

21A.506 Section III: Module 3 (Lepselter)

Summary of "From the Earth Native's Point of View: The Earth, the Extraterrestrial, and the Natural Ground of Home"

"From the Earth Native's Point of View: The Earth, the Extraterrestrial, and the Natural Ground of Home," by Susan Lepselter, is an anthropological study of the natural and the unnatural, the real and the unreal, based on fieldwork in Austin, Texas, primarily from 1992 through 1994. Lepselter gathered stories from "abductee support group" gatherings, events "where people get together to tell their encounters with 'all the weird stuff' that haunts and worries the real." They tell stories of abduction and encounters with UFOs, occurrences that are always too real to be dreams but that set the earth in an unnatural light.

Lepselter describes how the abductee support group started: in 1992, a veteran of Alcoholics Anonymous put an ad in the local paper calling for "UFO experiencers." After a few weeks, the group maintained a core of about fifteen regulars, who showed up for meetings of the support group structure of Alcoholics Anonymous. The group began to have UFO parties during Christmastime and New Year's and other gatherings during the summer.

Bear and Jimbo, amongst other members of the support group, tell stories about their experiences with UFOs, which are striking examples of how encounters with the unnatural transpire. Bear, one night, finds himself sleep-driving through a park he would never go to, and when he wakes up he finds that "*something* has taken off all his rings, laid them right there neat in a row on the pillow." He thinks "it must be the UFOs again." Jimbo has encountered UFOs since he was very young: "even when he was two years old they reached their long arms into the backseat of the car to grab at him." He has "seen things, felt things, and they were real."

All of these stories show some kind of "freefalling into the uncanny, out of the natural sites that should root you in ordinary time and space." They "force deferral of any quick judgement about what the real might be." All the confessors reiterate that their experiences weren't dreams; they were real. Whereas other people in the world would call them crazy for what they have supposedly seen, the self-help support group genre allows members to confess what they've seen and remember without being dismissed and torn down as they would in the outside world. Lepselter also points to the "emotional force" of the stories, which, like other personal narratives, forces others to listen openly.

Members frequently speak of their abductions by aliens. Some see aliens as "benevolent guardians warning us of our own technology spinning out of control," whereas others see them as "sinister high-tech thieves of human selves." Nevertheless, nostalgia is always present in these stories. Lepselter likens abductee group members' feelings of nostalgia about a vanishing earth to nostalgia for a childhood hometown, which involve similar feelings of displacement and loss. The special thing about nostalgia is that the remembered places can be "both longed for and despised." For example, our childhood hometown could be remembered as the place of "child abuse, narrowminded meanness, dead-end shit jobs" but simultaneously as the place of "rootedness, prayer, order and attachment." Similarly, the earth is a place where poverty and cruelty abound, where people are made to feel "crazy and judged," but it is also a stable foundation, a sign of the natural, the real. "The imagined earth is rehumanized as our natural home," a home that has been invaded by space aliens, a home that is longed for and lost.

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