and Scully are working to get out from under the most enduring legacy of the Reagan/Bush era: the way government, in the words of the Situationist philosopher Guy Debord, "[proclaims] that whatever it said was all there was." In other words, that the

truth is irrelevant. . . .

The X-Files is about insisting on truth that runs counter to all ideas about how things are supposed to work, ideas so deeply ingrained that those in power can call them up to deny reality merely because it sounds crazy. Week after week, in the course of their investigations, Mulder and Scully find that behind their cases lies some secret government experiment or program kept from the public because it won't be able to "handle" the truth. (The Reagan years were scary because, though the facts were often out in the open, people "handled" the truth by denying it, rushing to defend Reagan as a nice guy. . . .) What makes Mulder and Scully so dangerous—and what makes them heroes—is that, having glimpsed a government that wants to reign them in, they choose to operate as if that government really worked the way it claims to. They're watching their backs as much as they're watching the skies. (X-X)

If Mulder and Scully need eyes in the back as well as the top of their heads, so, too, do critics pondering the show's significance, seeking to read clearly its cultural and media meanings need special equipment. For The X-Files is as complex and controversial a phenomenon as the medium of television has produced in many years, not just because the series has dared to suggest with great seriousness the incredible charge that the government of the United States is involved, for reasons not yet made clear, in a vast conspiracy involving former Nazi and Japanese scientists to assist alien beings in performing experiments—including, perhaps, genetic hybridization!—on American citizens, but because it experiments, televisually, narratologically, semiotically, with the medium in innovative ways.

As we complete final editing of this book and sit down to write the introduction you now read, the third season of The X-Files is not yet complete. Though we have just learned the intriguing names of the next four episodes—"Avatar," "Quagmire," "Wet Wired," and "Talitha Cumi"—from Cliff Chen's episode guide on the Internet (<http://bird.taponline.com/~cliff/>), we are not certain what they portend, nor do we yet know how the year will end, though we assume and expect a dramatic close, something akin to the episodes which ended seasons one and two: "The Erlenmeyer Flask" (in which Mulder's mysterious ally Deep Throat is assassinated) and the cliffhanger "Anasazi" (in which Mulder is left seemingly dead in a buried and torched train car containing as well the bodies of aliens). We presume, of course, that the season finale will return to The X-Files' continuing, "serial story" of alien abduction (including the abduction of Samantha, Mulder's sister) and government conspiracy. If The X-Files were canceled tomorrow (and it has, of course, already been renewed for a fourth season, the stars have been signed for five, and Carter and company regularly speak of a six or a seven year run), there would still exist over 3,000 minutes and slightly over fifty hours of X-Files text—the equivalent of twenty five feature length films! —for our consideration.

As we write, The X-Files, a show now about to go into syndication, has reached, and perhaps passed, its zenith of popularity. It continues nevertheless to generate merchandise and to make news (assuming, that is, that media hype constitutes news), as indeed it has all throughout this season in which it emerged from cult status to become a mainstream hit and an "activated text" (John Fiske's term) with polysemic, intertextual relations. Topps comic books tie-ins, a multitude of T-shirts (as many as twelve designs), phone cards, hats, posters, collector cards, calendars, and coffee

mugs are for sale. Two guide books to the series, Brian Lowry's *The Truth is Out There: The Official Guide to The X-Files* and N. E. Genge's *The Unofficial X-Files Companion*, both released in the fall of 1995, made it onto the USA Today bestseller list for a time. (Other guide books are on the way, including one focused exclusively on the third season, not to mention a reported collection of scholarly essays on the series by academics.) Not too long ago, Gillian Anderson won the Screen Actor's Guild award for Best Actress in a Dramatic Series. In a recent issue of *Rolling Stone*, Scully and Mulder appeared in fantasy-consummating photographs partially unclothed in bed together (in one photo none other than Chris Carter shares their bed, and Scully smokes a post-coital cigarette), and two weeks ago Anderson and David Duchovny (dressed in evening wear) graced the cover of a *TV Guide* which featured a fluffy story on "X Exposed: 20 Things You Need to Know About The X-Files." A CD collection of music from and inspired by the series, *Songs in the Key of X*, is available in stores. An X-Files feature film is in the works (after season five). Fans flock to conventions which have become as popular as those devoted to *Star Trek* and its various manifestations. Internet surfers have been able to read about their favorite show on scores of World Wide Web pages. (Interestingly, an October 1995 survey on the [chaos.taylor.com](http://chaos.taylor.com) usergroup identified a significant portion of fans as either students who plan within the year to enter graduate school, current graduate students, or postgraduate students in fields as diverse as bio-engineering, law, literature, and physics.) Some fans offer (at sites like [alt.tv.x-files.creative](http://alt.tv.x-files.creative)) additional, and sometimes alternative, fanfiction (and slash fanfiction) adventures for Scully, Mulder, Skinner, Krycek, etc. And in this Sunday's paper an Associated Press story informs us that "X-Files [is] doing boffo in Japan," the first series since *Twin Peaks* to be a big hit in that country. (The series has been a big success in other foreign lands as well. One comprehensive WWW index of sites [<http://www.tiac.net/users/bpaq/1.2/xfiles.html>] lists national home pages for Finland, Switzerland, Australia, England, France, Ireland, Scotland, Germany.)

Right now, however, *The X-Files* itself is in a stall. Over the last two months, we have had only a few new episodes to whet our appetite (since January, only eight new episodes have been broadcast, leaving us to make do with rebroadcasts of earlier episodes on many Fridays. A good time, it would seem, to reflect on the series, its origin, its nature, its future direction.

"At one level," Frank McConnell has observed, "*X-Files* has all the subtlety of those headlines in the tabloids ("*Aliens clone Hitler's Child*") that you wish . . . you could peruse in full, if only the guy ahead of you had fourteen more frozen dinners to check out" (17). This tendency, too, gives the series the stamp of its cultural moment.

Foremost among its tabloid subjects, of course, is alien abduction. Because the phenomenon of abduction constitutes much more than simply a plot device or theme of *The X-Files*, because it was, in fact, its very inspiration, instrumental to its genesis and perhaps the key ingredient in its growing complexity, it is to abduction as a cultural/historical phenomenon that we know turn.

## **II. High Strangeness: Alien Abduction and the Zeitgeist.**

"I found it fascinating to hear this," Carter said. "This man [Dr. John Mack of Harvard, author of *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*] in the highest levels of academia and a scientist using rigorous scientific methods had come up with something quite astounding. So I thought that was a wonderful entry into explorations of the paranormal. And so I came up with Mulder and Scully, the FBI, and this fictional investigative unit called the X-Files.

from Paula Vitaris, "X-Files: Filming the Fox Show That Has Become a Horror and Science Fiction Sensation"

"Roswell! Roswell!"

Blaine Faulkner in "Jose Chung's From Outer Space"

It is certainly no accident that an image of a flying saucer begins the credits to *The X-Files*, an image which, like most purported photographs of flying disks, has an hazy, imprecise, even dreamy quality that underscores its possible unreliability. And it is equally unsurprising that *The X-Files* uses the UFO abduction phenomenon as its basic serial narrative, for tales of alien abduction are unrivaled in contemporary culture for their ability to combine the most terrifying aspects of paranormal experience with various elements of science fiction; New Age obsessions with channeling, reincarnation, near-death experiences, and spiritual advancement; Byzantine government conspiracy stories which include secret medical experiments upon unsuspecting citizens; and concerns with sexual abuse and genetic engineering. In the past fifteen years public interest in UFOs has transformed itself into a fascination with alien abduction, a shift in focus that intensely personalizes extraterrestrial encounters, bringing them down from the skies right into the bedroom.

Modern ufological history begins in June 24, 1947, with civilian pilot Kenneth Arnold's sighting of several "flying saucers" (the term came from Arnold's description of what he saw) while he flew his own plane near Mount Rainier. Curiously, the first alleged encounter with aliens happened only eight days after Arnold's experience. On July 2, 1947, a rancher named Mac Brazel found metal debris on his property in Roswell, New Mexico, and the most famous UFO/alien legend was born, a story that has come to include the finding of a crashed disk, the recovery of dead (and one living) alien bodies, a massive governmental cover-up which some believe extends until the present day, and President Truman's creation of the Majestic Twelve (MJ-12) on September 12, 1947, a top-secret group of "experts" brought together to investigate the events at Roswell. In the early 1950s a group who called themselves "contactees," led by George Adamski, announced that they had been visited by benevolent aliens from Venus, "Space Brothers" who had arrived to warn Earthlings about nuclear testing and to promote peace and love. But it was the story told by Barney and Betty Hill that provided the model for the more sinister abduction narratives that have come to dominate abduction literature. The Hills' claim of being removed from their car one September night in 1961 and taken aboard a UFO where they were subjected to a variety of medical procedures, including a gynecological examination and a sperm extraction, has become the paradigmatic UFO abduction. The Hills both experienced

“missing time” and remembered their experience only after undergoing regression hypnosis. Many skeptics believe that John Fuller’s book about the Hills’ abduction, *The Interrupted Journey* (1966), and the made-for-TV film of the same name (starring James Earl Jones and Estelle Parsons) created the images and events of the “typical” alien abduction that has become increasingly familiar to the public.

In the 1970s New York artist Budd Hopkins began an exploration of UFO abduction cases using regression hypnosis that further refined the structure of alien abduction, culminating in the publication of *Missing Time: A Documented Study of UFO Abductions* (1981) and *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods* (1987). In *Intruders* Hopkins focuses on the genetic project of the aliens, a project that includes the hybridizing of the human and alien species. Hopkins’ disciple, Temple University history professor Dr. David Jacobs, adopted Hopkins’ notions about the alien genetic agenda and began to regress his own abductees. The publication of *Secret Life: Firsthand Accounts of UFO Abductions* (1992) contains both transcriptions of these hypnosis sessions and the conclusions Jacobs has drawn from them, neatly summarized in a terse quotation from one of the abductees: “They’re breeding us” (158). “We have been invaded,” Jacobs portentously tells the reader. “It is not an occupation, but it is an invasion . . . a disturbing program of apparent exploitation of one species by another” (316). Women, however, seem to be more exploited than men in Jacobs’ alien scenario, for Jacobs tends to focus on the experience of female abductees (women, he says, “seem to have a larger number of more complex experiences”), whom he portrays as the “victims” (his word) of emotionless, indifferent, relentlessly efficient alien beings (15). Jacobs’ aliens also have some definite sexual proclivities, including forcing humans (usually female) to become sexually aroused and to climax during the lengthy gynecological procedures carried out on board the spacecraft.

The growing tendency of abduction narratives to cast women as the victims of high-tech rapes and alien breeding programs has been reiterated by the writers of *The X-Files*, a fact that contradicts the way the show generally undermines traditional male-female stereotypes. Although there are some male abductees, among them Duane Barry in “Duane Barry” and Harold in “Jose Chung’s,” it is Scully and Samantha—not Mulder—who are supposedly abducted, and the eerie gathering of implanted abductees who greet Scully in “Nisei” are all women. (Female Mutual UFO Network members beware!)

The publication and popularity of Whitley Strieber’s *Communication* in 1987 made the alien face a household image and acquainted a much larger section of the public with alien behavior. *Communication* focuses on the bizarre and terrifying nature of the abduction experience and hints at what Strieber develops at greater length in later books, the philosophical and spiritual nature of the experience. In *Transformation* (1988) and the recently published *Breakthrough: The Next Step* (1995), Strieber distances himself from the Hopkins-Jacobs nuts-and-bolts approach to abduction, which emphasizes the genetic machinations of the aliens and the physical nature of the experience, and instead begins to speculate about the psychical dimension of what Strieber renames “the visitor experience.” Calling one of his visitors “somebody from another meaning” (*Breakthrough* 199), Strieber describes the abduction experience as a “thoroughgoing revision of being” (280) that allows the abductee to understand “the

indeterminacy that is at the core of the world" (284). "The challenge to the worldview that is at the heart of the experience . . . is among the very most shattering and profound assaults that a person can sustain," says Strieber, adding that visitor contact allows the experiencer to "perceive the world . . . in ranges and probabilities rather than definite, seemingly immutable structures" (118, 203). Strieber has come to believe that communion with an alien reality is the catalyst for a soul journey, one that requires "a surrendered openness" on the part of the "experiencer" (206).

Strieber's books greatly widened public interest in alien abduction, but it was the publication of Dr. John Mack's *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens* (1994) that created a highly-publicized controversy about the nature of the abduction experience and the treatment of abductees by therapists and counselors. Mack, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School for thirty years and the 1977 Pulitzer Prize-winning author of a biography of T. E. Lawrence, runs the Cambridge Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER) and co-sponsored the 1992 Abduction Study Conference held at MIT. After being investigated for more than a year by the Harvard Medical School for allegedly "affirming the delusions" of patients who believe themselves to be alien abductees, a special faculty committee decided that Mack could retain his tenure and decided against censuring him for his conduct. The publicity surrounding Mack's problems at Harvard only increased interest in *Abduction*, which Chris Carter claims to have been an important influence upon the development of *The X-Files* (see the epigraph above) . But Mack has little interest in the biological experiments and government conspiracy stories that *The X-Files* has explored so frequently. Instead Mack, like Strieber, is interested in the spiritual dimension of the abduction experience. Although *Abduction* is dedicated "To Budd Hopkins, who led the way," and he does not deny the work of Hopkins and Jacobs (in fact Mack wrote a glowing foreword to Jacobs' *The Secret Life*), he gently chides both men for having failed to come to terms with "the profound implications of the abduction phenomenon for the expansion of human consciousness, the opening of perception to realities beyond the manifest physical world and the necessity of changing our place in the cosmic order if the earth's living systems are to survive the human onslaught" (15). Mack's abductees, like those described by Strieber in *Breakthrough*, undergo a transformation of consciousness that includes acquiring paranormal powers and an increased concern for planetary survival.

With John Mack the connection among UFOs, alien abduction, and New Age spiritual and ecological awareness is made complete, a connection beautifully mocked by the "expanded consciousnesses" sported by the abductees at the conclusion of "Jose Chung's From Outer Space." For Mack the essence of the abduction experience is nothing less than an epistemological crisis in which abductees experience "ontological shock" (44) and require "another ontological paradigm" (389) after realizing the limitations of a chronological, physically-based interpretation of reality. He describes at length the changes in perceptions which abductees undergo and quotes patients who describe experiencing "dimensional merging" and "converging time frames" (404-405). ("Jose Chung" comically and also quite accurately depicts what UFO literature calls the "high strangeness level" of alien encounters and the bizarre discrepancies of the stories told by experiencers.) The loss of physical and psychological control described by abductees is "in some way 'designed' to bring about a kind of ego death from which

spiritual growth and the expansion of consciousness may follow" (399), Mack believes, adding that this new consciousness is one which perceives the falsity of the scientific/materialist worldview that is perpetuated by the intellectual and political elite of our culture. According to Mack, the UFO abduction experience radically undermines the assumptions of a culture which seeks to place human beings at the center of the universe, able to control and predict all events: "to a large degree, the scientific and government elite and the selected media that it controls . . . determine what we are to believe is real, for these monoliths are the principle beneficiaries of the dominant ideology" (410-411). The discrepancy between the message of human powerlessness communicated by the aliens and the pretenses of power and knowledge by government, academic, and media institutions makes up what Mack calls "the politics of ontology." Mack's conspiracy theory, certainly more philosophically provocative and Foucauldian than the more simplistic narratives played out in , casts the U. S. government in the role of an ignorant and frightened onlooker to an alien agenda which it does not comprehend and cannot stop, a view shared by Whitley Strieber in Breakthrough. In this sense, then, The X-Files, with its recurrent themes of government pirating of alien technology and staging of phony UFO and abduction events, reiterates the dominant cultural ideology that privileges human power and control, reducing the entire alien phenomenon to a comical cover-up of government misbehavior. Jacobs' warning that "They're breeding us" becomes in "The Erlenmeyer Flask" "We're breeding them," a more comfortable and domesticated scenario than having aliens direct an intergalactic breeding program in which humans function as passive and mindless laboratory animals.

It is equally true, however, that The X-Files always refrains from passing any final judgment on the issue of alien abduction and seems to validate Mulder's state of "ontological shock" more frequently than Scully's scientific-reductionist theories. Curiously Mulder, always the bridesmaid during abductions, undergoes the spiritual transformation that Mack describes so eloquently not during an encounter with aliens but during his near-death experience in "The Blessing Way." In fact it seems that Chris Carter is as yet hesitant to explore the full epistemological implications of abduction that Mack says are the foundation of the abduction experience, a "reintegration of the self, an immersion or entrenchment into states and/or knowledge not previously accessible" (8) and the realization of "the total separation of the spirit and the physical world" (418). Always Mulder's intuitions and experiences are open to question: did he actually witness his sister's abduction during "Little Green Men" or was she merely "taken" by human agency because her father preferred Mulder to her, as we learn in "Paper Clip"? Who abducted whom in "Jose Chung's From Outer Space"? By always suggesting a possible human agency behind ostensible extraterrestrial encounters, and, in "Jose Chung," parodying the now-generic alien narrative, Carter leaves all his options open and avoids sending anyone into ontological shock.

This is not to say, however, that the alien abduction narrative in The X-Files is used to validate materialist assumptions about the nature of reality or to depict the U.S. (and world) government as an omnipotent, omniscient force. In fact quite the opposite is true. For many viewers their weekly encounter with the show is an unsettling, sometimes frightening experience that powerfully interrogates a consensus reality that excludes the paranormal. John Mack's conclusion to Abduction, which speculates about

the intention and effects of alien encounters, is equally applicable to The X-Files:

The intelligence that appears to be at work here . . . is subtler, and its method is to invite, to remind, to permeate our culture from the bottom up as well as the top down, and to open our consciousness in a way that avoids a conclusion, that is different from the ways we traditionally require. It is an intelligence that provides enough evidence that something profoundly important is at work, but it does not offer the kinds of proof that would satisfy an exclusively empirical, rationalistic way of knowing. (421)

Like Mulder, many X-philes want to believe, but Carter refuses to provide him or them any easy answers.

### **III. Narrative Abduction: "Jose Chung's From Outer Space"**

Your scientists have yet to discover how neural networks create self-consciousness, let alone how the human brain processes two-dimensional retinal images into the three dimensional phenomenon known as perception. Yet you somehow brazenly declare that seeing is believing.  
The Man in Black in "Jose Chung's From Outer Space"

Judging by the reviews recorded in the X-Files Ratings and Reviews on the World Wide Web (<http://www.amaroq.com/x-files/3.20/review.html>), "Jose Chung" was by no means a consensus hit. Michael T. MacDonell, for example, loved the episode:

It doesn't get any better than this. My admiration for Chris Carter has increased 10-fold. There are a number of philosophies that hold that we are each three people. The person we are, the one we perceive ourselves to be, and the one perceived by others. In this story, Carter has managed to show us a kaleidoscope of the three views of all of the characters. Including the audience! At the same time, Carter has presented a story that is, in itself, most interesting and most thought provoking. Superb!

But Andrea Lingenfelter did not:

This was the most disappointing X-Files I've ever seen. Maybe I didn't get it but it was poorly written and confusing. Even ones that I have not liked the story lines (like Gargoyles) displayed good writing and organization. What happened to this one. It was annoying to watch. I usually tape the show and watch it later. Had I been watching it on tape I would have turned it off—I've never done that to an X-Files!!!! If anyone can improve my view of this one, please let me know.

Another commentator, David Evans, noted that "[Chris] Carter is walking a fine line here by spoofing his show (and its audience)," while Chuck Cruzan observed that the

show “failed to involve me emotionally.” Like other episodes written by Darin Morgan (“Humbug,” “The War of the Coprophages,” “Clyde Bruckman’s Final Repose”), “Jose Chung” had a postmodern, Twin Peaks-ish air about it. It made some heavy demands on the viewer, the sort of demands which make academics like ourselves, always on the lookout for television material difficult enough to present a true challenge to our encyclopedic vocabulary of allusions and our arsenal (semiotic, psychoanalytical, narratological, reader/viewer-response, deconstructionist, etc.) of critical methodologies.

For example, it would take a team of narratologists working overtime to unravel its complexities. After a pre-credit sequence depicting the abduction on a lonely road in Washington state of two young lovers, the episode proper begins, after a considerable lapse of time, as Scully tells her version of the investigation to noted author Jose Chung, who is writing a book about the abduction—a book to be entitled *From Outer Space*. Most of the remaining story unfolds within this frame tale, as Scully sits with her on-screen narratee Chung relating her take on recent events and answering his questions.

“The vast majority of television narrators,” Kozloff has observed, “strive for neutrality and self-effacement, as if viewers are supposed to overlook the fact that the story is coming through a mediator and instead believe that they are looking in on reality” (83). “Jose Chung” is anything but majority television narrative. Scully’s story is far from straight forward, for it incorporates numerous other “nested” narratives as well, some by highly unreliable narrators, for whom she serves, within her own narrative, as an onscreen narratee. Nor is Scully herself completely honest in her narration. We know, for example, that she is acting as a censor (of Detective Manners’ profane language) and wonder if she might possibly be giving her own subjective spin to other matters as well.

Sitting in Mulder’s office (the signature “I Want to Believe” poster visible in the background), Scully tells Chung of the results of their interrogation of Harold and then Chrissy, the abductees, and as Chrissy tells her story under hypnosis, we witness in her mindscreen her encounter on board the alien spaceship with her abductors. But as we later see, after Chrissy is hypnotized a second time, her memories may have been implanted by Air Force officials to cover her real abduction by the government.

When utility company lineman Rocky Crickerson later tells Mulder and Scully the bizarre story of the visitation of the Men in Black and his eyewitnessing of the abduction of Chrissy and Harold, he is likewise a possibly (probably) unreliable narrator. But his version of the abduction, and of his encounter with Lord Kimbote, is not the product of his mindscreen. It takes place, rather, in Mulder’s own mindscreen as he reads Crickerson’s manuscript aloud to Scully (who is narrating his reading in the episode’s outermost frame to Chung). In this scene, then, Crickerson is the narrator (via his manuscript); Mulder is the primary narratee (we can tell by the slowing pace of his reading of Crickerson’s account that he has come to doubt its veracity); and Scully is a secondary narratee (here and elsewhere she lets us know by her looks of disbelief—especially her rolling eyes and dubious stare—that she, too, is incredulous).

The account offered by Blaine Faulkner, a young man obsessed with UFOs (he hopes to be abducted, he explains, so he won't have to look for a job), of his discovery of an alien in the woods is even more fully unreliable. This time Blaine tells his story to Chung, who relates it, in turn, to Scully during their discussion in the episode's outermost frame. In his eyes, the show's heroes become the "Men in Black": Scully is suspected of being a man masquerading as a woman and Mulder appears to be a violent and threatening "mandroid."

In subsequent scenes the narrative becomes even more convoluted. For example, Scully relates (to Chung) Mulder's version of a conversation at a local diner with Lieutenant Schafer, the Air Force pilot of a flying saucer (and gray alien in disguise). In this account, Mulder, of course, serves as onscreen narratee to Schafer's bizarre ramblings. (He insists that, even though he has himself pretended to be a [gray] alien charged with abducting individuals like Harold and Chrissy for obscure "covert intelligence operations," he is absolutely certain that he was himself been abducted. He asks Mulder "Have you ever flown a flying saucer? Afterwards, sex seems trite." He expresses grave doubts about the existence of the food on his plate and even of Mulder himself. He knows the name of Lord Kimbote [which we had earlier been led to believe was the lunatic raving of Rocky Crickerson].) Chung calls this account immediately into question, however, by relating another version of the event as told to him by the cook, one in which no pilot is present.

In the episode's closing scenes, two more narrative layers are added on. Mulder arrives—presumably after Scully's departure—at Chung's to plead with him not to write his book. His appeal is, however, futile, and in the episode's epilogue Chung reads the final words of *From Outer Space* (in which Scully and Mulder have both been given fictional names) as his words come visually alive before us. In an American Graffiti style "where are they now?" recapitulation), we see: Blaine Faulkner at his new job as a utility company lineman; Rocky Crickerson leading a New Age group dedicated to the belief that beings of higher consciousness exist at the Earth's core; Scully and Mulder getting on with their lives {Scully is reading Chung's book; Mulder, described by Chung as "a ticking timebomb of insanity," is lying alone in bed watching a show about Bigfoot); Chrissy at work as an environmental/peace activist, fulfilling the imperative given her during her "abduction" to help to save the planet.

But it is not just the episode's complex narrative structure which makes it both rich and difficult. "Jose Chung's *From Outer Space*" is a very postmodern text, ripe with what Eco has called the weight of "the already said," opulently intertextual and self-referential, studded with allusion upon illusion. An attentive, cultish watcher would take pride in noting at least the following.

- A Star Wars homage slow tracking shot (the episode's opening image) of the underbelly of a star cruiser that turns out to be in reality the bottom of the lift basket of a utility company line repair truck.
- The equation of electric company linemen with UFOs, an allusion, of course, to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, in which Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) experiences his Third Encounter while out on assignment during a blackout. (In

the aforementioned scene in the diner between Lieutenant Schafer and Mulder, the former is eating, and playing with, his mashed potatoes, whose ultimate metaphysical reality he questions to his companion. Illusion or not, the potatoes are, of course, another direct allusion to Close Encounters of the Third Kind, in which, in a famous scene, Neary sculpts a replica of the Devil Tower's rendezvous site from his spuds.)

- A Washington county, Klass, where the abduction takes place, has the same name as a leading UFO Doubting Thomases, author Phillip Klass (a.k.a. science fiction writer William Tenn).
- The inside-joke appearance of Alex Trebek, the host of the popular television quiz show Jeopardy, on which David Duchovny (Fox Mulder) recently appeared (in a segment of "Celebrity Jeopardy"), losing to novelist Stephen King because of his inability to supply the question "What is Breakfast at Tiffany's?" to a "final jeopardy" answer. (Earlier in the episode, Scully is, of course, seen reading Capote's novel.)
- In a scene in a local diner which (as noted above) may or may not be illusory, Mulder momentarily becomes Agent Cooper of Twin Peaks, obsessed with pie (sweet potato, though, not cherry).
- A very profane local police detective bears the same name—Manners—as one of the series' chief creative forces, writer/producer/director Kim Manners.
- A character (Blaine Faulkner) wears a Space: Above and Beyond T-shirt, product-placement for another Fox Network show created by former X-Files writers/producers Glen Morgan (brother of Darin Morgan, "Jose Chung's" author) and James Wong.
- We watch a videotaped autopsy (performed by Scully) on a supposed alien, which bears an uncanny resemblance in its visual style to the infamous "Alien Autopsy" shown on Fox a year ago. (The host for the autopsy's screening is The Stupendous Yappi, the dubious psychic we had first met in "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose".)
- When Scully completes her narration of the events to Jose Chung, she admits that it "probably doesn't have the sense of closure you want, but it has more than our other cases"—a very self-conscious allusion to/defense of the often-complained-about-tendency of Mulder's and Scully's cases (and every X-Files' episode) to end enigmatically and without full resolution.

For some Internet commentators "Jose Chung" represents a turning point for the series. David Evans observes, "Watching X-Files used to make me lock the doors at night. Now it makes me chuckle at odd moments (Alex Trebeck !???!)." And Chris Chia, while ready to praise "Chris Carter & company's willingness to spoof/parody the series

and its protagonists," admits that the episode nevertheless poses a real problem: "I don't think I can ever watch another UFO-related episode with a straight face . . ."

"David Lynch wrecked the trance of Twin Peaks," James Wolcott observed during The X-Files' first season, "when he abandoned all interest in even a quaint semblance of normality and began to strobe the screen in a fit of expressionism" (99). No doubt a few X-Philes are afraid (perhaps very afraid) that Carter, et al, are about to go down the same path.

Thomas Schatz has delineated a life cycle for movie genres. A genre, he shows, routinely passes through four stages:

an experimental stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established, a classic stage, in which the conventions reach their "equilibrium" and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of refinement, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form, and finally a baroque (or "mannerist," or "self-reflexive" stage, when the form and its establishments are accented to the point where they "themselves become the "substance" or "content" of the work." (37-38)

Does a television series, regardless of genre, undergo, over the course of its history, a similar metamorphosis? Many questions would need to be answered to establish the validity of that hypothesis. (For example, was not a series like Twin Peaks born "baroque"?) We present the hypothesis here only for its illustrative value in considering the progress of X-Files evolution at the end of its third season. Certainly it would appear that a terribly self-conscious, cannibalistic episode like "Jose Chung" would indicate a move to Schatz' baroque stage. And yet another explanation presents itself. Perhaps The X-Files is increasingly self-reflexive not out of any genre-driven/television programming dictated desire or inclination to subvert itself but because the evolution of consciousness has now brought the human mind, as it grapples with increasingly alien realities, to the epistemological equivalent of Schatz's baroque stage.

After Scully finishes her narrative in "Jose Chung," the story (as we noted earlier) picks up later at an unspecified moment in the future. Mulder appears at Chung's office and asks to see him (he had previously been unwilling to speak with the author and therefore had not contributed first-hand to the narrative). Noting that many well-meaning individuals who seek to tell of their real UFO/abduction experiences appear to be crazy when they speak of them, he pleads with Chung not to publish his book.

You'll perform a disservice to a field of inquiry that has always struggled for respectability. You're a gifted writer but no amount of talent could describe the events that occurred in any realistic vein because they deal with alternative realities that we're not yet able to comprehend, and when presented in the wrong way, in the wrong context, the incidents and the people involved in them can appear foolish, if not downright psychotic.

Chung denies his request and asks Mulder himself to finally go on the record—to explain exactly what did happen. “How the hell should I know?” Mulder responds.

Though Chung’s book is not uncritical (as we learn when he reads its conclusion in the subsequent, concluding scene), it is no more a disservice to our understanding of the UFO/abduction phenomenon than is “Jose Chung’s From Outer Space” itself. Indeed, Mulder’s plea not to ridicule is, in a sense, a self-referential one that could have been made (and, to hear some of the talk on the Internet, should have been made) to Carter and company. But it constitutes as well a metadefense which lifts the continuing X-Files’ serial story of abduction and conspiracy—a meta story in which “Jose Chung” stands as a vital part, to a higher, more epistemological plane. (After all, as we learn in Chrissy’s second hypnotism, the government has no more idea of what happened in Klass County, Washington than Scully, Mulder, or Chung do.) The Man in Black’s admonition to Rocky (see the epigraph to this section) to recall that the UFO mystery is not the only mystery—that we are still completely in the dark about such minor matters as the nature of self consciousness and the construction of reality in perception—articulated ingeniously one of The X-Files’ always implicit themes. In “Jose Chung” this “baroque” (in Schatz’ sense) theme takes center stage, and it will likely shadow all future episodes as they explore “alternative realities that we’re not yet able to comprehend.” If this self-reflexive awareness makes The X-Files increasingly baroque, if it leads to the series’ accentuation of its own “form and its embellishments . . . to the point where they themselves become the ‘substance’ or ‘content’ of the work,” such a development should not surprise us, for philosophy, psychology, quantum physics, anthropology, cosmology, etc., etc. are now similarly “baroque.” The surprise lies in our encounter with such an ultimate dilemma on Friday night on the Fox Network.

#### **IV. Preview of Coming Attractions.**

The essays which follow seek to read/interpret The X-Files from a variety of perspectives. Since a brief intro precedes each, establishing, as a prelude to reading, the essay’s context and method, we will offer here only a brief “tease”/gloss on each as a preliminary, umbrella guide to your perusal of the book’s contents.

- In “Re-Writing Popularity: The Cult Files,” Jimmie L. Reeves of Texas Tech University), Mark C. Rodgers and Michael Goldstein, both of the University of Michigan, place The X-Files in its proper television context, seeking to understand the development of “cult TV” generally and The X-Files in particular as a manifestation of a major sea change in the nature of American mass communication.
- As the alt.culture entry cited above notes, The X-Files was “one of the first shows to flourish on the Internet,” and in DDEB, GATB, MPPB, and Ratboy: The X-Files’ Media Fandom, Online and Off,” Susan J. Clerc of Bowling Green State University examines how and why fans of the series used this new communication medium to enhance their viewing pleasure.

- Allison Graham of University of Memphis finds *The X-Files* a splicing together of 1970s conspiracy films and the science fiction films of the '50s in her "'Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?': Conspiracy Theory and *The X-Files*," an essay which situates the series in a wide cultural, political, and psychological context. Mulder and Scully and their agency superiors are the most recent in a long line of FBI agent characters in popular culture.
- The contribution of Michele Malach (Fort Lewis College), "'I Want to Believe' in the FBI: *The X-Files* as an FBI Drama," examines the series as part of a continuing cultural dialogue about law and order, freedom and safety, right and wrong, truth and falsity.
- Folklorist and independent scholar Leslie Jones offers a comprehensive examination of *The X-Files*' indebted to folkloric and mythic sources in "'Last Week We Had an Omen': The Mythological *X-Files*."
- Rhonda Wilcox (Gordon College) and J. P. Williams (Georgia Southern) carefully probe Scully and Mulder's gender roles and delineate the many ways in which the series represents a departure from television stereotypes in "'What to You Think?' *The X-Files*, Liminality, and Gender Pleasure."
- Lisa Parks of the University of Wisconsin offers a much less favorable feminist interpretation of the series, grounded in Donna Haraway's theory of the female as cyborg, in "Special Agent or Monstrosity: Finding the Feminine in *The X-Files*."
- In "How to Talk the Unknown into Existence: An Exercise in X-Filology," Alec McHoul of Murdoch University, Australia offers a "microlinguistic" analysis of the way language is used in this series devoted to the exploration of the unknowable.
- In "The Rebirth of the Clinic: The Body as Alien in *The X-Files*," Linda Badley, also of Middle Tennessee State University, drawing on sources as diverse as Foucault, Haraway, Sartre, and Todorov, examines how the series' culturally self-conscious, postmodern adaptation/adoption of motifs of body invasion, mutation, and vampirism from modern horror-sci-fi film.
- Utilizing Jacques Lacan's fusion of psychoanalysis and semiotic/structuralist methods, Elizabeth B. Kubek of Syracuse University presents a far-reaching, all-inclusive Lacanian reading of the series in "'You Only Expose Your Father': The Imaginary, Voyeurism, and the Symbolic Order in *The X-Files*."

Taken together the essays in this volume, including this one, offer no more closure than a typical *X-Files* episode. No doubt they raise as many questions as they answer. Our hope is that they nonetheless enrich your present and future experience of the series in all its complexity.

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