

# ALIEN CONVERSATIONS

An interdisciplinary colloquium on the state of research and policy implications concerning UAP and other forms of alien encounter



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**Durham Law School | Palatine Centre  
Hogan Lovells Lecture Theatre  
Stockton Road | DH1 3LE  
24 March 2023 | 09.00 AM**

**And via Zoom:**

<https://durhamuniversity.zoom.us/j/6946699111?pwd=QzJPc2srK25QY2N3NWpiWdDlNUtkUT09>  
Meeting-ID: 694 669 9111 | Code: 395774

## SETI, SETA and the Elephant in the Room

*“I find it astonishing that there are still some scientists who adapt the position that it can’t be, therefore it isn’t. [...] Those who don’t want to believe these things will dismiss them no matter what they read”[...].*

Leslie Kean | Award-winning author and investigative journalist

*“As you get into this further you’ll have to give up your belief that some things are unbelievable. [...] I think the level of strident disbelief is not based on a corresponding body of careful research yielding negative results.”*

David E. Pritchard | MIT | Email to Michael Bohlander

In recent years, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI) has begun to move out of the fringe existence that it used to have for a long time. However, this applies only to what may be called the “safe” kind of SETI, the one looking at the stars and listening for signals from afar. The fate of those who carry out research into unexplained aerial phenomena (UAP) closer to home has not changed to the same degree. They are still mostly being treated as “alien hunters”, “conspiracy theorists” or “crackpots” – some of them maybe rightly so due to their less than rigorous methodology. Talking about Roswell, Area 51 and its ominous Site 4, the 2004 *USS Nimitz* incident with its “Tic-Tac Object”, or addressing rumours ranging from recovered alien technology or bodies, reverse-engineering attempts, to alien abductions and an alleged 75-year-long cover-up, is still bound to raise eyebrows, smirks or face-palms in the audience. This despite the recent admission of the US Government that it is taking UAP seriously as a potential threat to national security, and its decision to establish a permanent official investigation body, with the assignment of substantial funding.

The title of this colloquium intentionally resonates with that of the famous abduction studies conference held at MIT from 13 – 17 June 1992, “Alien Discussions”. It aims to provide a much more modest contribution to the movement towards an academically rigorous interdisciplinary examination of the UAP-related issues, especially under the accepted SETI category of the search for extraterrestrial artefacts (SETA): If UAP originate in outer space, that is what they are. However, the search effort should not be restricted to outer space if extraterrestrial artefacts can be found in Earth’s airspace or on Earth itself.

UAP have been SETI’s elephant in the room for obvious reasons. If their non-human provenance and alleged vastly superior technological capabilities are confirmed, the inevitable and uncomfortable question arises: Are we the dominant species on this planet and what is our place in a cosmos where more advanced civilisations exist?

## PROGRAMME

09.00 Arrival of delegates – tea and coffee

09.20 *Welcome from Law School Dean **Volker Röben***

### Session 1

09.30 ***Hakan Kayal** The IFEX UAP Research Programme at the University of Würzburg*

10.00 ***Hermine Landt-Wilman** Appearing and disappearing signals in the new era of transient sky surveys*

10.30 Discussion

11.00 Tea and coffee break

### Session 2

11.15 ***David Clarke** No Defence Significance? – UAP records at the UK National Archives*

11.45 ***Andreas Müller** Germany's UFO files*

12.15 ***Andreas Anton** "UFOs exist and everyone needs to adjust to that fact." - (Dis)Information Campaigns on the UFO Phenomenon*

12.45 Discussion

13.00 Lunch (Staff Common Room – 2<sup>nd</sup> floor)

### Session 3

14.15 ***John Elliott** SETI, Sherlock and the Devil*

14.45 ***Michael Bohlander** Alien encounter narratives in a forensic environment – Work in progress*

15.15 Discussion

15.30 Tea and coffee break

### Session 4

15.45 ***Emily Finer** Meteorite or Martians? Public engagement at the Moscow Planetarium in 1948*

16.10 ***Mike Cifone** The Society for UAP Studies and Limina – The Journal of UAP Studies: Developing the International Academic Infrastructure Necessary to Sustain UAP Studies Going Forward*

16.40 ***David E. Pritchard** Reflections [via Zoom]*

17.00 ***Michael Bohlander** Closing words*

## Speakers and abstracts (in alphabetical order)

### Andreas Anton

Senior Researcher | Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health | Freiburg | Germany

#### "UFOs exist and everyone needs to adjust to that fact." - (Dis)Information Campaigns on the UFO Phenomenon

"UFOs exist and everyone needs to adjust to that fact" was the headline of the renowned U.S. daily newspaper Washington Post on May 28, 2019. The basic message of the article is that in the wake of recent releases of various U.S. military information on the UFO issue, there could no longer be any doubts about the reality of the UFO phenomenon (in the sense of unidentified flying objects with anomalous characteristics). This positioning differs in a significant way from the usual reporting of important leading media in the USA on the UFO topic for decades. However, the Washington Post article does not stand alone, but is part of a whole wave of media events related to the UFO phenomenon that have attracted much attention in the U.S. and worldwide since late 2017. The paper examines the background of the events and attempts to critically evaluate and contextualize the current situation with a view to historical PR campaigns and intelligence activities in connection with the UFO topic in the U.S.

### Michael Bohlander

Chair in Global Law and SETI Policy | Durham | UK

#### Alien encounter narratives in a forensic environment – Work in progress

The reluctance of the vast majority of SETI researchers to take non-repeatable personal alien encounter narratives into account is a staple trope in the alien encounter debate. However, the proof of the pudding would seem to lie in investigating the very practical consequences of the use of encounter testimony of all sorts in legal proceedings, for example, when examining how courts would react to a claim that somebody had a car accident because she was buzzed by a UFO or distracted by a sighting while driving etc. The German Federal Court of Justice in the famous "Sirius" case already had occasion to test the impact of a victim's firmly held belief in the alien origin of a fraudster on the latter's criminal liability. In the age of increasingly ubiquitous dashcam footage, for example, we might now even have new sources of evidence to complement the personal narrative. The paper will engage with rules of civil and criminal procedure and the principles of forensic witness psychology and how the interplay might influence the outcome of a case in real life. It will focus mainly on the German legal system, because trial judges there have to give extensive reasons for their judgment, and there is no "black box" of secret jury deliberations. The author will draw on his experience as a trial and appellate judge in Germany.

## Mike Cifone

Lecturer in Philosophy | CUNY – Bronx | USA

### **The Society for UAP Studies and *Limina – The Journal of UAP Studies*: Developing the International Academic Infrastructure Necessary to Sustain UAP Studies Going Forward**

While there have been many UAP-interested (and UFO-focused) research organizations and groups throughout the world over the last several decades, there has never been an international academic organization devoted to the coordination of research efforts to study the UAP problem among the various interested groups throughout the world. There has also never been anything like a formal learned society, primarily academic in orientation, devoted to those activities that can nurture and sustain UAP Studies as a viable and dynamic academic discipline in its own right. And while there have been a few journals devoted exclusively to the UAP/UFO problem over the years, there currently exists no such strictly academic journal of substance devoted to UAP Studies. This talk will discuss how the Society for UAP Studies intends to develop this badly needed academic infrastructure for sustained, rigorous, and serious academic scholarship in UAP Studies. We will also discuss how the Society, through its distinguished members and Council of Advisors, will act to define the discipline going forward. These are interesting times indeed!

## David Clarke

Associate Professor | Sheffield Hallam | UK

### **No Defence Significance?: UAP records at the UK National Archives**

During the Cold War Western governments and intelligence agencies collected and on occasions investigated reports of UAP. These inquiries were confined to the potential ‘defence implications’ posed by the more evidential sightings. Once conventional threats to defence were eliminated, no further research was continued into the nature of the phenomena. Since the arrival of Freedom of Information (FOI) a steady stream of archive documents have entered the public domain that allows scrutiny of the UAP archives in many countries including France, Canada and most recently the UK. Since 2017 media attention has largely focused upon the ongoing UAP inquiries by US government agencies. This has overshadowed five decades of UK Ministry of Defence UAP research that was book-ended by two significant reports produced by the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). From 2008-13 I was consultant and curator for an UK open government project that oversaw the public opening of the Ministry of Defence’s UAP records at The National Archives in Kew, west London. This paper examines the most important/significant documents from this archive and the implications of the conclusions reached by MoD for both the physical and social sciences. It includes examples of unexplained incidents drawn from the files including radar/visual and photographic evidence.

## John Elliott

Chair – UK SETI Research Network | Coordinator – SETI Post-Detection Hub | St Andrews | UK

### **SETI, Sherlock and the Devil**

To paraphrase Sherlock Holmes: Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be possible. To paraphrase the Devil: Prove it, bucko! Central to the SETI protocol is the tenet “Once a candidate detection is made, confirmation is required, before any announcement or further action”. It is this benchmark that the SETI Permanent Committee have recently agreed for considering UAPs. We look at SETI's legacy rationale, the need for scientific rigour, and its evolving mindset and internal dynamics, as established agencies such as NASA begin to investigate this area.

## Emily Finer

Senior Lecturer in Russian | St Andrews | UK

### Meteorite or Martians? Public engagement at the Moscow Planetarium in 1948

Should scientists use fiction to engage and energise the public? BBC TV's recent First Contact: An Alien Encounter made it difficult for viewers to distinguish astronomers from actors and NASA's lavishly illustrated travel posters raised expectations of habitable exoplanets. This paper explores an unsuccessful attempt to convert public fascination with UAPs into understanding of evidence-based scientific investigation. "The Mystery of the Tunguska Meteorite" was an outreach event held at the Moscow Planetarium in 1948 which had unexpected consequences. The scripted interventions from actors planted in the audience proved more convincing than the scientist primed to debunk them. Spectators left the event convinced that that the 1908 Tunguska event was caused by a UAP and this explanation still has currency in popular science books and journalism today.

## Hakan Kayal

Professor in Space Technology | Würzburg | Germany

### The IFEX UAP Research Programme at the University of Würzburg

Decades of observations of UAP with their sometimes astonishing characteristics are an important reason for investigating the background of these phenomena. However, the available objective data are very modest and largely based on anecdotal narratives. The research on UAP at the Julius-Maximilians-Universität of Würzburg (JMU) focuses on the development of intelligent sensor systems to obtain such data. The experience with sensors used in satellite missions, such as SONATE-2, which are also developed, built and operated in space at JMU, is used in this process. With the Interdisciplinary Research Center for Extraterrestrial Studies (IFEX), JMU is so far the only university in Germany with a scientific institution that has explicitly set itself the goal of researching UAP, among other topics such as general space exploration. Currently, after having used SkyCAM-5 since December 2021, a new system is in development. The goal is to deploy a larger number of the systems in so-called "hotspots". The paper will present the situation in Germany and the current and future activities of IFEX in UAP research.

## Hermine Landt-Wilman

Assistant Professor and Daphne Jackson Fellow | Durham | UK

### Appearing and disappearing signals in the new era of transient sky surveys

The discovery of two large interstellar objects within a few years suggests that, although they have not been seen before, they are common phenomena. But whereas the 2019 2I/Borisov object was unambiguously classified as an interstellar comet, the nature of the 2017 1I/'Oumuamua object remains a matter of debate. In this talk, I will discuss opportunities for the detection of large numbers of interstellar objects and other interesting transient phenomena with the upcoming Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST). LSST is a pioneering international project whose goal is to provide a sensitive survey of three-quarters of the entire sky about every three days for a total duration of ten years.

## Andreas Müller

Independent Journalist and Author | Saarbrücken | Germany

### Germany's UFO files

Many states around the world run official investigation into UFOs and UAP and most of them have made the files compiled during those studies and investigations public, such as the British Ministry of Defence (MoD) via the British National Archives, the French UAP study group GEIPAN, or the USA with its first of such official studies, during the period from 1950-1970 (Project Blue Book) and most recently with the "All-Domain Anomaly Resolution Office" (formerly known as "UAP Task Force"), to name but a few. However, while it is one of the largest and politically most influential European countries, little was known about Germany's official interest, strategies and policies regarding UFOs/UAP. While political positions were known and some files discovered previously, there was no overview and current investigation into the situation. With his book "*Deutschlands UFO-Akten*" (Germany's UFO-files), Andreas Müller compiled such an overview in 2021. He will give a short overview of the available German UFO-files, present some special cases and discuss their relevance and related international consequences. He will also give an update on the current state of official involvement in the research of UFOs and UAP in Germany.

## David E. Pritchard

Cecil and Ida Green Professor of Physics | MIT | USA

### Reflections

Dr Pritchard, Chair of the 'Abduction Study Conference' held at MIT and co-editor of "Alien Discussions", will present his reactions to the colloquium.