

Through the Lens of Culture

By

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This paper will evaluate ideas and concepts constructed through the lens of culture. It will focus upon truth, meaning and knowledge as being relative and, why these three concepts are not absolutes. This paper uses the poem “Unidentified,”¹ composed by the author of this essay, Karen Eastland,² to explore these concepts further. It will discuss the many different terminologies used throughout the poem with Foucault’s Theoretical Concern³ and the Theories of Representation, more specifically the: Reflective or mimetic model of representation,⁴ Althusser's “Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus,”⁵ Barthes “Structural Analysis of Narratives,”⁶ and Giddens “Modernity and Self-Identity”⁷ to assist in the analysis of “Unidentified.” A full version of the poem can be found via this link.

“Truth, meaning and knowledge are not absolutes, but are always constructed through the lens of culture.”

A general social and cultural view of the world is coloured by the understanding of “what is.” This is a perception of the group, not the individual. If the group is structured, then the perception of truth, meaning and knowledge becomes absolute, but only for that group. If the group is unorganised and scattered, it becomes the minority and their views are perceived as fringe.⁸ Organised groups are generally made up of government officials, scientific and academic leaders, religion and capitalist giants, to name a few. Collective beliefs out way the beliefs of unorganised powerless groups of like minded people, giving credence to their brand of absolute relativeness. Their perceptions are built upon through their collective beliefs, which makes their culture the giver of laws, history and knowledge. Now, in the age of

¹ Karen Eastland. The Gothic Writers Guild. 2008. Unidentified.
<http://www.gothicguild.org/index.php/poems/191-unidentified>.

² Karen Eastland. Thealtic Verse: A Collection of Poetry and Prose: Unidentified. 2008.

³ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. An Introduction to Cultural Studies: Rationality and its Limits. Pp. 30:10-14

⁴ CLT110 – Image, Text, Culture. Module 4: pp.2. 2009. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.) Lines:3-6

⁵ CLT110 – Image, Text, Culture. Module 3: pp.3. 2009. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.) Lines:1-4

⁶ CLT 110- Text, Image and Culture. Module 2. Lecture 6. 2010. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.)Line:6

⁷ Chris Barker. Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice: Social Identities. Pp 218:3-4.

⁸ Antony Lewis. Word Web Pro. 2009. (Princeton University. New Jersey.) Fringe: A social group holding marginal or extreme views.

wireless capabilities, the unstructured, powerless groups have been given a voice and almost every person in the world can have an opinion, a belief and an idea. A small, select group of like minded people, believe that the existence of UFO's is a creation of bored teenagers and pre-historic cutlery (boards attached to feet), despite evidence to the contrary, or do they?⁹

“Unidentified”¹⁰ is a creative narrative of meaning, a glimpse into one aspect of the identity, and perception of Eastland. The words and signification¹¹ which make up the poem, are those in which Eastland identified with at that particular time. In other words, Karen Eastland shared a moment of identity in post-modern terms,¹² in an identity project of the past, present and future.¹³ “Unidentified” theorises through art, one person’s perception of the existence of UFO’s. It questions why all the evidence is viewed as relative¹⁴ and why there is such a large disinformation campaign concerning their existence?¹⁵ A point in case: The war in Iraq was instigated on the premise that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction (W.M.D’s). So, the world followed America into Iraq on “relative evidence” rather than “absolute certainty.” This relative, fluid uncertainty produced no W.M.D’s. With the Iraq occupation, we are asked to believe in the “possibility” that the Iraqis “may” have W.M.D.’s. Evidence as to the existence of U.F.O.’s mounts daily, and the world’s population is informed that in this, they are not even allowed to believe their own eyes.¹⁶

Unidentified”¹⁷ is a Foundationalists¹⁸ idea of alternatives through the use of art, culture and creative consumption.¹⁹ This means that Eastland is attempting to give absolute universal

⁹ Leonard David. Pioneering Astronaut Sees UFO Cover Up. 2000.

<http://www.ufoevidence.org/news/article165.htm>.

¹⁰ Unidentified. Appendix A.

¹¹ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: Signification. Pp. 487:29-30

¹² Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: Identity. Pp. 481:27-31,

¹³ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: Identity Project. pp.482:1-2

¹⁴ Graham Rodrigue. Unidentified-Flying-Objects. 2007. <http://www.unidentified-flying-objects.com/>

¹⁵ Anne Strieber. How Disinformation Experts Spread Fear About UFOs.

<http://www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc1538.htm>

¹⁶ Trystan Swale . Paranormal & UFO talks : Disinformation and UFOs – The Saucer Saboteurs. 2010.

<http://www.whalesinspace.com/2010/02/paranormal-ufo-talks-disinformation-and-ufos—the-saucer-saboteurs-27th-february-with-trystan-swale>

¹⁷ Karen E. Eastland. Thealtic Verse: A Collection of Poetry and Prose: Unidentified. 2008.

<http://www.gothicguild.org/index.php/poems/191-unidentified>

¹⁸ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.2: Questions of Culture and Ideology: The Foundations of Culture. Pp. 55:15-23

¹⁹ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Television, Texts and Audiences. Creative Consumption Pp. 344:12-37

grounds or circumstances for the truth of knowledge and values,²⁰ whilst relating absolutism as undesirable and only valid according to each different belief system and within cultural groups. The poem has been composed using many different concepts: Constructionism to show a “contrast of theories that appeal to universal and biological explanations for the U.F.O. phenomena.”²¹ Artistic modernism is used to demonstrate the “acceptance of the idea of depth and universal mythic-poetic meaning.”²²

Individualism, being most prevalent in poetic discourse because “we are individuals in a social process using shared materials.”²³ The following quote by Louis Althusser²⁴ on ‘Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus’:

“The ultimate condition of production is . . . the reproduction of the conditions of production.”²⁵

This correctly labels the actions of those in the field of arts: because an artist takes what they see or hear, then embeds an interpretation into their work. Their work is then sent out for other people to interpret according to their own individualism. An artist is the ultimate recycler because art in any form, keeps on giving.

“Unidentified” has been composed with individual freedom of thought. It depicts an anti-essentialism idea when read in a fictitious context, this means that “identities are not things that exist; rather they are the product of discourse or regulated ways of speaking about the world.”²⁶ In other words, “these identities are made, rather than found generally through language.”²⁷ “Unidentified” suits the following genres: the Paranormal: Not in accordance

²⁰ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary. Foundationalism Pp. 480:3-4

²¹ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: Constructionism. Pp. 475:32-34

²² Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.6: Enter Postmodernism. Pp. 185:4-13

²³ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.7: Social Identities. Pp. 218:3-27

²⁴ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.2. pp.58:22-23. Questions of Culture and Ideology. Louis Althusser was a Marxist Philosopher and theorist of the French Communist party. 1918-90

²⁵ CLT110 – Image, Text, Culture. Module 3: pp.3. 2009. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.) Lines:1-4

²⁶ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.1: Subjectivity and Identity. Pp. 11:27-30

²⁷ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.1: Subjectivity and Identity. Pp. 11:29-31

with scientific laws,²⁸ and Fringe Science: a scientific inquiry in an established field of study, which departs significantly from mainstream theories.²⁹

Michel Foucault³⁰, a French Theorist, developed the term “discourse in Cultural Studies,” in the course of his studies of major institutional sites in France.³¹ Foucault’s theoretical concern on the matter of “rationality and its limits,”³² argues that “knowledge is not metaphysical, transcendental and/or universal but is a matter of perception.”³³ Foucault also theorises that “truth is a social creation,”³⁴ meaning that what becomes a truth, is something accepted by the social order of specific cultural identities. This means, in an East versus West discussion, the East will view “all events in the universe as interconnected,”³⁵ where as the West is more focused on “individual events and the role of the person.”³⁶

“Unidentified” promotes the idea that what is unexplainable is most times interpreted on an individual level. It speaks of a truth accepted by only a few, and as mentioned earlier, ‘a truth condemned by specific power groups.’ The truth it speaks of is, the actuality of U.F.O's according to the perspective of individual experience. It goes on to explain the reality of physical evidence, which is repeatedly treated with contemptuous disregard, by peoples who do not wish to be labelled as foolish or unsound.³⁷ These people therefore, do what is expected within their cultural heritage, by accepting a truth they do not necessarily believe, to fit with certain cultural beliefs.

“Unidentified” focuses upon perception. This perception allows a group of humans to view things that are hidden from other groups, those who perceive their world, and all that has

²⁸ Word Web Pro. 2009. (Princeton University. New Jersey.) Paranormal: Not in accordance with scientific laws.

²⁹ Martyn Shuttleworth. Philosophy of Science > Fringe Science. 2008. <http://www.experiment-resources.com/fringe-science.html>. lines:1-2

³⁰ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Ch.6. pp.194:6-7. Enter Post Modernism. 1926-84. A major figure in French Philosophy whos work has been influential in Cultural Studies.

³¹ CLT110 – Image, Text, Culture. Module 2: Lecture: 4. pp.10. 2009. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.)

³² Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. An Introduction to Cultural Studies: Rationality and its Limits. Pp. 30:10-14

³³ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. An Introduction to Cultural Studies: Rationality and its Limits. Pp. 30:11-12

³⁴ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: Truth. Pp. 490:13-15

³⁵ Anastasia Bibikova and Vadim Kotelnikov. East versus West: Philosophy, Cultural Values, and Mindset. http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/cultures_east-west-phylosophy.html

³⁶ Anastasia Bibikova and Vadim Kotelnikov. East versus West: Philosophy, Cultural Values, and Mindset. http://www.1000ventures.com/business_guide/crosscuttings/cultures_east-west-phylosophy.html

³⁷ Karen E. Eastland. Appendix A. 2008. Unidentified. Line:5

been revealed to them as absolute. It moves on to speak of human ideology³⁸ which characterises the thinking of a group and how over time human beings have lost the ability to be imaginative. It also shows how people have deliberately changed the way in which they view the world. The use of the phrase: “deliberate emptiness that permeates the relativeness of our understanding,”³⁹ reveals a conscious move by humans to remove from being anything unexplainable. Verse 3 presumes that truth, meaning and knowledge are not absolutes, but are in fact relative, and it is our cultural perception which defines these concepts as such.

Roland Barthes⁴⁰, "Structural Analysis of Narratives"⁴¹ is best used to describe the structure of Unidentified. Barthes states that; "a narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances."⁴² Verses 3 and 4 of the poem, describe evidence types discovered over the centuries and how some ancient discoveries such as: cave paintings, sculptures and some forms of ancient languages speak of U.F.O. sightings.⁴³ These forms of communications share with the modern world, cultural identities of communities and individual expressions of past influences. Once more the loss of these truths is attributed to human perception, on the deconstruction⁴⁴ of human history to suit the few and oppose the many.

“Shapeless sculpture of boundless fates,”⁴⁵ describes matter without form. This matter is made of endless circumstances and events. These events interact with nature, through the mindless disorderliness brought about by human beings. Abstracts combine that which we cannot see, nor understand (metaphorical), with those that we can (measurable). “Provoking hidden truths” refers to buried evidence unearthed through such studies as Palaeontology⁴⁶ and Archaeology,⁴⁷ but is over looked or thought to be of no importance in the UFO debate.

³⁸ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: Ideology. Pp. 482:3-7

³⁹ Unidentified. Verse3:1. Appendix A.

⁴⁰ CLT 110- Text, Image and Culture. Module 2. Lecture 6. French linguist and semiotician, wrote a famous essay on narrative called, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives."

⁴¹ CLT 110- Text, Image and Culture. Module 2. Lecture 6. 2010. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.)Line:6

⁴² CLT 110- Text, Image and Culture. Module 2. Lecture 6. 2010. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.)Lines:7-8

⁴³ Brian Zeiler and NICAP. Crystallinks. UFO's In Earth's History. <http://www.crystalinks.com/ufohistory.html>

⁴⁴ Chris Baker. Cultural Studies. 3E. 2008. Glossary: deconstruction. Pp. 477:28-32

⁴⁵ Unidentified. Verse 4:1. Appendix. A.

⁴⁶ Word Web Pro. 2009. (Princeton University. New Jersey.) Palaeontology: The earth science that studies fossil organisms and related remains.

⁴⁷ Word Web Pro. 2009. (Princeton University. New Jersey.) Archaeology: The branch of anthropology that studies prehistoric people and their cultures through their material remains.

Barthes expresses that a “narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.”⁴⁸

“Unidentified” is a “body of thought that is concerned with the structures of signs that allows linguistic performance to be possible.”⁴⁹ This means that Eastland used words to describe mental representations. These representations enter the mind in the form of an idea or images. Eastland then transcribed these images into words. A good example of poetic description visualised and interpreted by Eastland is the phrase “colliding swales.”⁵⁰ This phrase describes a powerful authority, which has the ability to withhold evidence from the masses and in doing so is able to deny the existence of U.F.O.’s. Verse 5 describes an idea, greater than man, that has the ability to influence people. Eastland presumes to understand the reality of the human condition: that whether or not a person or persons believe in the existence of UFO’s, these persons are unprepared for such a truth to become actual. Eastland concludes the poem with this understanding. The final 2 lines of “Unidentified” show this reality: “The swiftness of its being is caught beyond the observed and retracts into an absence of sound.”⁵¹ In other words, the unidentified craft and its inhabitants realise the futility of revealing truth to a world unprepared, and so retract into a state of being, which is beyond human perception and silently vanishes altogether.

Of all the concepts covered in this essay, which have assisted in the analysis of "Unidentified," “Individualism”⁵² is the most suitable. Individualism describes the idea that absolutes are acquired through learned practices and that our self-identities are conceived through sociological truisms which exist in a world that pre-exists human existence.⁵³ In other words, human understanding pre-exists physical being. The visual acuity of the human eye transmits images to the brain, the brain filters through these images to deliver an articulated response that a person is able to understand. Learned behaviour assists in the brains ability to give an image, an idea, form, which allows human understanding to draw on accumulated imagery obtained through lessons taught from birth. On this premise, human perception allows only known ideas to present themselves as true, this infers that human

⁴⁸ CLT 110- Text, Image and Culture. Module 2. Lecture 6. 2010. (Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.)Line:14

⁴⁹ Chris Barker. Cultural Studies:Theory and Practice. 3E. 2008. Glossary. Structuralism. Pp.489:1-5

⁵⁰ Karen Eastland. Unidentified. 2008. Appendix A. Verse 5:1

⁵¹ Karen Eastland. Unidentified. 2008. Appendix A. Verse 5:3-4

⁵² Chris Barker. Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice. 3E. 2008. Pp. 218:3-28

⁵³ Chris Barker. Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice. 3E. 2008. Pp.218:3-4

awareness understands the substance of visual stimuli and cannot create a recognisable object out of stored imagery, if the object is alien and did not pre-exist human existence.

This paper has shown that nothing is absolute and that all things are created through the lens of culture. It has located and defined many concepts which have assisted in the analysis of the poem, "Unidentified." It has shown that Truth, meaning and knowledge are not absolutes but are achieved through pre-existing knowledge which is delivered through different cultural preferences. The poem "Unidentified," determines that a culture can be manipulated into certain belief structures. This paper has concluded with Giddens "Modernity and Self-Identity" to explain the understanding that "truth, meaning and knowledge are relative" and absolutism is a creation of culture.

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Appendix A.

Unidentified.

Karen Eastland – 19th of July 2009

<http://www.gothicguild.org/index.php/poems/191-unidentified>

Verse 1.

Bright lights shimmer across northern skies, dancing undeniably against the values of knowledge. Arrogance belittles salutations and fierce movements of scholarly debate turn and toss through incoherent babblings of haughty words, to blind the honour of ancient messages inscribed across the great land. Their truths flouted, to those lost to social acceptance.

Verse 2.

Moving silently, they inscribe their presence to those of mutual perception, radiating soft glows which colour the deep, achromatic hues of sullen beauty. In shape and forms of lost times past, they penetrate the hidden depths of human ideology and fulfil the deliberate emptiness that permeates the relativeness of our understanding.

Verse 3.

Rivers and oceans keep their secrets and through the endless times of forbidden reasoning's, protrude throughout the long ages, imprinting themselves in cavernous discoveries. Lost tribes recollect and admonish those of blind consciousness. Subtle tales of mythical truths prevent the un-seeing, the un-willing from its perceived representativeness.

Verse 4.

In shapeless sculpture of boundless fates, musings interact with protestations and forced declarations, ensuring the anonymity of conceptional notions. Abstract characteristics entwine the metaphorical with the measurable. Incitation's arouse dormant stirrings and present themselves as normative.

Verse 5.

Colliding swales swallow the mighty findings and deny their actuality of existence. Revolving limitations direct towards itself the harrowing sufferance of normality that influences the enamoured and attracts the futility of incomprehension. The swiftness of its being is caught beyond the observed and retracts into an absence of sound.