

Call for Papers
UFOs, Aliens, and the Academy: An Interdisciplinary Conference
May 27, 2017
Trent University, Peterborough, Canada

Only a few decades ago, it would seem inconceivable to host an academic conference focusing on the theme of UFOs and extraterrestrials. Scholars have been slow to engage with this topic, despite the fundamental questions posed by its sudden rise and pervasiveness since the summer of 1947 (and even earlier), as an enduring cultural phenomenon. Even today, serious research in this area often remains taboo, and scholars frequently dismiss discussions about UFOs and ETs, saying they belong to the realm of the ‘irrational’ and the pseudoscientific. The result has been a shortage of scholarly literature in contrast to the vast amount of source material ready to be analysed. While easily dismissed as kitsch, fringe, and lowbrow, UFOs and extraterrestrials in fact play a significant role in our world.

This one-day conference will comprise a full day of speakers, followed by a film screening and keynote address. We are looking for papers that explore the significance of UFOs and ETs. Questions of particular interest include: Despite the lack of direct evidence of the existence of ETs, how do we explain the ongoing appeal of this research for both scientists and the lay public? How can we account for the fact that there is often very real and physical evidence accompanying these contact narratives? What might these stories reveal about their tellers and the historical situation in which they find themselves? Why have stories about ETs and UFOs latched so strongly onto conspiratorial imaginings? (How) do alien contact narratives fit into the wider genre of science fiction? What is the relationship between ‘fact’ (or those allegedly ‘true’ stories of alien contact) and fiction? What might be the ramifications of contact with otherworldly or multidimensional beings? How would we recognize their communication? How should we situate and contextualize discussions of UFOs and ETs? For instance, the UFO phenomenon has largely been seen as an American one – but what about stories outside of the US? Moreover, discussions are often situated in the context of the Cold War – but what about earlier sightings? And what has happened to UFOs and ETs in the Post-Cold War context? Where are we now?

This conference is committed to the task of treating UFOs and extraterrestrials as a serious object of study. We are seeking a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives on this topic (historical, anthropological, sociological, psychological, religious, literary, scientific, etc.), and we are looking for engagement with the questions posed above, as well as the themes listed below.

Possible themes include (but are not limited to):

- astrobiology
- the implications of contact - ethical, political, religious, government/military planning
- history of UFOs/ufology in North America, especially in Canada
- UFOs and the Cold War/post-Cold War
- UFOs and science/technology
- ‘Airship’ sightings before the Cold War
- ufology and the occult
- the alien in mythology and folklore
- exopolitics and world politics
- communication and contact
- apocalypticism and ETs
- theorizing ET conspiracy theories
- the ET in Fin-de-millennium culture
- the convergence of popular culture, science fiction, and ‘real’ stories of alien contact
- the cultural, political, social, historical contexts of beliefs in ETs
- alien religions/communities of UFO/ET believers
- alien contact narratives, especially in relation to the body, race, gender

Submissions:

Please send in the body of your email (no attachments) the following:

- the title of your paper
- a 250 word abstract
- your full name and institutional affiliation (if applicable)
- a 50 word biographical note

Please email submissions to: matthewhayes2@trentu.ca

There will be a nominal registration fee for conference participants, to be determined closer to the date. The conference room will be equipped with a computer, wifi, and the standard AV equipment.

Deadline for abstracts: December 15, 2016

Decision announcement: by January 27, 2017

Conference Organizers:

Matthew Hayes, Canadian Studies, Trent University

Laura Thursby, Cultural Studies, Trent University