

BATH SPA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

**CAN THE CROP CIRCLE COMMUNITY BE DESCRIBED AS A RELIGION,
SECT, CULT OR UFO/ET GROUP?**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the sociology of the crop circle community. Through comparison of this community to other similar groups, both contemporary and cultural, this dissertation will evaluate any religious and social factors within the crop circle community and consider whether these factors, if existent, contribute towards a common bond within the community.

This dissertation discusses the sociology of religion, sect and cult, examines contemporary UFO groups, and relates the findings to the crop circle community, prior to suggesting a tentative sociology for that community. Leading members of the crop circle community are interviewed, with the results evaluated using a qualitative as opposed to a quantitative methodology. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology used in this study is given.

This investigation examines, analyses and critiques the data from both existing relevant scholarly literature as well as that obtained from interviewees before evaluating similarities and differences between them.

This dissertation concludes that the crop circle community falls outside of the conventionally accepted forms of religion, sect, cult or UFO/ET group, but that there is a strong element of respect, humility and wonder for both landscape and the environment within that community that makes it unique. It also concludes that further sociological examination of the crop circle community would bring a greater awareness and understanding of landscape.

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Francine Blake

Polly Carson

David Elkington

Michael Glickmann

John Martineau

Statement of Originality

This dissertation is an independent work, in which the sources of all non-original content have been acknowledged.

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Introduction

Outline of aims of dissertation

In the first part of this introduction to the dissertation, there is a breakdown of the different parts of this dissertation.

The second part of this introduction to the dissertation contains an insight into the recent (1978 – present) history of the crop circle phenomenon and its attendant community.

In the review of previous work, the dissertation subject is placed in the context of existing literature. As the phenomenon is comparatively recent, there is little, if any, existing scholarly literature. However, there are a number of books published on the phenomenon, including some from a scientific perspective, and these will be considered here. Also to be considered are three different examples of crop circle journals.

This section also contains research into the sociology of religion, sect, cult and the UFO/ET movement.

The methodology used will be seen to be to be qualitative as opposed to quantitative. There will be a discussion of why and how the research into the sociology of the crop circle community was conducted, and this discussion will include an assessment of both the strengths and the weaknesses of that form of research. The evidence collected from a number of unstructured interviews with leading members of the current crop circle community is collated and analysed.

In the results and findings section, a comparison of similarities between any or some of the religious, sectarian, cult or UFO/ET groups and the results from the interviews with the crop circle community is made, as well as highlighting the discrepancies between these communities. The data gathered from a study of both the recognised communities' sociologies and the interviews with the crop circle community is interpreted and analysed. A critique of all the data is made before an evaluation of the findings is given.

In the summary and conclusion, the main points arising from the dissertation are emphasised, and reference drawn to its place in advancing the knowledge and comprehension of the subject matter before an embryonic and tentative sociology of the crop circle community is postulated. A conclusion is reached which also encompasses the potential scope for further future research.

A bibliography is attached, as are relevant appendices, including the interviews with representatives of the crop circle community.

An introduction to the crop circle phenomenon and its attendant community

Whilst there are records of the crop circle phenomenon in the UK from the 15th,¹² 16th,³ 17th,⁴ 18th and 19th centuries,⁵ it is the contemporary field of the crop circle phenomenon and its associated community and enthusiasts that is relevant for this dissertation.

The first recorded contemporary report of a crop circle took place on the night of the 15th August 1972, at Star hill, near Warminster in Wiltshire.⁶ Between 1972 and 1980, the crop circle phenomenon was out on the remote fringes as far as public awareness and opinion was concerned. It was seen as being on a par with commonly held perceptions of fairies, UFOs and extra-terrestrials. It was only from 1980 that the first serious attempts at cataloguing and analysing the circles began, after three crop circles formed in a field of oats under the White Horse at Westbury, Wiltshire⁷. Terence Meaden, an associate professor of physics at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, who was one of the first four contemporary researchers, became aware of the event in Westbury and immediately investigated it, striking an independent path of research, following his own theories round weather patterns, stationary whirlwinds and plasma vortices.^{8, 9} He was followed by Pat Delgado in 1981,¹⁰ Colin Andrews in 1983¹¹ and Busty Taylor in 1985¹² who, having all discovered the phenomenon separately from each other, decided to work together. In 1986 this team discovered and surveyed twelve crop circles, including the first one recorded in oil-seed rape.¹³ By 1987 the phenomenon had trebled in size¹⁴ with

¹ Ashe, G., *Mythology of the British Isles*, (London, Methuen, 1990, p. 118), quoting the poet Richard Corbet (1582-1635):

Witness those rings and roundelays, of theirs, which yet remain,
Were footed in Queen Mary's days, on many a grassy plain,
But since of late Elizabeth, and later James came in,
They never danced on any heath, as when the time hath been.

² Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, p. 281).

³ John Michell, in the first edition of *The Cereologist*, offers a woodcut of 'The Mowing Devil of 22nd August' from a broadsheet newspaper of 1678. Michell, J., 'The Mowing Devil', *The Cereologist*, 1990, vol. I, no. 1, p. 11.

⁴ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, p. 281).

⁵ Wilson, T., *The Secret history of Crop Circles*, (Paignton, CCCS, 1998).

⁶ Hesemann, M. *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, p. 7).

⁷ Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, p. 17).

⁸ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, p. 6).

⁹ Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, pp. 17-18).

¹⁰ Hesemann, M. *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, p. 18).

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹² *Ibid*, p. 18.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 19.

over forty examples, and again in 1988, both in size and frequency, with more than 120 formations.¹⁵ By 1989, the phenomenon had spread to the midlands of England and again trebled in size, with more than 350 formations,¹⁶ a pattern repeated in 1990 with around 1,000 formations.¹⁷

The crop circle phenomenon appears in crop fields throughout the world, with the United Kingdom having approximately half of the reported worldwide total. As the phenomenon only appears in harvestable crops (although there are a few exceptions to this rule), it is only evident during the crop growing season, normally April through to September in the UK, although the majority of formations occur in ripening crops between June and August.

In these formations, the crop (normally wheat, barley, canola [oil seed rape], rye or oats, but not necessarily limited to these crops) is generally flattened and laid down in a circular or spiral formation, either out from or concentric with the centre of the formations.

From the time of 1972 to 1982, it was noted that the phenomenon seemed to gradually expand, both in terms of number and in terms of the measurable size of each formation. Until 1980, the phenomenon was known only in terms of single crop circles, with the exception of a number of events that were only to come to light much later, in 1998.¹⁸ The first known multi-circular formations appeared at Westbury White Horse in Wiltshire in 1980¹⁹ and Cheesefoot Head in Surrey in 1981.²⁰ In 1983, also at Cheesefoot Head, the first quintuplet formation appeared, with four small satellite circles appearing at the cardinal points around a larger, central circle.²¹ In 1986, the first circles with rings of alternate standing and laid crop around them were recorded,²² and by the late 1980's this was a regular phenomenon. In 1988, the Silbury hill area of North Wiltshire was visited extensively by the phenomenon, leaving behind it a number of large circles, complete with satellite circles, joined together by rings of alternate flattened and standing crop.²³ In 1989, at Winterbourne Stoke in Wiltshire, the first formation of a non-spiralling type was recorded, with the crop laid down towards the four cardinal directions, emanating from a central hub in the middle of the circle.²⁴

In 1990, there were some crop circle formations that changed the way that the phenomenon was seen forever. Until the end of 1989, no crop circle formation or component of a formation had been larger than 150 feet in length or diameter, and all

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁷ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 132.

¹⁸ Wilson, T., *The Secret history of Crop Circles*, (Paignton, CCCS, 1998).

¹⁹ Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, p. 17).

²⁰ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *Circular Evidence*, (Bloomsbury, London, 1989, p. 21).

²¹ Ibid, p. 27.

²² Ibid, p. 41.

²³ Ibid, p. 115.

²⁴ Hesemann, M., *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, p. 25).

formations had been circular, in shape and/or form. In early 1990, a number of crop circle formations occurred which incorporated ninety-degree angles, boxes, rectangles and straight lines. The first of these was at Chilcomb Farm, near Winchester in Hampshire, in the third week of June.²⁵ In August 1990, a triangle occurred in a wheatfield at Beckhampton, North Wiltshire.²⁶ However, the significant events of 1990 were in July when three formations, each over five hundred feet in length, all with many different facets and sections, occurred close in distance to each other. The first two, in the villages of Alton Barnes and Alton Priors in North Wiltshire, appeared simultaneously on the night of July 11.²⁷ The third, five miles away at East Kennet, occurred on July 26.²⁸ The resultant media exposure of these massive formations opened the phenomenon to more people, and brought it into the mainstream of public awareness and perception in a greater way than ever before.

In 1991, crop circle formations of such complexity and size occurred that the majority of scientific researches up until that date decided to withdraw from the field, as the intricacy and complications of the formations negated their scientific theories. They were helped in their withdrawal by the timely announcement in the national media from Doug Bower and Dave Chorley that they had created every crop circle as a hoax with wooden planks and ropes²⁹, although Bower later qualified his position, saying that an 'unknown force' had told him to make the crop circles.³⁰

Until 1989/90, the main scientific theory was of the opinion that the phenomenon was caused by unusual weather patterns and plasma vortices. The strongest proponent of the plasma vortex theory was Terence Meaden. Meaden contributed extensively to the *Journal of Meteorology*,³¹ a well-established international journal for disseminating research and information on weather and climate. He is now a member of the journal's International Editorial Board. Meaden stated in 1990 that:

My hypothesis is that there exists a previously unrecognised energetic vortex, a helical or toroidal force which interacts with the crop and brings with it great power and unexpected electromagnetic properties. Notwithstanding the difficulties of interpretation which have arisen from the amazing discoveries of recent years, including those of 1990 at the time of going to press, I remain confident that the circles are to be wholly explained within the bounds of conventional science.³²

²⁵ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *The Latest Evidence*, (London, Bloomsbury, 1990, p. 23).

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 54-55.

²⁷ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, p. 19).

²⁸ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *The Latest Evidence*, (Bloomsbury, London, 1990, pp. 58-59).

²⁹ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, pp. 34-40).

³⁰ *Sunday People*, 27 December 1998, p. 25.

³¹ *Journal of Meteorology*, 1985, vol. 10, pp. 75-80, vol. 11, pp.152-3, 1988, vol. 13, pp. 305-311, 1989, vol. 14, pp. 9-17.

³² Meaden, T., 'Crop Circles and the Plasma Vortex' in Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, p. 76).

The formations of 1991 (particularly the triangular and circular geometric formation at Barbury Castle, near Swindon, and the 350 foot perfectly formed representation of a Mandelbrot fractal, near Cambridge) finally disproved that theory. In the interviews with the crop circle community, John Martineau, a geodesist, geometer, publisher and crop circle researcher since the late 1980s gives a perspective towards Meaden:

Meaden was definitely a scientist, who thought that the formations were being made by plasma vortices, but he over-stretched his theories by trying to incorporate the more complex formations into it. It seemed to work well when he was just accounting for the circles, or circles with rings and/or satellites, but when he started to include the extended phenomena of the mandala-like formations that didn't start until the early 1990's, a lot of people gave up on him.³³

Francine Blake, co-ordinator of the Wiltshire Crop Circle Study Group, editor of *The Spiral*, the group's magazine, and crop circle researcher since the early 1990s, supports this statement. In almost the same terms, she elucidates upon the origin of the hoaxing theory:

Barbury Castle could not, with the best will in the world, be attributed to a rogue wind. Meaden admitted in print that "it showed signs of consciousness and therefore it must be man made." Wingfield (another prominent researcher of the early 1990's) asked, "why would anybody do that?" to which Meaden replied "they're doing that to make us look ridiculous." That was the beginning of the hoaxing theory. A theory based on a man's fear of being laughed at, on a man's sudden realisation that his research was no longer valid, and that consciousness was involved. At that moment many researchers turned pro-hoaxers.³⁴

In reaction to the Mandelbrot fractal crop formation, the celebrated physicist Professor Stephen Hawking of Cambridge University said 'Corn circles are either hoaxes or formed by vortex movement of air',³⁵ which bears a remarkably similar resemblance to the official government opinion of today.³⁶

Since 1991, the majority of scientific researchers remaining in the field have been of the opinion that the phenomenon is a man-made hoax, for the simple reason that it can't be anything else. Dr. David Whitehouse, the BBC news online science editor, contributes the following: 'Crop circles are made by people, straight and simple, and anyone who tells you otherwise is either misguided, a fool or a charlatan.'³⁷

³³ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 131.

³⁴ Blake, Appendix E, p. 140.

³⁵ *Cambridgeshire Evening News*, 30 September 1991.

³⁶ See Email of 5 May 2005 from R. O. Moore, Policy Matters Manager of the Arable Crops Division, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in Attachments.

³⁷ Whitehouse, D., 2000: 'Going around in Circles', at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/138718.stm> [accessed on 28 Apr. 2005].

Colin Andrews provides research based evidence to contradict this idea. He provided crop circle plant samples and control samples from the same field both inside and outside the crop circle to specialist researchers Kenneth and Rosemary Spelman, who, after a distillation procedure approved by the German Government's 'Pharmacopoeia for Homeopathy', were able to show photographic proof of the dramatic difference between the two types of plant crystal when examined under a microscope.³⁸

Another scientific researcher who has stayed within the crop circle research field is W. C. Levenson, who Hesemann describes as a 'biophysicist and professor from Michigan, USA, who specialises in the analysis of bio-electrochemical energies in plants and seeds.'³⁹ Silva quotes American nuclear physicists Michael Chorost and Marshal Dudley as demonstrating the existence of both 'non-naturally occurring unusual radioactive isotopes (vanadium, europium, tellurium and ytterbium) with a short half life,'⁴⁰ and 'dramatic discrepancies in alpha radiation, varying from 27 percent below to 198 percent above average'⁴¹ in samples taken from inside crop circles. A complete account of their findings can be found in their full report.⁴²

Since 1990, when there were perhaps 1,000 examples of the phenomenon,⁴³ there has been a considerable decrease in the reported number of crop circle formations. Since the year 2000, there has only been an average of sixty large formations annually in the UK.⁴⁴ But as the number of examples of the phenomenon has decreased by a factor of ten or more, so the complexity and size of the remaining crop circles have increased by a similar factor.

The state of the crop circle community has paralleled the phenomenon over the years. Prior to 1990, the community was split into two camps. Firstly, there were the original investigators and their colleagues, who developed a more hands-on phenomenological approach. Their numbers grew from five in 1983 to about twenty by 1989. Secondly, there were the academic and scientific researchers, who were seeking to place the phenomenon within the boundaries of accepted scientific knowledge. From one or two in 1985, they grew to about ten by 1989. In the interviews with the crop circle community, Michael Glickman, Professor of Architecture at the University of Southern California and an active researcher and commentator on crop circle formations since 1989, suggests that these two groups could be labelled 'A' and 'B' types, and that their archetypes have survived into the current day. Glickman says:

³⁸ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *The Latest Evidence*, (London, Bloomsbury, 1990, p. 42).

³⁹ Hesemann, M., *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, p. 81).

⁴⁰ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, p. 122).

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 123.

⁴² Chorost, M. and Dudley, M., 'The discovery of thirteen short-lived Radionuclides in soil samples from an English Crop Circle', at www.execonn.com/cropcircles/isotopes.html, [accessed on May 12 2005].

⁴³ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 132.

⁴⁴ For an accurate account of annual numbers of crop circles, both worldwide and in UK, see <http://www.kornkreise-forschung.de/textStatistics.htm>, [accessed on 26 May 2005].

The 'A' type croppie (crop circle enthusiast), one of which I'm proud to be, is the one who says 'what's happening is astonishing and mysterious, and after several years I don't really know what's going on but I want to stick around and see it through because it's so exciting. The fact that I can't nail this to the floor and explain this is fine.' The 'B' type of croppie says 'God, this is fascinating. But ultimately, it is irksome, because I cannot arguably explain or justify it. So I will bring a sledgehammer and a shovel to fit it into a consensus.'⁴⁵

In the early 1990s, the crop circle community expanded at an accelerated rate, with literally thousands of people out on summer weekend trips to the crop circles, a large number of who maintained their interest, many to this day. At the same time, the stories of hoaxers forging formations in the fields became common, a section of the overall phenomenon which remains topical to this day.

A number of different crop circle groups sprang up during 1989 and 1990, most notably the Centre for Crop Circle Studies (CCCS). This group attracted many of the leading researchers of the time, although only one of the original four (Busty Taylor) from the early 1980s. Pat Delgado and Colin Andrews stayed with CPR (Circles Phenomenon Research), which Andrews claims to have formed in 1983.⁴⁶

By the mid/late 1990s, the phenomenon had attracted its own sub-culture and iconography, as demonstrated by the rise in crop circle jewellery, T-shirts, videos, photographs, websites and posters. The community had become more commercial, with hoaxers creating formations in daylight for advertising agencies, international media and other commercial companies. As doubts about the phenomenon grew, so the active numbers in the crop circle community of the day dwindled.

In the twenty-first century current day, one end of the spectrum of opinion is that the crop circles are seen by many as an elaborate hoax by persons unknown. The current official UK governmental position is that 'We believe that crop circles are either formed as a result of meteorological turbulence or deliberately made by hoaxers.'⁴⁷ Others at the opposite end of that spectrum of opinion see the phenomenon as some form of contact with a higher intelligence, although that contact seems to be one way.

The phenomenon is firmly established in British contemporary folklore, with its own magazines, websites which attract millions of visitors, regular talks and discussion groups and an active and participant community. There are Hollywood films made of the phenomenon. It features regularly in the national press during the summer. Culturally, it has arrived.

⁴⁵ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 124.

⁴⁶ Andrews, C., 2004: 'Urgent Notice' at http://www.memorologyllc.com/CropCircleInfo/2004-0227-URGENT_NOTICE.htm [accessed on 4 May 2005].

⁴⁷ Email of 5 May 2005 from R. O. Moore, Policy Matters Manager, Arable Crops Division, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). See Attachments.

The crop circle phenomenon is unique in that it is a current cultural phenomenon which has no counterpart either in historical or contemporary society, it is non-commercial, non-profitable and not generated by any known individual or group. As Martineau says in the interviews with the crop circle community:

This is the most extraordinary thing happening in the visual arts in the world. There's no competition. There is no work that compares with this in the modern visual art field. It's ecological, it's non-commercial, there's no ego involved, there's no money changes hands.⁴⁸

The active crop circle community in the UK is today numbered in the low hundreds as opposed to the thousands of the early nineties, with a small core group of about twenty to thirty active participant researchers.

In this introduction, an outline of the structure and sequence of this dissertation has been given, along with an introduction to the crop circle phenomenon and its attendant community. The next section, the review of previous work, covers the existing literature encompassing the crop circle phenomenon and its community. It also looks at the sociological definitions of religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET group, and places the crop circle community in relation to these criteria.

⁴⁸ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 132.

Review of Previous Work

Crop Circle Books

In the review of previous work, the dissertation subject outlined in the previous section is placed in the context of existing literature. As the contemporary crop circle phenomenon is comparatively recent, there is little, if any, existing scholarly literature. However, there are many books published on the phenomenon, including some from a scientific perspective, and these will be considered here. Also to be considered are three different examples of crop circle journals.

As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, crop circles have been recorded since at least the 15th century. Indeed, there is speculation backed up by demonstrable evidence that crop circles were recorded in England in Roman times.⁴⁹ Contemporary records of the crop circle phenomenon only began to be accumulated from the late 1970s onwards, and only three or four people compiled these. The crop circle phenomenon first came to the large-scale general public's attention through the publication in 1989 and 1990 of the books *Circular Evidence*⁵⁰ and *The Latest Evidence*.⁵¹ These books, by Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado (two of the original four researchers from Hampshire), catalogued their journey through the crop circle world in the days of 1978-1990, with accompanying measurements and pictures. A story within the crop circle community is that *Circular Evidence* was on Queen Elizabeth's summer reading list for 1989.⁵² Whilst venerated in the crop circle community at the time of publication for being ground-breaking in bringing the phenomenon into the public eye, in retrospect these books might be said to be aimed more at the coffee table end of the commercial market rather than at the academic or scientific community.

A more scientific perspective was taken by its contributors in *The Crop Circle Enigma*.⁵³ In this book, a number of different opinions are offered. Michael Green, a professional archaeologist and architectural historian, comments on the formations from an ancient artistic perspective. John, the 13th Earl of Haddington, comments on the similarity of the formations' patterns to ancient symbology. Terence Meaden, in his capacity as a specialist in meteorology and solid-state physics, describes his plasma vortex theory. Professor Archie Roy, FRAS, offers an overview of both the phenomenon and humanity's changing attitudes towards it. The contributors of both the written and the photographic content in *The Crop Circle Enigma* combined in 1990 to form the Centre for Crop Circle Studies (CCCS), the first and the biggest of the crop circle community's attempts to regulate itself and to establish a type of coherent identity as a group.

⁴⁹ Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990. pp.141-43, 160).

⁵⁰ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *Circular Evidence*, (Bloomsbury, London, 1989).

⁵¹ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *The Latest Evidence*, (Bloomsbury, London, 1990).

⁵² Hesemann, M. *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, p. 22).

⁵³ Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990).

The dramatic and sudden increase in the numbers of the phenomenon in 1990 caught a lot of researchers by surprise. The corresponding increase in complexity and detail of the formations convinced a significant number of the more scientific, rational and analytical researchers to leave the field, stating that as the phenomenon obviously could not be a natural occurrence, it therefore had to be of human origin.

The scientific researchers' withdrawal from the fields left a hole in the community, one that was promptly filled by individuals representing the more esoteric side of the phenomenon.

In *Crop Circles – Harbingers of World Change*,⁵⁴ this change can be clearly demonstrated. Whereas the 1990 book *The Crop Circle Enigma* is evenly split in its contributors between those looking for a scientific explanation and those looking for an esoteric one, *Harbingers of World Change* and its contributors arrives at the phenomenon coming from a more symbolic and phenomenological perspective, concentrating more on the meaning of the formations rather than the cause. The contributing authors in *The Crop Circle Enigma* represent an interdisciplinary approach to the phenomenon, whilst those in *Harbingers of World Change* are more speculative in their approach. The authors in *The Crop Circle Enigma* primarily ask ‘How are the crop circles formed?’ whilst the authors of *Harbingers of World Change* ask ‘What do they mean?’ and ‘Why are they happening at this time in our history?’ One of the main reasons for this imbalance towards the more esoteric viewpoint in *Harbingers of World Change* was that by the time it was published, there was no-one left willing to give a scientific perspective, or rather that the scientific researchers had faded so much into the background as to be invisible. The rationalists and the scientists had moved on, and left the fields to the non-scientific researchers.

In 1994, three years after there had been a major expose in the national media, purporting that the crop circles had all been made by two elderly men from the Southampton area,⁵⁵ an American researcher by the name of Jim Schnabel shook the community even further with his accusations and inferences about the hoaxing phenomenon. A detailed description of Schnabel’s past history and his introduction to the crop circle phenomenon and its hoaxing counterpart can be found elsewhere.⁵⁶ In 1994 he published a book purporting to give the ‘low down’ on both the crop circle phenomenon and the crop circle community.⁵⁷ Schnabel sowed dissent, castigating and criticising leading members of the crop circle community and claiming many of the previously supposed genuine crop circle formations as his own work. Hesemann quotes Schnabel as claiming, both in magazine articles and in interviews, to have ‘CIA

⁵⁴ Bartholomew, A., ed., *Crop Circles – Harbingers of World Change*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1991).

⁵⁵ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, pp. 34-40).

⁵⁶ Hesemann, M. *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, pp. 44-48).

⁵⁷ Schnabel, J., *Round in Circles: Poltergeist's, Pranksters and the Secret History of the Cropwatchers*, (Buffalo, Prometheus Books, 1994).

connections', as well as having links with both the Vatican and the UK intelligence services.⁵⁸

An attempt to right this imbalance and to bring the debate up to date was made by Hesemann in his 1996 work, *The Cosmic Connection*.⁵⁹ In the first half of this book Hesemann gives an update into the latest research into crop circles, involving chemical changes in the crop circle stalks and radioactivity in soil samples as well as reports and pictures of the phenomenon from many different countries. Hesemann also gives an up to the date assessment of the hoaxing element of the crop circle phenomenon. In the second half of *The Cosmic Connection*, Hesseman attempts to draw links between the crop circle phenomenon and UFO/ET reports and experiences.

In 1998 a strictly limited edition of *The Secret History of Crop Circles* was published, listing nearly 300 events involving the crop circle phenomenon before 1980.⁶⁰ The author of this book, Terry Wilson, researched 298 separate manifestations of the phenomenon, some of which involved multiple events. He found evidence of over 400 crop circles prior to 1980, in the UK alone. However, shortly after publishing his work at the end of 1998, Wilson abruptly disassociated himself from the community and the phenomenon, not to return. Asked in later years why he had retired from the crop circle world, Wilson stated that in his opinion all of the current waves of crop circles from the early 1990s onwards were hoaxes, and he wanted nothing to do with it. In early 2001 Wilson emailed a number of crop circle noticeboards with the following statement:

All the geometrically complex formations, which make such impressive works of art, are the result of human endeavour, and anyone who says otherwise is, frankly, kidding themselves, in the absence of any robust evidence. I know, because *I have made a few of them*,⁶¹ and witnessed, in full knowledge, the irrational and ecstatic reactions of the research community.⁶²

Also in 1998 Andy Thomas published his book *Vital Signs*, republished in an updated form in 2003.⁶³ In this book he focused primarily on the meaning of the formations, taking note of both the complexity of the patterns and the antiquity of some of the symbols. Thomas makes a convincing case for why the hoaxing element of the crop circle phenomenon is in itself a hoax!

In the 21st century, the emphasis has switched away from books on crop circles. The exception to this is the work done by the geometer, geodesist and astronomer Dr. Nick Kollerstrom. He has been an active researcher into the crop circle formations since the early 1990s, but has no apparent interest in the roots, origins or the superficial meanings

⁵⁸ Hesemann, M. *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, pp. 44-47).

⁵⁹ Hesemann, M. *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996).

⁶⁰ Wilson, T., *The Secret history of Crop Circles*, (Paignton, CCCS, 1998).

⁶¹ Author's italics.

⁶² Sayer, J., 'Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind', *The Cereologist*, 2001, no. 31, pp. 28-29.

⁶³ Thomas, A., *Vital Signs*, (Lewes, Vital Signs Publishing, 2003).

of the symbols in the fields. Kollerstrom also has no apparent interest in the crop circle community. However, he has published the most definitive and exhaustive analysis of both the geometry and the mathematics of the crop circle formations to date.⁶⁴ In his book, Kollerstrom demonstrates how the crop circles have in them elements of sacred geometry that have been known to humanity for hundreds, if not thousands of years. He gives mathematical insights into the structures of the natural world, as shown by the crop circle formations, which are innovative and controversial with the capacity to change our understanding of the ways that the world works.

It might be said that the scientists never left the fields, that instead it is a case of the rationalists, the analysts and the meteorologists being replaced by the mathematicians, the geometers and the geodesists. The traditional scientists, that is, the ones who attempted to shoe horn the crop circle phenomenon into current day scientifically acceptable explanations, have given way to the new scientists, defined as those working with less rigid forms of science. Rhoney Dougal, in *Where Science and Magic Meet*,⁶⁵ quotes Paul Davies thus:

In the first quarter of the twentieth century two monumental theories were proposed: the theory of relativity and the quantum theory. From them sprang most of twentieth century physics. But the new physics soon revealed more than simply a better model of the physical world. Physicists began to realise that their discoveries demanded a radical reformulation of the most fundamental aspects of reality. They learned to approach their subject in totally unexpected and novel ways that seemed to turn common sense on its head and find closer accord with mysticism rather than materialism.⁶⁶

It may well prove to be the case that the crop circle researchers who are still active in the research field conform to Davies' ideas of what a physicist and scientist does, as opposed to the more traditionalist and orthodox viewpoint as espoused by Meaden.

⁶⁴ Kollerstrom, N., *Crop Circles: The Hidden Form*, (Salisbury, Wessex Books, 2002).

⁶⁵ Rhoney-Dougal, S., *Where Science and Magic meet*, (Shaftesbury, Element, 1991, p. 89).

⁶⁶ Davies, P., *God and the New Physics*, (New York, Touchstone Simon and Schuster, 1983).

Crop Circle Journals

There are three crop circle journals that are still publishing. All are long standing, having been in print since the early 1990s.

The first crop circle journal to be published was *The Cereologist: The Journal for Crop Circle Studies*, in the summer of 1990. It was founded and edited by the noted antiquarian and geometric author, John Michell. Under his editorship, *The Cereologist* (later to change its name to *The Cerealogist*) became the flagship journal for the discussion and debate of the phenomenon. It can be seen by reading back issues that during the 1990s, the issue of the hoaxing of the crop formations became a large factor in people's minds.

In the autumn of 1993, the editorship of *The Cerealogist* transferred to George Wingfield, a crop circle researcher active in the field since 1987. He instigated a more confrontational approach to the hoaxing constituent of the crop circle phenomenon.⁶⁷ By the summer of 1997, the editorship of *The Cerealogist* had passed to John Sayer, who gradually led a movement away from the hoaxing debate and towards the UFO/ET phenomenon, and tried to establish solid links between the crop circles and UFO/ETs. In 2005, Sayer still edits *The Cerealogist*, but it primarily concentrates on the East Anglia area of the UK, and its circulation has decreased.

In 1991, *The Circular: the Quarterly Journal for the Centre of Crop Circle Studies* was published. It has had a number of different editors, and differs from *The Cerealogist* primarily in that *The Cerealogist* tended and tends to focus on the more on the hoaxing/UFO debate, whilst *The Circular* looks more at the measure and analysis of the formations.

The Spiral is a privately run sixteen-page crop circle newsletter for the Wiltshire area. It differs from both *The Cerealogist* and *The Circular* in that *The Spiral* publishes eleven editions a year. *The Spiral* publishes up to date debate and discourse on the crop circle phenomenon, and has done so since the summer of 1995.

⁶⁷ *The Cerealogist*, 1993, no.10, pp. 15, 25.

The Sociologies of Religions and Sects

Durkheim commented that ‘there is no known society without a religion,’⁶⁸ and that ‘religion has given birth to all that is essential in society,’⁶⁹ whilst at the same time heaping scorn and ridicule on those scholars who felt that religion must have a concept of the supernatural. Alternatively, York suggests the opposite, when he says: ‘Religion is the shared positing of the identity of and the relationship between humanity, the world and the supernatural in terms of meaning assignment, value allocation and validating enactment.’⁷⁰ Smart suggests that ‘to understand human history and human life it is necessary to understand religion.’⁷¹

It could be said that the evolving technological world of the twenty first century is challenging previously held rigid concepts concerning the practical application of religion in one’s day to day life – that is, religion is coming under increasing pressure to adapt and transform, or else stagnate and eventually become irrelevant. As Weber states:

The general result of the modern form of thoroughly rationalising the conception of the world and of the way of life, theoretically and practically, in a purposive manner, has been that religion has been shifted into the realm of the irrational.⁷²

So what constitutes the conditions for a religion? Hamilton⁷³ quotes Southwold’s attributes as a ‘tentative and probably incomplete list.’ This list includes: a relationship with God, a separation of the sacred and the profane, an orientation towards salvation, rituals, beliefs held on the basis of faiths which in turn support an ethical and moral code, supernatural sanctions on breaking that code, a mythology, a scripture, an elite priesthood, and association with both moral communities and ethnic or similar groups. Most forms of conventional religion fulfill the majority of these criteria.

When only some of the criteria are met, there can be a deviation from theology towards politics, as evinced by the development of Marxism, which although it ‘possesses doctrines, symbols, a moral code and even sometimes rituals, it denies the possibility of the existence of the invisible world.’⁷⁴ Marxism, through its influence and ideology in the Communist Party during the Russian revolution in 1917, proved to be the core foundations for communism as the world has known it since that year. It is notable, however, that where Marxism has developed independently (that is, not through Soviet conquest), differing interpretations of Marxism have come to the forefront. Hence, as

⁶⁸ Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, The Free Press, 1995 [1912], p. 273).

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 466).

⁷⁰ York, M., ‘A Report’ in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 1995, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 197.

⁷¹ Smart, N., *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969, p. 11).

⁷² Gerth, H. H. and Wright Mills, C., eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (London, Routledge, 1991, p. 281).

⁷³ Hamilton, M., *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, (London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 21-22).

⁷⁴ Smart, N., *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969, p. 11).

Smart shows,⁷⁵ Marxism in the old USSR differed greatly from the Marxism of Albania and the Marxism of China, demonstrating how a belief system, whether political or religious, can change and adapt according to local demand and influence.

Durkheim has a less regulated approach to what constitutes a religion. Whilst debating the shifting boundaries of the sacred and the profane, Durkheim defined religion as: ‘A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden-beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.’⁷⁶

As can be seen from the interviews, the crop circle community fills few of the criteria for being a religion as defined by Southwold or Durkheim. However, orthodox religion, with its basis of theology, ritual and philosophy still receives much scholarly attention. This can be seen as being to the detriment of the study of folk religion.

There may be a case for allocating the crop circle phenomenon under the generalised heading of ‘folk religion.’ Folk religion is a broad descriptive term encompassing many different phenomena and belief systems. In many ways it is used as a handy ‘catch-all,’ for anything that falls outside of conventional or orthodox religion or philosophy. To ignore folk religion when discussing and debating orthodox religion is to not only miss some of the bigger picture, but also to lose vital components of religion’s roots. As Marion Bowman says: ‘To dismiss folk religion as aberrant religion or to regard it as a deviation from the norm is to misunderstand what is normative. To ignore it is to impoverish our understanding of religion.’⁷⁷

For the purpose of this dissertation, the Yoder definition is relevant here. He defines folk religion as: ‘The totality of all of those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion.’⁷⁸

From the interviews with the crop circle community, it can be seen that whilst the community is at least non-religious, if not anti-religious, there is less resistance to being classified or categorised under the heading of folk religion as opposed to orthodox or conventional religion.

Although it was Max Weber who was one of the first to introduce the idea of the sociology of both church and sect, it was his student Ernst Troeltsch who made the ideas important. Thomas O’Dea, the leading Catholic sociologist of the 1950s and 60s, who summarised Troeltsch’s work as well as that of later scholars, suggested a list of criteria for the constitution of a sect. This list comprises a separation from society, exclusiveness in attitude and social structure, an emphasis on conversion prior to joining

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 21).

⁷⁶ Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, The Free Press, 1995 [1912], p. 47).

⁷⁷ Bowman, M., *Phenomenology, Fieldwork and Folk Religion*. Paper presented to the British Association for the Study of Religions annual conference, Oxford, 1991, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Yoder, D. ‘Toward a Definition of Folk Religion,’ in *Western Folklore*, 1974, vol. 33, no. 1, p. 14.

(which must be voluntary), a spirit of regeneration and an attitude of ethical austerity, often of an ascetic form.⁷⁹

But a sect must, by necessity, have a connection with an established religious movement. As Stark and Bainbridge state: ‘To be a sect, a religious movement must have been founded by persons who left another religious body for the purpose of founding the sect. The term *sect*, therefore, applies only to schismatic movements.’⁸⁰

There can be vague dividing lines between religion and sect. For example, are the born-again Christians a religious community, or are they a sect? It might be argued that in the USA, the born-again Christian movement is a sect. It fits the criteria for a sect suggested by Stark and Bainbridge, and O’Dea, and with its ‘living room churches,’ the movement has done away with the need for fixed points of assembly. Alternatively, it could be argued that in Norway, where in late 1997 over half of the government were born again Christians,⁸¹ the movement constitutes a religion, or that it is still part of the mainstream Christian church, as it has not had a schism.

There are even vaguer lines drawn in some cases between not only religion and sect, but also cult. For example, *Opus Dei*, often regarded as a cult by its critics, nevertheless consists of members of the Catholic Church, so it may be said that it does not fit the criteria of sect, let alone cult.⁸²

It is clear that as the crop circle community has no connection with any type of systematised religion or conventional church, by extension it cannot have sect status, as defined by Stark and Bainbridge, or O’Dea. However, the hoaxing element of the crop circle community might be said to be a sect of the parent community. This hypothesis will be examined later in this dissertation.

⁷⁹ O’Dea, T. F., *The Sociology of Religion*, (New York, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 68).

⁸⁰ Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S., *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 25).

⁸¹ Stark, R., ‘Atheism, Faith and the Social Scientific Study of Religion’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 1999, vol.14, no.1, p. 57.

⁸² Chryssides, G. D., *Exploring New Religions*, (London, Cassell, 1999, p. 21).

The Sociology of Cults

Defining what constitutes a cult is an ever-changing proposition, as the cult movements themselves are changing rapidly. A popular conception is that psychological and social manipulation is often considered to be part of the cult experience. Robert Jay Lifton, a visiting professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, witnessed first hand the behavioural changes in prisoners of war during the Korean War, as well as in students in revolutionary universities in 1950s China. From this experience he postulated ideas of thought reform and mind control. In a groundbreaking attempt to list the conditions for cult-like behaviour,⁸³ he identified eight psychological themes within thought reform environments which have been widely used as criteria for evaluating whether or not a particular group meets the requirements to be described as a cult. These criteria include: control of all communication an individual has, including with him/herself, the demand for purity with the cult leader as the ultimate arbiter, and personal surrender, where the individual is claimed by the group. A cult's doctrine is seen as ultimate truth, with no dissent allowed, whilst outsiders to the cult are seen as non-persons, creating an 'us versus them' mentality.

Over the years, thought reform techniques have changed. Margaret Singer, along with the sociologist Richard Ofshe, is credited with refining thought form techniques, stressing the important distinctions between a person's central versus peripheral elements of self.⁸⁴ Singer delineated further characteristics relevant to cult identification in the 1950s and 60s, many of which highlight the ideas and prominence of cult leader. Tobias and Lalich⁸⁵ offer a comprehensive list of Singer's cult characteristics.

Over the years both the public and the professional attitude and approach to cults have changed considerably. Both Lifton's and Singer's views founded the basis for the definition of what a cult is and what cult-like behaviour consists of, but their theories are perhaps less relevant in the twenty-first century than they were in the 1960s and 70s. Since the late 1960s, the cult phenomenon has evolved, as evinced by the growth in both cult recruitment operations and in cult counselling and advice/recovery centres.

In 1985, The American Family Foundation (AFF), a leading anti-cult movement, set out what has become a widely accepted definition as to the constitution of a cult:

Cult: A group or movement exhibiting great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethical, manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control (e.g., isolation from former friends and family, debilitation, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgement, promotion of total dependency on the group

⁸³ Lifton, R. J., *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, (New York, W. W. Norton, 1961, p. 22).

⁸⁴ Singer, M. T. and Ofshe, R., 'Attacks on Peripheral Versus Central Elements of Self and the Impact of Thought Reforming Techniques', *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1986, vol.3, no.1, pp. 3-24.

⁸⁵ Tobias, M. L. and Lalich, J., *Captive Hearts Captive Minds: Freedom and Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships*, (Alameda, Hunter House Inc., 1993, p. 13).

and fear of leaving it), designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community.⁸⁶

Steven Hassan, himself an ex-cult member turned cult counsellor, has stated that there are currently four main types of cults. He suggests⁸⁷ that there are:

1. Religious or Spiritual Cults. These are often fronted by a charismatic leader who claims divine contact. The Moonies are an example of this type of cult. (Also falling under this definition are the suicide cults, such as Heaven's Gate, Jim Jones' Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians at Waco and the Solar Temple cult).⁸⁸
2. Political Cults. These often take the form of dictatorships. There may be a case for Marxism to be included as a political cult. The Stalinist days of communist Russia could be seen as cult like in their ways of dictating how people lived, thought and communed. This grouping may also include the fundamentalist suicide bomber as well as extreme left wing political groups, e.g. Socialist Worker in the UK.
3. Therapy and Group Awareness cults. In this is included both the enclosed participation cult of Scientology, as well as the more group therapy orientated cults, such as Exegesis, EST and Landmark Forum, which focus on individual weaknesses as tools for bringing people 'into line' and 'on board.'
4. Commercial and New Age Cults. These are based on personal disempowerment within one's work and home environment, and the making of profit. A commercial cult will infiltrate a company, persuade its employees to attend meetings, and take over the business before bleeding it dry.

It will be seen from the interviews with representatives of the crop circle community that neither the cult definitions of the 1950s nor those of the 2000s apply to the community.

⁸⁶ American Family Foundation, 'Cultism: A Conference for Scholars and Policy Makers,' *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1986, Vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 119-20.

⁸⁷ Hassan, S., *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves*, (Somerville, Freedom of Mind Press, 2000, pp. 5-10).

⁸⁸ Chryssides, G. D., *Exploring New Religions*, (London, Cassell, 1999, p. 33).

The Sociology of the UFO/ET Community

Since the end of World War 2, the UFO phenomenon has escalated to the point where the term 'flying saucer' is now a familiar one. A number of UFO groups have arisen, some of them evolving to become exclusive cults. A notable difference between elements of the different UFO/ET communities is whether their group, church or cult claims direct contact with a non-human intelligence, or whether their information is 'channelled' or 'transmitted' through a third party.

Both Ernest Norman, who founded the Unarius group in the USA in 1954⁸⁹ and George King, who founded the Aetherius Society in the UK in 1956,⁹⁰ were recipients of 'channelled' information.

Another more notorious recipient of 'channelled' or 'transmitted' information and data was Marshall Applewhite and his partner, Bonnie Lou Nettles, who died in 1985. Through a mixture of New Age dogma and hi-tech Christianity blended with an element of UFO and ET, the 'Two' as they liked to be known, were the leading initiators of the Heaven's Gate UFO cult which organised a mass suicide in March 1997, in San Diego, USA. Their teachings were described as 'space-age Neo-Christian'.⁹¹ Formed under a different name in the late 1970s,⁹² the group's basic tenet was that aliens residing in the Kingdom Of Heaven had placed human beings on Earth as a gardening experiment to grow souls, preparing them for transplantation to a higher evolutionary level.⁹³

The Church of Scientology, although described as a cult elsewhere in this paper, has a strong UFO/ET connection, as demonstrated by David Touretzky.⁹⁴ This connection may or may not be influenced by the fact that the Church's founder, Ron L. Hubbard, was a science fiction writer at the time of the Church's foundation in 1954, which was also the same time that the UFO contactee movement was constantly in the news.

Claude Vorilhon founded the Raelian Church after his face to face encounters and conversations with extra-terrestrial entities that he met whilst hiking in mountains in Clermont-Ferrand in France in December 1973.⁹⁵ It is pertinent to this dissertation that

⁸⁹ Tumminia, D., 'When the Archangel died', in Partridge, C., Ed., *UFO Religions*, (London, Routledge, 2003, p. 65).

⁹⁰ Smith, S. D., 'Opening a channel to the stars: The origins and development of the Aetherius Society, in Partridge, C., Ed., *UFO Religions*, (London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 85-86).

⁹¹ Hall, J. R., *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe and Japan*, (London, Routledge, 2000, p. 178).

⁹² Wojcik, D., 'Apocalyptic and Millenarian Science', in Partridge, C., ed., *UFO Religions*, (London, Routledge, 2003, pp. 277-78).

⁹³ Balch, R. W., 'Waiting for the Ships: Disillusionment and the Revitalization of Faith in Bo and Peep's UFO Cult', in Lewis J. R., ed., *The Gods have landed: New Religions from other worlds*, (New York, State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 137-66)

⁹⁴ Touretzky, T., 1997: 'OT III Scholarship Page' at <http://www.xenu.net/archive/OTIII-scholar> [accessed on 4 May 2005].

⁹⁵ Chryssides, G. D., 'Scientific Creationism', in Partridge, C., Ed., *UFO Religions*, (London, Routledge, 2003, p. 49).

the Raelian Church is of the opinion that 'crop circles are made by alien spacecraft landing in fields.'⁹⁶

One factor which links all of these UFO/ET groups is that they all have some type of charismatic figurehead, or leader, often someone who claims that they have a direct channel of communication to a form of higher intelligence or an alien power, which, when coupled with an aspect or sense of divinity, can be seen as elevating the group/cult/church founder into the status of guru, or unimpeachable leader. Often, whether these groups are successful in promoting and maintaining themselves is dependent on the charisma and magnetism of their leaders, and whether those leaders can hold the attention and devotion of their followers at the same time as attracting more.

As will be seen in the interviews with representative members of the crop circle community, the direct opposite is happening with them. Every time in the last fifteen years that an individual has arisen and taken on a position of presumed leadership within the community, they have rapidly fallen from grace!

It can be seen that in the cases of the quoted UFO/ET groups there are individuals who attain an almost omnipotent status in the eyes of their adherents. These individuals claim a communicative link with non-human intelligence, a link that is for them and them alone. It is as though 'God talks to them,' that they are the 'chosen ones,' the 'messengers of the divine.'

An alternative way of looking at this suggests that these same individuals are open to accusations of invention, flights of fancy, and illusion and deception, both of themselves and of others.

A different viewpoint on the UFO/ET phenomenon is offered by Serena Rhoney Dougal, who is the first person to obtain a PhD in Parapsychology. She suggests the UFO/ET phenomenon could be the airborne version of fairies – the airy fairy! She postulates that: 'UFOs are fairies in modern guise, representing in outer form the subconscious archetype of our planetary mind at this time – contact with other beings in the universe.'⁹⁷

It may be that pertinent that the majority of cases involving UFO/ET contact have been in the Americas, where European immigrants attempted to eradicate indigenous belief systems and superimpose their own upon local tribespeople and the land to which they had relocated. By not connecting with locally held land-based traditions and beliefs, the immigrants could be said to have lost their connection with the earth. It could ensue from this that the majority of the UFO/ET phenomenon in the Americas is a 21st century version of the airy fairy – air elementals or spirits. In the same vein, in Europe, fairy contact is experienced as being land based – pixie, elf, land elemental or spirit.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 51.

⁹⁷ Rhoney-Dougal, S., *Where Science and Magic meet*, (Shaftesbury, Element, 1991, p. 97).

Whilst there is no insinuation or suggestion that fairies or similar phenomena are involved in the crop circle manifestations, it may be relevant to this dissertation to note that the Americas host only about five percent of the annual world total of crop circles, and that crop circles around the planet have a pattern of being found close to or next to ancient earthworks and monuments that date from before recorded history.

It may also be pertinent that for every crop circle researcher who suggests that the crop circles have an extraterrestrial or outer worldly origin, there is one who responds by suggesting that the originators of these formations are terrestrially based, but outside of humanities' perceptive range – in an otherworld, populated by fairies, pixies, elves, and perhaps crop circle maker. Where is this otherworld? Lady Gregory, an anthropologist from the early 1900s who researched stories of the fairy faith in southwest Ireland, suggests:

Fairyland exists as a supernormal state of consciousness into which men and women may enter temporarily into in dreams, trances or various ecstatic condition; or for an infinite period at death. Though it seems to surround it and interpenetrate this planet even as the X-rays interpenetrate matter, it can have no other limits than those of the universe itself.⁹⁸

It may be that the difference between the otherworld of fairy and elf and the universal world of UFO/ET is only descriptive and thus dependent upon the opinion and perception of the describer. This issue falls outside of the boundaries of this dissertation, but is perhaps worthy of a separate investigation at another time.

A notable difference between the aforementioned UFO/ET groups and the crop circle community is that whilst the UFO/ET groups have only a limited number of manifest phenomena to support their claim, the crop circle community have many thousands. Tales of UFO visitations and encounters with ETs and fairies are common, but difficult to substantiate as well as being transient in manifestation. Crop circles are evident and measurable, and remain in place until harvest.

It may also be seen, both from the interviews and the existing literature on the phenomenon, that the generating force behind the crop circles appears to have not only intelligence, but also a sense of humour. The majority of individuals who are still actively researching the crop circles are those who remain adaptable and flexible in the face of the changing phenomenon, as opposed to cultivating positions of prestige or renown.

In this review of previous work, an assessment of crop circle related publications since 1990 has been given. Whilst there are no specific publications in existing literature solely related to the crop circle community separate to the phenomenon itself, a number of the previously mentioned publications have extensive comments on the community as it was at the time of writing.

⁹⁸ Gregory, Lady, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland*, (Gerrards Cross, Colin Smythe, 1920 [1979], p. 28).

This review has also assessed the necessary criteria for the establishment of a religion, sect, cult or UFO/ET group by examining the sociology of these groups, in preparation for the measurement against the crop circle community.

In the next section, the methodology used in preparing this dissertation will be discussed, including an appraisal of both the strengths and weaknesses of that methodology, and a discussion of why and how the research was carried out. Also, the methodology used in the interviews with the crop circle community will be assessed.

Methodology

Representatives of the crop circle community have been interviewed in order that the sociology of that community can be at first analysed, assessed and then evaluated against the sociology of religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET group.

The interviews with the crop circle community are necessary to provide a modern and contemporary sample of current opinion within the community. The interviews have been approached from an ethnographic and qualitative perspective, for two reasons.

Firstly, as described previously, the individuals comprising the ethnographic crop circle community are freethinking, non-conformist, unorthodox and original. A quantitative approach to this community, each with their own opinion on the phenomenon, would restrict and limit the responses, whilst a qualitative approach is likely to give more intricate and in depth detail. As Bryman suggests: 'Qualitative researchers routinely describe the data deriving from ethnographic work as "rich" and "deep," often drawing a contrast with quantitative data, which tends to be depicted as superficial.'⁹⁹

Secondly, quantitative research is often primarily used for the verification and consolidation of existing theories, whereas there are no pre-eminent existing theories about the crop circle phenomenon, other than 'it is all a hoax.' This field is appropriate for qualitative research, where theory sometimes emerges from the researched data as opposed to quantitative research where data often confirms existent theories. But this distinction is not specific. As Bryman says, 'the difference between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of verification of theory against preferring theory to emerge from the data is not as clear cut as it is sometimes implied.'¹⁰⁰

Quantitative data, often associated with positivist epistemology, normally refers to analysis of figures and numerical data. Qualitative data, relying more on meanings than numbers, could be seen as a more interpretative epistemology.

An ethnographic approach has been used in the interviews with the crop circle community, as the subject matter required 'in-situ' and 'on-site' interviews. The individuals who were interviewed face to face were more comfortable talking within environments known and familiar to them, that is to say they were able to offer more 'in-depth' statements through being at home than they would if they were in a formal setting. Similarly, some of the interviewees who were interviewed by phone stated that they felt more comfortable talking whilst at home. To quote Brewer:

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Bryman, A., *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, (London, Routledge, 2001, p. 103).

¹⁰⁰ Bryman, A., *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*, (London, Routledge, 2001, p. 99).

¹⁰¹ Brewer, J. P., *Ethnography*, (Buckingham, Open University Press, 2000, p. 10).

Ethnographic research, as in the interviews with the crop circle community, depends upon and is based in some type of social interaction with that community. The author of this dissertation has a history of association with the crop circle phenomena and its attendant community. Therefore, it is accepted that it is not possible to remove all forms of personal prejudice, bias and preconception. However, this potential has been recognised and acknowledged, and attempts have been made to ‘bracket off’ bias and pre-judgement, and to be constantly aware of the need to be reflexive at any given time within the research.

Ethnographic research would not be possible if it did not embrace a multi-layered reflexivity. Without this reflexivity, the researcher would turn inwards or become absorbed by the subject matter, undermining capacity for cultural exploration. The ability to be reflexive, to see one’s own position in the research at any given time, but also to be aware of the capacity for self absorption in the subject matter, is essential when dealing with unstructured interviews.

Because of the desire of the interviewees to be asked questions in a known and comfortable environment, and because each interviewee has their own personal opinions regarding the crop circle phenomena and its attendant community, unstructured interviews were conducted. The interview techniques followed the suggestions made by Charlotte Davies. She stated:

Interviewing carried out by ethnographers whose principal research strategy is participant observation is often virtually unstructured, that is, very close to a ‘naturally occurring’ situation. However, even in such unstructured interviews, ethnographers have in mind topics they wish to explore and questions they would like to pose; thus they tend to direct the conversation with the research in mind, without imposing much structure on the interaction. Furthermore, unstructured interviews nearly always take place between individuals who share more than simply the interview encounter; usually the ethnographer will have established an ongoing relationship with the person being interviewed, one that precedes the encounter and that will continue after it.¹⁰²

Ethnographic research, which incorporates reflexivity but accepts that complete bracketing is impossible, is necessary for the purpose of getting into the field of consciousness concerning the crop circle phenomena, instead of just observing it objectively from the outside, although one can never truly experience another person’s experience. This is another reason for unstructured interviews, for as Fontana and Frey state: ‘...the very essence of unstructured interviewing is the establishment of a human to human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain.’¹⁰³

¹⁰² Davies, C. A., *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, (London, Routledge, 1999, p. 94).

¹⁰³ Fontana, A. and Frey, J. H., ‘Interviewing: The Art of Science,’ in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. S., *Collecting and interpreting Qualitative Materials*, (London, Sage, 1998, p. 57).

Edmund Husserl, one of the principal founders of phenomenology, also supports this point of view, stating: 'the phenomenological study of consciousness is emphatically not the same as the psychological study of consciousness, for the researcher is seeking to observe and describe, not explain in terms of pre-ordained categories.'¹⁰⁴

The interviews with the crop circle community are carried out from an ethnographic perspective, taking the need for bracketing and reflexivity into account at all times.

¹⁰⁴ Husserl, E., *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, (trans. Quentin Lauer, New York, Harper and Row, 1965, pp. 90-91).

Results and Findings

This section explores the comparative differences and similarities between the crop circle community and the different religious, sectarian, cult or UFO/ET groups. These differences and similarities are considered and measured against each other before the findings are evaluated and assessed, prior to establishing a tentative sociology of the crop circle community.

The Crop Circle Community as a Religion or Sect

According to Southwold,¹⁰⁵ some of the main criteria for a movement being a religion include: a relationship with God, a distinction between the sacred and the profane, a drive towards salvation, rituals and beliefs which are held on the basis of faiths which in turn support an ethical and moral code, sanctions on breaking that code, a mythology, a scripture, and a priesthood.

There are large discrepancies here between the religious and the crop circle communities. The crop circle community could be seen as antithetical to the notion of God, but paradoxically quite comfortable with notions of the divine and divinity. It can be seen from attendances at religious services that religion's adherents seek to belong to a church, almost in a group collective, whereas the crop circle community are composed of individuals looking for their own relationship with the Divine. There appears to be no collective relationship with any notions of God or supreme being within the community, although as can be seen in the interviews, a supposed relationship with the universe is commonplace in individuals within the community, possibly as a result of the constant ongoing interaction with landscape and the heavens.

There is no evidence for ritual, or any drive towards salvation. This could be seen as being in opposition to the beliefs of the contactee/abductee elements of the UFO/ET groups, who in many cases are seen as looking for salvation from the heavens. The Heaven's Gate mass suicide is an example of this phenomenon.¹⁰⁶ The crop circle community has no desire for rapture. It might be that contact/abduction by UFO/ET is the contemporary version of the rapture, or ascent into heavens that is referred to in the Bible, Koran, Rig-Veda and other ancient texts, and is also recently a significant facet of emerging Christian thought, especially in the USA. There might also be a correlation with the abduction phenomena as experienced in terms of fairy, pixie and changeling. This hypothesis may be worthy of separate study, as it is beyond the remit of this dissertation.

The community has no commonly held beliefs or faiths, or any type of ethical and moral code beyond an established voluntary code for respecting the countryside, environment and landscape whilst actively researching the crop circle phenomenon. The original countryside code established by the Centre for Crop Circle Studies¹⁰⁷ has changed over the years after consultations with the National Farmers Union to the point where there are now clear and specific guidelines governing a person's behaviour whilst in the fields.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Hamilton, M., *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, (London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 21-22).

¹⁰⁶ Lewis, J. R., 'Legitimizing Suicide: Heaven's Gate and New Age ideology' in Partridge, C., ed., *UFO Religions*, (London, Routledge, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ See 'Code of Practice' in Appendices in Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, pp. 189-90).

¹⁰⁸ See <http://www.cropcircleconnector.com/anasazi/conduct/html> [accessed 25 May 2005] for current (2005) 'codes of conduct' in the fields whilst researching crop circles.

The crop circle community has no systematic or organised system of beliefs – as can be seen in the interviews, a cross section of the community shows a wide range of opinion as to the origins, meanings and purpose of the crop circle phenomenon. It also has no mythology beyond the contemporary. There is no established scripture within the community.

In the interviews with members of the crop circle community, David Elkington, specialist in aural fields, author of “In the Name of the Gods” and crop circle researcher for twelve years, suggests that the crop circle movement is almost anti-religious, when he states ‘Are we still in reaction to systematised conditional Christianity? To a large extent, I think that that’s very much the case.’¹⁰⁹

There is no notion of priesthood, or elitism, within the crop circle community. As can be seen in the interviews, individuals who have over the years established themselves in the position of leader, figurehead, guru or some other form of elite authority within the community have invariably, and rapidly, fallen from grace. There is an apocryphal myth within the crop circle community that as soon as someone postulates a theory as to the origin, meaning or purpose of the formations, the Circlemakers (the generators of the phenomenon) will then rapidly create a formation that directly disproves the postulated theory.

Perhaps the only way in which the crop circle community conforms or agrees with a criterion of religion inasmuch as Southwold defines it is in the distinction between the sacred and the profane. As can be seen in the interviews, the words ‘awe’, ‘wonder’ and ‘respect’ are commonly used in relation to landscape, and to a lesser extent the environment. When asked if the crop circle community is linked to landscape by worship or some other type of relationship, Glickman replies: ‘At the lower circle I would use the word respect, and at the higher circle, a profound awe, but I wouldn’t go so far as to say worship.’¹¹⁰

What may be particularly relevant here is that the crop circle phenomenon draws a person’s attention to the interface between land and the heavens, between the earth and the sky.

During the daytime in the summer, researchers, when not in crop circle formations, will spend many hours searching for them. For the majority of these researchers, this involves driving around the countryside, particularly to localised high points giving commanding views across the fields. One is constantly aware of the horizon whilst looking for crop circles. A minority of researchers have aerial transportation, from which vast areas of the countryside can be surveyed. It can be demonstrated that the pictures taken of crop circles that incorporate both landscape and horizon are significantly more popular than those that do not.

¹⁰⁹ Elkington, Appendix B, p. 127.

¹¹⁰ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 125.

In the night time, many researchers will go on ‘crop watches,’ where they will stay awake in one location overnight. Apocryphal stories in the crop circle community speak of many forms of unidentifiable aerial phenomena being observed, although there is no proven direct link between the crop circles and these phenomena. As discussed earlier, a minority of researchers feel that the origins of the crop circles are terrestrial as opposed to heavenly. Crop circle researchers are constantly interacting with the heavens, the horizons and the landscape at all hours of the day and night. This attention might have a link – tenuous or otherwise - with some basic religious dogma that suggests that God is in the heavens.

There is a clear understanding in both the religious and the crop circle communities as to the differences between the sacred and the profane. In the crop circle community that difference is measured in terms of respect and awe for the landscape, the environment encompassing that landscape, and the heavens that contain all that is visible at the time of experience. It is a hands-on, phenomenological experience. In religious communities, the difference between the sacred and the profane is expressed more in terms of dogma, liturgy and doctrine, often based on ancient texts and non-contemporary theologies. It is a hands-off experience, primarily one concerning faith and belief. Perhaps Durkheim summarises the differences between the sacred and the profane when he states, concerning them, that ‘The two classes cannot even approach each other and keep their own nature at the same time.’¹¹¹

Conventional religions hold concepts of sacred space, often symbolised in Christianity by church buildings, which are linked to a feeling of specialness that is recognised in a particular environment. Crop circle researchers, upon entering new formations, are often awe-struck and amazed by the sanctity and sacredness of what they see and feel. By comparing these two statements, it can be said that sacred space needs a location in order for it to be existent, but it also needs people to recognise its sacrificiality, or sacredness, for it to exist. It can be seen in the interviews with the crop circle community that crop circle formations are considered sacred spaces in the same way that orthodox congregations hold their church building to be hallowed. Perhaps Eliade summarised the notion of sacred space when he said:

For religious man, space is not homogenous; he experiences breaks in it, interruptions; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others.... There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous.¹¹²

By stating that sacred spaces are different to other, perhaps profane spaces, Eliade seems to be suggesting a need for interaction with people to experience the presence and absence of sacredness in order for that sacred space to exist. If this is so, might a further

¹¹¹ Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, The Free Press, 1995 [1912], p. 40).

¹¹² Eliade, M., *The Sacred and the Profane; the Nature of Religion*, (Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1959, p. 20).

postulation on this theme be that individuals carry the potential of sacred space within themselves as much as it is sited in a particular spot in the landscape?

Max Weber sets out boundaries in the sociology of religion that might tangentially pertain to the crop circle community when he states that ‘The relationships of men to supernatural forces which take the forms of prayer, sacrifice and worship may be termed “cult” and “religion,” as distinguished from “sorcery,” which is magical coercion.’¹¹³

This definition of what is religious and what is sacrilegious could be seen as separating the idea of adoration from that of invocation. The religious, or sacred, might be seen as inviting ‘energy’ representative of God, or some manifestation of the divine spirit, into individual and community lives. The sacrilegious, or profane, might be seen as invoking or summoning some type of energy more dedicated or focused towards the summoner’s will. If this were the case, the religious would become the subject of worship and detached idolatry, whilst the sacrilegious involves a more participant level of operation.

An example of this is given in the interviews when Glickman describes the crop circle phenomenon as:

...a devout, life-consuming interest, but it’s not a religion. I mean it’s fundamentally changed my life and my worldview, but I wouldn’t call it a religion. I don’t worship anything: I’ve come to have a greater sense of the divinity of it all.¹¹⁴

Here Glickman is saying the crop circle phenomenon is not a religion, but at the same time confirming that a hands-on and participant approach to the phenomenon has life-changing capacity.

It is demonstrably clear that by comparing the crop circle community against Southwold’s criteria for the establishment of a religion it can be seen that the community is not a religion, nor does it have any religious over or undertones. Neither can the crop circle community be considered a religion when measuring that concept by Durkheim’s ideas.

However, as has been described earlier, Michael York’s idea of religion is fundamentally and diametrically opposite to Durkheim’s viewpoint in the areas concerning relationships that individuals have with the supernatural. York’s statement¹¹⁵ that religion is a combination of humanity, the world as one and the supernatural could easily be acceptable to the majority of the mainstream crop circle community’s experience, although perhaps only in tenuous terms connected with an individual interpretation of supernatural. This statement can be demonstrated by

¹¹³ Weber, M., *The Sociology of Religion*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1991, p. 29).

¹¹⁴ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 125.

¹¹⁵ ‘Religion is the shared positing of the identity of and the relationship between humanity, the world and the supernatural in terms of meaning assignment, value allocation and validating enactment.’ York, M., ‘A Report’ in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 1995, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 197.

perceiving the substantial numbers of people in crop circles in the immediate days after their formation as a kind or type of congregation in a form of nature church. This seemingly spontaneous attendance at unorthodox and unexplainable phenomena occurring in nature perhaps could be seen as demonstrating York's criteria of religion involving 'meaning assignment, value allocation and validating enactment.'¹¹⁶

Therefore, it appears that whilst the crop circle community has little or nothing in common with the conventional, or traditional, ideas of religion as personified by Durkheim and Southwold, it could be seen as having certain similarities with the idea of religion as postulated by York.

It has already been established elsewhere in this dissertation that in order for a group to be recognised as a sect, there must be or have been a parent body for that sect to break away from. This is clearly not the case with the crop circle community as it is a demonstrably new phenomenon, arising only within the last fifteen years. It is also clear that the crop circle community does not meet any of the other criteria for being a sect, at least a sect as defined by O'Dea¹¹⁷ and Stark and Bainbridge.¹¹⁸

Alternatively, it is feasible, if viewing the large scale crop circle community as a church, to envisage the hoaxing element of that community as a schismatic sect that has pulled away from the parent body. The elements of this sub-phenomenon which fit the criteria for a sect, as espoused by O'Dea and Stark and Bainbridge, which will be discussed later in this dissertation

It can be seen in the interviews with the crop circle community that the word schism or schismatic is used to describe the break ups – Glickman describes the community as having been 'riven'¹¹⁹ - within the community over the years, but this by itself is not indicative of sect status.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 197.

¹¹⁷ O'Dea, T. F., *The Sociology of Religion*, (New York, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 68).

¹¹⁸ Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S., *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 25).

¹¹⁹ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 123.

The Crop Circle Community as a Cult

Everyone who has been involved, even to a peripheral degree, with the crop circle phenomenon at any time over the last fifteen years will be aware of the degree of in-fighting and argument that has permeated the crop circle community. As will be seen in the interviews, one of the main reasons for this in-fighting is the considerable range of opinion regarding the meanings and origins of the crop circle phenomena. Over the years, there have been many proponents of different theories, each vying for prominence and acceptance, all who have quickly failed in their attempt for eminence, distinction and prestige within the community.

This is in direct contrast to the general perception of a cult as being under the leadership of either a small elite group, or more commonly, a powerful and charismatically magnetic individual. As Eisenstadt quotes Weber as saying:

The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission. His success depends upon whether he finds them. His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognised by those to whom he feels he has been sent.¹²⁰

Weber is saying that a leader, guru or other charismatic figurehead cannot fulfill his desires without followers. Yet the crop circle community is antithetical towards the notion of leaders and followers. From the outset, a study of existing literature concerning the crop circle phenomenon and community demonstrates that there has never been a 'leader' or 'guru' who has held their position for more than a few months before losing that position.

When members of the crop circle community were asked about individuals who have risen to prominence only to fall quickly, Polly Carson, resident and farmer in the village of Alton Barnes, near Avebury in north Wiltshire, whose farm has seen crop circle formations appear on it every year since 1990, states:

You have to be humble. If you don't show humility before this phenomenon, you're going to fall by the wayside. Anybody who sets himself or herself up as an 'expert' is very quickly dealt with. And they have been, all the way through.¹²¹

The interviews with members of the crop circle community further demonstrate that whilst the community has active participants in terms of innovation, pioneering and trail-blazing, it has also developed an almost pathological distrust of anyone who purports to have 'the truth,' or who seeks a position of authority within the community. As Glickman says: '...there's an enormous urge to become very arrogant and think "God

¹²⁰ Eisenstadt, S. N., *Max Weber: On Charisma and Institution Building*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 20)

¹²¹ Carson, Appendix D, p. 137.

speaks through me.” I’ve many years of looking at crop circle researchers who truly believe that God speaks through them.¹²²

The existing crop circle literature and the majority of the interviews with the crop circle community clearly demonstrate that the community does not fulfil any of the criteria for being a cult, as established by Lifton or Singer in the 1950s.¹²³

The same criteria apply to contemporary definitions of cult. From an examination of recent types of cult,¹²⁴ it can be seen that whether it is religious, political, therapeutic or commercial, a cult still has to have a form of leadership, something that the crop circle community interviews clearly show is not existent.

An exception to this is shown in the interview with Elkington. When he was asked if he would say that the crop circle community, or segments of that community, constituted a cult, Elkington replied ‘Yes, I would.’¹²⁵ When further asked whether he had in mind an audience cult where people go and listen, a participant cult where people take active part, or an internal cult where individuals cannot get out, Elkington replied: ‘It’s a cult of brotherly love, and therefore where there’s love there has to be the opposite.’¹²⁶ It should be noted that Elkington was the only interviewee who responded positively to the question concerning cult status and the crop circle community.

Alternatively, Carson commented:

If I think of a cult, I think of something sinister, and there was certainly nothing like that. What I came across was this phenomenal awe; people were in awe of what was happening. I found the movement in the early nineties was one of joy and spirit and just – WOW! Y’know, it was kind of like just ‘What is this!’. That’s what I experienced. I didn’t experience anything cult like or religious like, and I think that was because no one ever crystallised it into a particular reason, and they still don’t. There isn’t and never has been any doctrine. It was just like ‘What the bloody hell’s been happening here?’, and that’s the energy that I got.¹²⁷

Here Carson is firmly adamant in her support for freedom of individual experience in regard to the phenomenon, and strongly against any form of doctrinal convention.

When asked if he thought the crop circle community had anything in common with religion, sect or cult, Martineau answered:

¹²² Glickman, Appendix A, p. 123.

¹²³ Lifton, R. J., *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, (New York, W. W. Norton, 1961, p. 22).

¹²⁴ Hassan, S., *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves*, (Somerville, Freedom of Mind Press, 2000, pp. 5-10).

¹²⁵ Elkington, Appendix B, p. 128.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 129.

¹²⁷ Carson, Appendix D, p. 136.

I think you might have been able to say that up until 1991/2... I don't think you can describe them (the researchers) as a cult or religion any more. You've simply got a collection of minds around a phenomenon, which I don't think is a religion or cult, because a cult often has a creed to identify with, and a leader.¹²⁸

Martineau is acknowledging that the research community in the early 1990s was almost cult like, but that type of religious fervour is no longer the case within the existent community.

By studying the existing literature relating to cults, both historical and contemporary, and comparing this literature to the crop circle community, it can clearly be seen that there are no similarities or worthwhile comparisons between the two groupings at the current time, nor is there any realistic potential in the future for the crop circle community *en masse* to be seen as cult-like.

¹²⁸ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 133.

The Crop Circle Community as a UFO/ET group

Whilst it can be demonstrated that there are significant and inherent differences between the crop circle community and any UFO/ET groups, it can also be shown that there are more similarities between the community and these groups than there are with any form of religion, sect or cult.

An obvious difference is that in all of the examined UFO/ET groups, unlike in the crop circle community, an individual has initiated the group, aided by either 'channelled' or physical UFO/ET contacts. This individual, who, as demonstrated earlier, assumes the role of group leader, becomes the focus of the group and could be seen as 'taking control.' As the interviews with members of the crop circle community show, any attempt at dominance within the community has always ended in failure.

There are clear similarities here between the leader orientated UFO/ET groups and certain cults inspired by an individual, or individuals. An obvious example is the case of the Heaven's Gate UFO cult. Inspired by their charismatic leader Marshall 'Bo' Applewhite, the group committed mass suicide in the belief that a spaceship supposedly hiding behind the approaching comet Hale-Bopp in the heavens would collect their souls and take them on to the next level of evolutionary progression.¹²⁹

However, cults and the UFO/ET groups may be said to differ in respect of issues relating to salvation. Whether a cult in question is a religious, political, therapeutic or commercial one, its adherents look to the cult leaders for advice and help regarding personal and planetary redemption. The UFO/ET groups might be said to look for advice and help from the heavens, albeit sometimes through the 'channelled' or guided auspices of a leader figure.

As has been repeatedly noted, the crop circle community does not have any established hierarchy, leaders, spokesperson or recognised authority. This fact on its own precludes the community from being described as a cult, and it goes a long way to excluding the community from being described as a UFO/ET group as defined earlier in this dissertation.

The crop circle community is comprised of a number of eclectic and individualistic people, many of whom are highly educated in contemporary technology. There is an opinion within the community that the UFO/ET groups are behind the times. As Glickman quotes: '...if you compare the crop circle community to the UFO community, it's very interesting. The UFO community is rooted in the past, it's rooted in the third dimension, it's rooted in mechanical reality, it's fundamentally a bunch of train spotters.'¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Wojcik, D., 'Apocalyptic and Millenarian Science', in Partridge, C., ed., *UFO Religions*, (London, Routledge, 2003, p. 278).

¹³⁰ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 125.

The only similarity between UFO/ET groups and the crop circle community appears to be in their relationships with the heavens. As explained above, the UFO/ET communities look to the skies for some type of answer, redemption or salvation. The crop circle community also looks to the skies, for answers as to the generation or origin of the formations, although as the interviews with the community show, there is an acceptance that the generation of the crop circles does not necessarily come from 'above,' as in from the heavens. The crop circle researchers interact with and relate to landscape, environment and the horizon as much as the heavens, whereas UFO researchers react as opposed to interact, and primarily with the heavens only as opposed to heaven and earth. The crop circle community is not looking for redemption or salvation at any type of group level, unlike many of the UFO/ET communities.

Although the crop circle community and the UFO/ET groups share some similarities, there is not enough linkage between the two communities to suggest that the crop circle community should be classified as a UFO/ET group.

Through the process of examining criteria for the establishment of religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET group and measuring these criteria against the existing literature of and interviews with the crop circle community, it has been shown that the community does not significantly fall under the criteria of any of these groups.

In keeping with the question of this dissertation, the next section looks at the crop circle community: does the community exist, and if so, what is its sociology?

What is the circle community?

It has already been demonstrated that the crop circle community has little in common with religions, sects or cults. It has further been demonstrated that whilst there are superficial similarities with elements of the UFO/ET groups, the crop circle community is fundamentally different to these groups.

As the interrelationships in the crop circle community do not fit any of the existing scholarly definitions of sociology, two questions need to be considered. Firstly, is there such a thing as the crop circle community? Secondly, if there is such a thing as the crop circle community, what is its sociology?

There is clear and undeniable evidence for the existence of the crop circle community. From the books sold, the journals subscribed to, the internet sites logged on to,¹³¹ the regular meetings throughout the year and the amount of people in the fields in the summertime, it could be said that the crop circle community is alive and well, reaching vibrancy in the summertime and semi-hibernating through the winter.

Alternatively, in the interviews with the crop circle community, Martineau describes it as communities as opposed to community. He states: '...there are very different groups of people involved, with very different agendas and very different belief systems. There are large elements and groups that never, ever talk to each other.'¹³² Martineau goes on to say later in the interview: 'The idea of there ever being a unified community in and around the embryonic new sciences is a dream for the future but it's certainly not going on at the moment.'¹³³

This is in contrast to Carson, who in her experience at the very centre of the crop circle phenomenon since 1990 is perhaps better qualified than anyone to appraise the state of the crop circle community, both past and present. She states that: '...there are remnants of the community. It's a much more tight community, a lot fewer people in it as opposed to a large, amorphous blob, which it was for many years.'¹³⁴

Blake, in her position of co-ordinator of the Wiltshire Research Group, is also well placed to give an authoritative opinion as to the authenticity and state of the crop circle community. She states: 'It's not a community. It's an aggregate of people with different viewpoints, different mindsets, different agendas. The only thing that unites us is the phenomenon.'¹³⁵

As has already been stated in this dissertation, the crop circle community is comprised of a number of eclectic, individualistic and educated people. These types of people do not generally bind well in orthodox communities. For every person in the crop circle

¹³¹ The Crop Circle Connector website has been in existence for ten years, and in that time has been viewed nearly three and a half million times.

¹³² Martineau, Appendix C, p. 131.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 134.

¹³⁴ Carson, Appendix D, p. 135.

¹³⁵ Blake, Appendix E, p. 139.

community interviewed, there was a different definition of what the community was or was not. For the purpose of this paper, the term crop circle community refers to a broad spectrum of researchers, with the common link being an active interest in the crop circle phenomenon.

Having established that the crop circle community is a functioning phenomenon, its inter-relationships and then its sociology need to be clarified so that its place within the larger community can be established. As Durkheim says: 'Society is possible only if the individuals and things that make it up are divided among different groups, which is to say genera, and if those groups themselves are classified in relation to one another.'¹³⁶

As stated earlier in this dissertation, prior to 1990 there were two main groups of crop circle researchers and enthusiasts. These were the phenomenological researchers such as Andrews, Delgado and Taylor who were examining the crop circle phenomena and searching for meaning within it, and there were the scientific researchers such as Meaden who were also examining the phenomena but looking for cause as opposed to meaning.

During 1990 and 1991, the sudden expansion of the phenomenon in terms of number, size and people attending the formations created an 'every man for himself' attitude within the rapidly expanding crop circle community, as old allegiances were broken and open hostility and in-fighting between proponents of different theories and opinions broke out. Out of the dramatic increase in all aspects of the phenomenon and its attendant community came a sense of confusion, where the community became fragmented and disrupted, a pattern that was to follow for many years.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the 1994 book by Jim Schnabel¹³⁷ effectively killed off any remnants of the old attitudes in the crop circle groups and communities. By 1995 the crop circle movement was a community in name only, being comprised mainly of individuals who refused to believe that the formations were anything but genuine, but who also admitted that they did not know where the formations came from or what their meanings were.

From an examination of both the interviews with the crop circle community and of the existing crop circle literature, it can be seen that the in fighting and character assassinations of the early 1990s had two primary causes.

Firstly, certain individuals took specific standpoints regarding the crop circle phenomenon, which caused disagreements, personality clashes and outright conflict. As a number of people in the interviews with the crop circle community testify, 'ego' got in the way. An example of this is when the original research and recording team of Andrews, Delgado and Taylor disagreed about issues concerning finances for

¹³⁶ Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, The Free Press, 1995 [1912], p. 444).

¹³⁷ Schnabel, J., *Round in Circles: Poltergeist's, Pranksters and the Secret History of the Cropwatchers*, (Buffalo, Prometheus Books, 1994).

photographs from both *Circular Evidence* and *The Latest Evidence*, and Taylor voiced his complaint in an interview in *The Cerealologist*.¹³⁸ Andrews and Delgado took up the journal's offer of reply to this interview, and published a letter from their solicitor's office criticising Taylor, in the summer 1991 edition.¹³⁹ Taylor ceased working with Andrews and Delgado and became a founder member of the CCCS in 1990, whilst Andrews and Delgado continued with the CPR.

Secondly, the sub phenomenon of crop circle hoaxing became the biggest issue ever to divide the community, an issue that continues to this day. This subject will be fully discussed further on in this dissertation.

Since the mid 1990s, the community has stabilised itself and started once again to research the crop circle phenomena, this time with a seemingly different attitude of looking for experience rather than answers. This could be seen as representing a switch from the empirical to the phenomenological.

In this dissertation, the crop circle community has been examined by segmenting it into three different generalised sub-groups. These are as follows: the open minded, the scientists, and the hoaxers.

¹³⁸ Harpur, M., 'An interview with Busty Taylor' in *The Cerealologist*, 1991, no.3, pp. 13-14.

¹³⁹ 'Whingeing,' a letter from Colin Andrews and Pat Delgado in *The Cerealologist*, 1991, no.4, pp. 22-23.

The Open Minded

As can be seen in the interviews, humility and respect seem to be the consistent values associated with longevity in the crop circle community. An apocryphal tale within the community is that the guiding force that transmits the crop circles examines and selects the people that it wants to work with, and in various ways arranges for others to depart. The in fighting and segmentation of the crop circle community during the years 1990-95 seems to have had the effect of weeding and pruning the community of those individuals who were involved with the phenomena for reasons such as prestige, financial gain or personal power, but leaving in place those individuals who were ambivalent, open and flexible in their attitudes and opinions towards the phenomenon.

In the twenty first century, the crop circle community has no leaders, gurus or charismatic figureheads, although that is not to say that those types of individual will not again emerge from the community in times to come. The community today is a highly disparate group of people, comprised of innovative, independent and open-minded individuals, united and linked by both the love and respect for the phenomenon that they are researching, and by the friendships and community that has arisen from the study and research of that phenomenon.

The reverence and awe that is shown within the crop circle community towards the visible phenomenon in the landscape is matched by the respect and admiration shown for the symbolic, geometric and mathematical meaning inherent in most of the formations. This could be seen as a crossover between religion and technology, or between nature and culture. Pearson suggests that alternative spirituality practitioners have a nature/culture duality:

The nature/culture duality thus persists... to re-enchant the natural world which has been exploited and dominated. Since practitioners are not generally involved with salvation religions, they do not reject the world or the everyday reality of living in the world, but seek to enhance life on earth. Earthly existence is not regarded as fundamentally sinful or binding, with a need for salvation or escape. How much one takes this as a need to defend and protect the earth, however, is open to question.¹⁴⁰

Whilst Pearson is clearly talking about practitioners of various forms of paganism, her words are very relevant for today's crop circle community. The community today is an eclectic, educated, broad based and multi faceted grouping of diverse and in some cases idiosyncratic individuals, most of whom are actively involved in 're-enchanting the natural world,' as Pearson puts it. Whilst not a prerequisite, the vast majority of the crop circle community espouse and actively promote environmental policies. It can clearly be seen in the interviews with members of the community that fifteen years of exposure to the crop circle phenomenon has permanently changed their attitudes towards the

¹⁴⁰ Pearson, J., Roberts, R. H. and Samuel, eds., *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 9).

environment, spirituality, their relationship with the planet and the heavens, and their attitude towards the supernatural

As stated earlier in this dissertation, Durkheim scorned and ridiculed supernatural concepts.¹⁴¹ He equated religions as natural phenomena that would organically arise and prosper as society became more established. Mircea Eliade disagreed with Durkheim. Quoting Eliade, David Carrasco says:

In Eliade's view, all religions are based on hierophanies or dramatic encounters manifesting themselves in natural objects. These manifestations transform those objects into power spots, power objects, wonderful trees, terrifying bends in the river, sacred animals. The stones, trees, animals or humans through which a hierophany takes place are considered valuable, full of mana, things to be respected and revered. Human beings who feel these transformations in their landscape believe that a power from another plane of reality has interrupted in their lives. Usually, they respond with a combination of great attractions and great fear. Their lives are deeply changed as a result of this encounter with numinous places which human beings have with what they consider to be supernatural forces¹⁴²

It is clear here that whilst Eliade is not referring to the crop circles, the phenomenon can be seen as representative of what he is describing.

If magic can be described as something spontaneous, joyous and inspirational, then the relationship that the crop circle community have with landscape can be said to be magical. It can be seen in the interviews that there is a quality about the crop circle phenomenon that is termed magical by many of the participants in it, and that the magical quality in question is not based on any form of personal empowerment or disempowerment. Instead it can be seen that the magical quality that is talked about relates to being constantly in what is seen as a sacred environment, where an interaction with a symbolic landscape is seen as promoting well being.

An example of this is given in the interviews with the crop circle community, when Martineau, in response to a question concerning the place of the researcher within the phenomenon, states:

The feeling of awe is indeed wonderful, seeing these incredible formations at what seems like just the right place in the landscape. There's also this extraordinary sense of recognition, which I think is something very common in researchers across the board.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, The Free Press, 1995 [1912, pp. 273, 466]).

¹⁴² Carrasco, D., *A Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimension in Chicano Experience: Bless Me, Ultima as a Religious Text*. Paper presented to the Chicano Studies Colloquium at the University of California, Santa Barbera, April 12 1979.

¹⁴³ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 134.

Pearson, whilst again speaking of pagan communities, nevertheless epitomises the diversity of the crop circle community whilst at the same time suggesting philosophical boundaries for that community: ‘The imperative within nature religion that humankind should not only respect and ascribe value to the natural world but seek out ultimacy in terms of ritual and symbolic interaction is open to a range of interpretations.’¹⁴⁴

A major and significant difference between the crop circle community and cults and/or UFO/ET groups is that the community are not hoping for rescue, or saving, but that they are actively seeking to re-engage with the planet and environment that they live with through their own individual auspices as opposed to being under the auspices of a leader or priest. Again, to quote Pearson talking about paganism but applying it to the crop circle community, the community is not looking for salvation, they actively ‘seek to enhance life on Earth.’

At a recent public talk, Polly Carson, who lives on a farm where large crop circle formations have occurred every year since 1990, made the comment that in the local villages around her, there were teenagers and even early twenty-year-olds who had grown up never knowing life without crop circles.¹⁴⁵ This statement in itself could be the basis for further sociological research in times to come, research which falls outside of the remit and boundaries of this dissertation.

There is an active hard core of crop circle researchers of some twenty to thirty individuals throughout the year. Many of these people have moved to north Wiltshire, which is the area of the greatest proliferation of crop circles in the world. As can be seen in the interviews with members of the crop circle community, the question of whether human interaction or presence encourages the appearance of the crop circle phenomenon is still an active one.

Having considered the open-minded approach to the crop circle phenomenon and its attendant community, the next section will focus on the current scientific state of affairs.

¹⁴⁴ Pearson, J., Roberts, R. H. and Samuel, eds., *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 3).

¹⁴⁵ Coronation Hall, Alton Barnes, Wiltshire, 13 April 2005, personal attendance by the author.

The scientific research element

It has already been demonstrated how under a microscope the crystalline structure of the crop from inside of a crop circle greatly differs from the crop in the same field but outside of the crop circle.¹⁴⁶ The scientific discoveries of Levengood,¹⁴⁷ Chorost¹⁴⁸ and Dudley^{149, 150} have also been discussed.

In 1992, Levengood, who specialises in the analysis of bio-electrochemical energies in plants and seeds, teamed up with John Burke, a New York business man with a strong avocational interest in geomagnetic and electromagnetic theory, and Nancy Talbot, a music producer with a research background at Harvard and the University of Maryland. Together, Burke, Levengood and Talbot, or BLT as they became known, collected samples of plants and soils from more than 300 separate crop formations around the world between 1992 and 2000.¹⁵¹

In 1994 Levengood published a scientific article concerning anatomical anomalies in crop circle plants.¹⁵² This was followed a year later by a collaboration with Burke discussing the findings of iron in crop circle formations.¹⁵³ Three years later, Burke published a paper seeming to support Terence Meaden's plasma vortex theory, even though that theory had been discarded some seven years previously.¹⁵⁴ The following year, in 1999, Levengood and Talbot published a paper discussing the different types of energy dispersal in crop circles around the planet.¹⁵⁵

The BLT team are still active in the crop circle research field and are currently looking at plant abnormalities, X-ray diffraction on soil samples, and magnetic material in the soils of crop circles that is nowhere else to be found.¹⁵⁶ They are currently working on a joint paper concerning the results of the recently completed Clay-Mineral Crystallisation Study, and hope to present it soon.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁶ Delgado, P. and Andrews, C., *The Latest Evidence*, (London, Bloomsbury, 1990, p. 42).

¹⁴⁷ Hesemann, M., *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, p. 81).

¹⁴⁸ Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, p. 122).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 123.

¹⁵⁰ Chorost, M. and Dudley, M., 'The discovery of thirteen short-lived Radionuclides in soil samples from an English Crop Circle', at www.execonn.com/cropcircles/isotopes.html [accessed on May 12 2005].

¹⁵¹ Levengood, W. C., 2004: 'BLT History' at www.bltresearch.com/history.html [accessed on 17 May 2005].

¹⁵² Levengood, W. C., 'Anatomical anomalies in crop circle plants' in *Physiologia Plantarum*, 1994, no. 92, pp. 356-63.

¹⁵³ Burke, J. A. and Levengood, W. C., 'Semi Molten Meteoric Iron associated with a Crop Formation,' in *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 1995, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 191-99.

¹⁵⁴ Burke, J. A., 'The Physics of Crop Formations' in *MUFON Journal*, October 1998, pp. 3-7.

¹⁵⁵ Talbot, N. P. and Levengood, W. C., 'Dispersion of energies in worldwide crop formations,' in *Physiologia Plantarum*, 1999, no. 105, pp. 615-24.

¹⁵⁶ Levengood, W. C., 2004: 'BLT History' at www.bltresearch.com/history.html [accessed on 17 May 2005].

¹⁵⁷ Levengood, W. C., 2004: 'Published Materials' at www.bltresearch.com/published/html [accessed on 17 May 2005].

In the years 1999-2005, Rodney Ashby has investigated a number of anomalous phenomena connected with crop circles. He has looked at and written extensively about crop stem weakening, the finding of very refined iron filings, sand and chalk in crop circles, and the strange fact that many hundreds of empty snail shells are often found in crop circles.¹⁵⁸

Dr. Gerald Hawkins, the noted astronomer, astrologer, archaeologist and archaeoastronomer who became noted for his theories concerning the use of the Aubrey holes at Stonehenge as eclipse indicators, had an avid interest in crop circles. It was Hawkins who first noted the diatonic ratios that exist in crop circles, using four theorems derived from a study of Euclidean geometry. From this he postulated a fifth theory, and challenged the readers of *Science News*¹⁵⁹ to come up with his unpublished fifth theorem. No one was able to do so, but to general astonishment, the following year crop circles demonstrating a precise example of that fifth theorem were evident.

By 1995, Hawkins had developed his theory where he was prepared to publicly discuss it.¹⁶⁰ He published his penultimate version of his Euclidean fifth theorem, incorporating Ptolemaic tradition, in 1997,¹⁶¹ before finally updating it in its final incarnation in 1998.¹⁶² *Science News Online*, an internet version of *Science News*, carried a comprehensive review of Hawkins' work, and reports crop circles happening to validate his theorem. The net journal, after complimenting Hawkins on his calculations, suggests, somewhat tongue in cheek, regarding the crop circles:

The persons responsible for this old-fashioned type of mathematical ingenuity remain at large and unknown. Their handiwork flaunts an uncommon facility with Euclidean geometry and signals an astonishing ability to enter fields undetected, to bend living plants without cracking stalks, and to trace out complex, precise patterns, presumably using little more than pegs and ropes, all under cover of darkness.¹⁶³

It could be said that the scientific elements of the crop circle community only study the component parts of the phenomenon. There remains within the scientific community a desire to explain, analyse and understand the phenomenon in rational terminology. The active crop circle community studies the whole phenomenon, real time, in the fields. They are not looking for explanations as much as experience. The difference between the researchers in the fields and the researchers in the laboratory is phenomenological.

¹⁵⁸ Ashby, R., 2005: 'Welcome to X-Stream Science' at www.xstreamscience.org [accessed on 17 May 2005].

¹⁵⁹ Hawkins, G. S., 'Letter' in *Science News*, 1992, vol. 141, no. 5, p. 156.

¹⁶⁰ Hawkins, G. S., 'Geometry in English Wheat Fields,' in *Mathematics Teacher*, 1995, vol. 88, p. 802.

¹⁶¹ Hawkins, G. S., 'From Euclid to Ptolemy in English Crop Circles,' in *Bulletin of the American Astronomical Society*, 1997, vol. 23, no.5, p. 23.

¹⁶² Hawkins, G. S., 'The Fifth Crop Theorem,' *Mathematics Teacher*, 1998, vol. 91, p. 441.

¹⁶³ Anon., 1996: 'Crop Circles: Theorems in Wheat Fields' at http://www.sciencenews.org/pages/sn_arch/10_12_96/note1.htm [accessed on 17 May 2005].

In the interviews with members of the crop circle community, Carson states, regarding the work of Levensgood:

As the years go on and he collects more data, so the results are becoming more statistically significant, and I feel that we have scientific data there that can be put forward if necessary. It doesn't explain it, but what it does do is state that there is something happening, and that's enough, that's kind of all that's needed really. We're not going to get an explanation really, because it's not in our realm. We can point to the measurable and demonstrable phenomena like the blown nodes that says that the phenomena is happening, but it's not telling you where it comes from, and nothing we do is going to tell us that, until it reveals itself.¹⁶⁴

The studies of people such as Levensgood, Burke, Talbot, Chorost, Dudley and Ashby at the microscopic, molecular and sub-atomic level, and Hawkins, Glickman, Kollestrom and Martineau at the geometric level show that the state of current scientific and mathematical input into the crop circle phenomena is alive and well. The next section will look at the hoaxing perspective and input into the crop circle phenomena.

¹⁶⁴ Carson, Appendix D, p. 137.

The Hoaxing Element

This section has already looked at the elements of the crop circle community that are made up of the open minded and the scientific. The third major constituent of the community is the hoaxing and sceptic fraternity.

When a phenomenon occurs that is beyond the capacity of standard science or convention to explain, it is natural to assume that the phenomena in question might be artificial, or man made. Only when the possibility of the phenomenon being artificial or man made has been effectively ruled out can a real exploration into mystery begin.

The first serious mention of hoaxing as a cause for crop circles came about in 1983. After the first quintuplet crop circle (a large circle with four attendant smaller circles equidistant from the main circle and at ninety degrees to each other) in Surrey, a rough replica was found at Bratton, in northwest Wiltshire. This was quickly exposed as a hoax, and the culprit, Francis Shepherd, showed his skills to the local press. He admitted that the *Daily Mirror* national newspaper had paid him to make the hoax to embarrass the *Daily Express*, another national newspaper, who, to the *Daily Mirror's* irritation, had scooped the first (possibly real) event in Surrey.¹⁶⁵

Because of the dramatic increase of crop circle events in 1990, the phenomenon received large-scale media coverage, and the general public became increasingly aware of it. As the phenomenon was suddenly and dramatically appearing in north Wiltshire, twenty-four hour filmed watches were made over specific fields, with links to live television. The high profile this assumed in the media is suggested by the fact that the BBC carried a live breakfast time link to fields at Bratton, where Colin Andrews, Pat Delgado and other researchers were excitedly proclaiming a new crop circle in an overlooked field. The following conversation took place on BBC 1 live television at 7.35 AM, 25 July 1990:

Colin Andrews: We have a major event here, two major ground markings. At 3.30 am we saw on the monitor orange lights making a triangle.

Nicholas Witchell (BBC Newsreader): I'm sure you have the nation agog. Are you quite sure you couldn't have been the victims of some elaborate hoax last night?

Colin Andrews: No, not indeed, we have something of great significance, we have everything on film – we are doing nothing now until helicopters have been over the top of the formation, to film what we have, before anyone enters the field.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, p. 20).

¹⁶⁶ Wingfield, G., 'A Carefully Planned Hoax' in *The Cereologist*, 1990, no. 2, p. 8.

Once the fields were entered, it was immediately clear from the trampled and dishevelled wheat, the ouija boards and the rough wooden crucifix's that the crop circle was a hoax.¹⁶⁷

The BBC and other news media seized upon this as evidence that all crop circles were hoaxes, and that the researchers were deluded. Subsequent investigations by the crop circle researcher George Wingfield suggest that the Bratton hoax was made by the army, under direct orders from the Ministry of Defence.¹⁶⁸ He states:

'It has been suggested that the hoax may have been perpetrated by a special detachment set up by the Army for this purpose. The purpose was said to be to defuse the (emerging crop circle) situation which was verging on public hysteria.'¹⁶⁹

Glickman comments on the possibility of governmental influence in hoaxing when he states:

I do not receive regular briefings from HMG, but, I cannot rule out the possibility, and indeed I embrace the probability, that, whatever the reasons for this hoaxing activity, authority is rather pleased by it. Therefore, it is not unlikely that in some way, there might be some kind of support for this activity. But, if I was sitting in Whitehall, I wouldn't engage these guys to clean my garden.¹⁷⁰

Martineau offers tacit support for this point of view, when he states in his interview:

I think that forces swing into being that have proved very successful. My best guess is that those forces are still there, and it's in those forces' best interests to see a fragmented psychic research community. So I think that there's a certain amount of opposition to this thing (the crop circle phenomenon) ever being stitched up or put together.¹⁷¹

Also in 1990, John Michell in *The Cerealogist* reports Dr. David Fisher, the secretary of *UK Skeptics*, claimed that every single crop circle had been made by 'an unidentified giant, comb-like farm implement.'¹⁷² Dr. Fisher resurfaced in the summer of 1990, where he challenged readers of *The Guardian* newspaper to tell the difference between the real and the hoaxed phenomena.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

¹⁶⁹ Wingfield, G., 'Epilogue: What happened in 1990?' in Noyes, R., ed., *The Crop Circle Enigma: Grounding the phenomenon in science, culture and metaphysics*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1990, pp. 185-188).

¹⁷⁰ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 124.

¹⁷¹ Martineau, Appendix C, pp. 133-34.

¹⁷² Michell, J., 'It is all a hoax', in *The Cerealogist*, 1990, no.1, p. 16.

¹⁷³ *The Guardian*, 11 July 1990, Letters page.

In the interviews with members of the crop circle community, Elkington finds that in general the sceptics and the hoaxers are easier to deal with at the day-to-day level. He states:

Sceptics are easier to deal with, I find, than those who believe. And I say that because the dogma of believers is that which says that if you go against something which they hold dear to their hearts, it makes them turn inward, it almost offends, they get very protective and all the insecurities arise. Whereas with the sceptic, in a sense you have a greater potential for open-mindedness. I find sceptics a lot easier to talk to because one can span over a broader range of subjects in terms of the potentials and the possibilities of what crop circles might be.¹⁷⁴

Elkington's comments fly in the face of the rest of the crop circle community interviews. His willingness to embrace what other researchers might see as the profane within the community (the hoaxers and sceptics) puts him in a place of his own. Nevertheless, it shows willingness on his part to embrace concepts that are considered unthinkable by some researchers within the crop circle community.

In 1991, further hoax exposés of hoaxes were unfolding. After the season had ended, the *Daily Star* newspaper reported the story of two sexagenarians, Dave Chorley and Doug Bower. Doug and Dave, as they have become known, claimed to have made every one of the many hundreds of crop circles up until 1991. Whilst their claim was quickly shown to have been ridiculous, the damage was done.¹⁷⁵ The majority of the public became convinced that the crop circle phenomena were all a hoax, a view that is held to this day.

By the summer of 1992, hoaxing had become a major and contentious issue, almost overtaking the real phenomena. A number of different hoaxing teams were making formations, causing seeds of mistrust to be sown throughout the community. Robert Irving, a part time journalist who photographed crop circle researchers, teamed up with Jim Schnabel, an American sceptic researcher. They became part of a hoaxing team that was known as 'Team Satan' in the crop circle community. Whilst observing the researchers at night, Irving and Schnabel decided to make circles themselves. When asked who was paying him, Irving, a nephew of a high ranking Home Office civil servant, mentioned a foundation.¹⁷⁶ Schnabel went on to claim that he made the majority of all of the crop circles in 1992.¹⁷⁷

1993 and 1994 were years of disarray, confusion and deception in what was left of the crop circle community. The highlight of the crop circle season in 1993 was the 'Bythorn Mandala,' an intricate pattern comprised of overlaid pentagrams, pentagons, rings and

¹⁷⁴ Elkington, Appendix B, p. 126.

¹⁷⁵ Hesemann, M., *The Cosmic Connection: Worldwide Crop Formations and ET Contacts*, (Bath, Gateway Books, 1996, pp. 39-44).

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 153.

circles.¹⁷⁸ Despite protests, *The Cerealologist* opined that this was a fake, a decision that split what was left of the crop circle community.¹⁷⁹ In 1994, the publication by Schnabel of his book ‘exposing’ the crop circles and their attendant community¹⁸⁰ was seen as the final nail in the coffin for the crop circles, at least as far as the public perception was concerned.

There may be relevance in the facts that as the hoaxing element of the crop circle phenomenon became more widespread in the early 1990s, so the number of formations appearing sharply decreased. It has been demonstrated earlier in this dissertation that the number of crop circle formations trebled yearly through the late 1980s, reaching a peak of 1,000 formations in 1990 in the UK alone. At this time, there were no accurate records being kept of crop circle formations elsewhere in the world. But by the year 1995, the number of crop circle formations had dropped to 180 worldwide, with only 135 of them in the UK.¹⁸¹

During the years of 1995 through to 1998, the crop circle phenomenon faded into the background as far as the media and public perception was concerned. In the fields, those researchers who were left started to form new communities. Hoaxers were still active, although to a lesser degree. But perhaps because the phenomenon refused to just ‘go away,’ further media interest occurred in 1998.

Robert Irving, of ‘Team Satan,’ teamed up with ‘landscape artists’ Rod Dickinson, Will Russell and John Lundberg to form ‘the circlemakers,’ a hoaxing team who claim to have made a large number of crop circles. This team represented the best of the hoaxing element of the crop circle community. They were flown to New Zealand by NBC, an American television company, to construct a crop circle for the television ‘debunking’ show *Unmasked: The Secrets of Deception*, in early 1998. Over three days, in broad daylight and with the aid of two forty ton cranes, they constructed a large crop circle formation, which was then filmed and offered as proof to the American public that all crop circles are fakes.¹⁸²

The ‘circlemakers’ and Doug Bower (of ‘Doug and Dave’ fame) were employed by the BBC and sponsored by the company Yell to make a pattern in the fields of north Wiltshire at night during 1998, incorporating the Yell logo. With the aid of a forty ton crane and floodlights, they succeeded, but were discovered within an hour of starting by, ironically, another group of hoaxers.¹⁸³ The BBC, showing the results on the programme *Country File* in late 1998, said that one of its stated aims was to see if they

¹⁷⁸ See Attachments. The dots at the left-hand arms of the pentagram are people. The dark area at the base of the crop circle is *unflattened* weeds, still vertical amidst a field of flattened wheat.

¹⁷⁹ Editorial in *The Cerealologist*, 1993, no. 10, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Schnabel, J., *Round in Circles: Poltergeist's, Pranksters and the Secret History of the Cropwatchers*, (Buffalo, Prometheus Books, 1994).

¹⁸¹ Andreas Muller, German crop circle researcher since 1991, at <http://www.kornkreise-forschung.de/>, [accessed on 22 May 2005].

¹⁸² Silva, F., *Secrets in the Fields: The Science and Mysticism of Crop Circles*, (Charlottesville, Hampton Roads, 2002, pp. 91-94).

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, pp. 99-100.

could create a complex crop circle at night without being caught.¹⁸⁴ Here, they obviously failed.

From 1998 to the present day, the crop circle phenomenon is once again creeping into the newspapers and onto the television screens. Since 2001, crop circles have featured in advertising themes on television and in newspapers. In 2004, 'Signs,' a Hollywood 'blockbuster' movie, used crop circles as one of its central themes. Every year, certain UK national newspapers (notably *The Daily Mail*) have multi page spreads of current formations.

In 1999, Matthew Williams and an anonymous colleague were photographed making a seven-pointed pattern in crops in Wiltshire. These photos were sent anonymously to the police, and a prosecution occurred in November 2000, at which Williams was fined £100.00.¹⁸⁵ Williams is the only person ever to be charged with criminal damage by making a crop circle. Prior to being prosecuted, he agreed to give a statement regarding his hoaxing activities in an interview with Sherry Stultz of *The Cerealogist*, although Williams himself emphasised that he considered himself a circlemaker rather than a hoaxer. In that statement,¹⁸⁶ Williams gives some of his reasons for making crop circles as being: to see how hard it is to make them, to see how good the researchers are and to ascertain if the claims of other human circlemakers are true.

In 2002, John Lundberg, a former researcher who became a hoaxer and the founder of 'the circlemakers' hoaxing team, was interviewed by the BBC. Even though he admitted making crop circles, he denied that he was a hoaxer, preferring the term 'conceptual artist.' Lundberg states:

I don't regard myself as a hoaxer - I'm not interested in rug-pulling anybody. Yet the assumption is that if I make a crop circle, it must be because I want to undermine the beliefs of people who think they are not man-made.¹⁸⁷

Currently, the numbers of crop circles worldwide is on the steady increase, although the same is not true for the UK. In the UK, the numbers have slowly but steadily dropped to the point where there are less than 100 formations annually each year.¹⁸⁸ However, the decrease in number is matched by a startling increase in complexity and design.

The hoaxers have not gone away. It is common during the summer to find any of the 'circlemakers' standing in a fresh crop circle, complete with planks and ropes, talking to (often Japanese) television crews. They do not specifically claim to have made any of the formations, but they insinuate by both words and actions that either they are responsible, or that they know who are. The 'circlemakers,' being the most organised of

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 100.

¹⁸⁵ http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2310127.stm, [accessed on 21 May 2005].

¹⁸⁶ Stultz, S., 'NHNE Crop Circle Update # 8: A Statement from Matthew Williams,' in *The Cerealogist*, 1999, Vol. 24, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸⁷ http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2191565.stm, [accessed on 21 May 2005].

¹⁸⁸ Andreas Muller, German crop circle researcher since 1991, at <http://www.kornkreise-forschung.de/>, [accessed on 22 May 2005].

the hoaxers, have their own website, where they regularly boast of their hoaxing abilities without ever actually admitting to having made anything other than formations for corporate companies or television stations.¹⁸⁹

Lundberg suggests that ‘We are doing well, we are all earning a very healthy living from crop circles.’¹⁹⁰ His aim is to ‘use art to perpetuate the mystery and the mythology about crop circles’. Later on in the same article, he goes on to explain further: ‘We are creating beautiful shapes but also mystery, allowing people to experience the unexplained. That is why we never claim authorship of the circles, because that would break the mystery.’¹⁹¹

Irving, in what may be seen as an attempt to defend his hoaxing activities, suggests that deception is part of creation, and a necessary part of both science and art, in his article ‘Art or Artifice?’¹⁹²

The hoaxers of 2005 are now self-styled ‘landscape artists.’ As the patterns in the fields have decreased in number but increased in complexity over the last ten years, so the claims of the hoaxers to have made many of the formations are coming increasingly under the spotlight, as are the hoaxers themselves. Glickman categorises them thus:

The hoaxers are, by and large, dysfunctional young males. They can’t sustain a job; they can’t sustain a relationship. They’re often – not always – but often dressed in black, they’re tattooed, they’re shaven headed or ponytailed, they drink a lot and they dope a lot. Their prime motivation is the sense of fulfilment that they get from the deception of others.¹⁹³

From a sociological perspective, there can be a case for the term ‘sect’ to be applied to the hoaxing element of the crop circle community. If the large scale crop circle community is seen as a parent church, the hoaxers could be seen as a schismatic sect, as defined by O’Dea, and Stark and Bainbridge. O’Dea’s list of attributes of a sect comprises a separation from society, an exclusiveness in attitude and social structure, an emphasis on conversion prior to joining (which must be voluntary), a spirit of regeneration and an attitude of ethical austerity, often of an ascetic form.¹⁹⁴ The hoaxers are certainly separate from the mainstream community, they can be seen from the interviews to have an exclusiveness of attitude and social structure, and they join together to make hoax drop circles willingly. However, whether or not the hoaxing element of the community embrace a spirit of regeneration and an attitude of ethical austerity remains open to question.

¹⁸⁹ See <http://www.circlemakers.org>, [accessed 21 May 2005].

¹⁹⁰ Harrison, D., ‘The Fellowship of the Ring,’ in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 25 July 2004, interviewing John Lundberg.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Irving, R., ‘Art of Artifice?’ 2005: at http://www.circlemakers.org/art_and_artifice.html [accessed on 22 May 2005].

¹⁹³ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 124.

¹⁹⁴ O’Dea, T. F., *The Sociology of Religion*, (New York, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 68).

The hoaxing element of the community fit the definition of sect as defined by Stark and Bainbridge,¹⁹⁵ as they (the hoaxers) have had a schism with the parent body (the larger crop circle community). Chryssides, when commenting on Christian sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Amish and the Hutterites makes a comment that is relevant to the schism between the hoaxers and the crop circle community at large. He states:

Because the sect cannot accept the values of the dominant culture, it follows that those who seek to belong are those who are disenchanting with the norms of prevailing society: the 'disaffected' and the 'alienated', who, according to Troeltsch, belong to the lower and more disadvantaged social classes.¹⁹⁶

It can be seen in the interviews that whilst the crop circle community *en masse* have no time for the hoaxers, many of them also begrudgingly accept that the efforts of the hoaxers over the years have made a lot of people look foolish, and that the hoaxing element is a part of the overall phenomenon. As Glickman says: 'I believe that the whole hoaxing thing is a specific part of the curriculum. I find it fascinating to see the ways in which the whole community has been – I wouldn't say divided – I would say riven by this, and it is very much some kind of lesson.'¹⁹⁷ Elkington offers a slightly different perspective, when he says: 'I think that a large part of the hoaxing thing itself is a hoax. We look at the time scale of these things being created, and we look at the complexity of some of the patterns, it's beyond belief.'¹⁹⁸

This opinion of Elkington's, that the hoaxing is itself primarily a hoax, is backed up by Blake, who, like all of the researchers interviewed, lives within an hour's drive of the phenomenon's epicentre and who knows a lot of the local people. She states:

I disagree with the idea that lots of people at work making crop circles. There is nothing to back that up. Living in the area, I speak to the farmers, the villagers and such like, and I just know that this is not true.¹⁹⁹

So what is it that motivates the hoaxers to create formations? Approaches were made to three separate hoaxers – Lundberg, Williams and Irving – with all three refusing to answer.

When the question of motivation for hoaxes was put to the crop circle community, Elkington relates it to the early Christian period, when there was a lot of scepticism regarding the physical resurrection of Christ. As he states in the interviews:

The first mention of the physical resurrection of Christ was inserted at the end of the gospel of Mark about 248 AD. It was not to be seen prior to that, the resurrection prior to that was purely spiritual. Suddenly you see a truth being

¹⁹⁵ Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S., *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 25).

¹⁹⁶ Chryssides, G. D., *Exploring New Religions*, (London, Cassell, 1999, p. 5).

¹⁹⁷ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 123.

¹⁹⁸ Elkington, Appendix B, p. 127.

¹⁹⁹ Blake, Appendix E, p. 140.

subsumed within a wider set of rumours. You have the same with the hoaxing community. I think that they play a very valuable role in that they raise the questions that some of the scientists and some of the believers are very reluctant to face.²⁰⁰

It can also be seen in the interviews that the majority of the interviewees have had a number of face to face contacts with most, if not all, of the hoaxers involved in the south of England. Some of these encounters have taken place in media engineered situations. Other meetings have happened in the fields, some with the hoaxers being ‘caught in the act.’ Carson, as a farmer of fields visited annually by the crop circle phenomenon since 1990, has caught people making crop circles on her land on more than one occasion. When asked for her opinion as to what motivates them, she stated:

I just cannot imagine what motivates them, which is why I don’t believe that they exist to any great extent. I know that people have done them, and I know that there are one or two very driven individuals, but what the heck drives them, I have no idea. They do not go public. If it’s art that they’re doing, they’re not actually laying claim to it. Some of these formations are so mind-blowing that I can’t imagine anyone doing them and not laying claim to them. It would cost very little to compensate a farmer to go into a field and ‘do’ their art. The formations are total masterpieces, and if you are capable of creating something like that, I can’t imagine why you would keep it quiet.²⁰¹

It is clear that many of the interviewees know the majority of the hoaxers well, but are not able to hold an objective and dispassionate opinion towards them. As Glickman says: ‘I think that even to describe them as graffiti artists who put tags on walls is to elevate them.’²⁰² Blake is more descriptive of the derision that the hoaxers are held in by the crop circle community at large:

I don't believe a word they say. They are liars and manipulators. People who fall for that kind of talk are very naive and have little understanding of human nature. Hoaxers are not part of this phenomenon, however much they would like to be. They're hangers on. They wish to gain notoriety and prestige by posing as the authors of the designs, and due to the general lack of knowledge about this phenomenon, they usually succeed. But probe them a little bit and you will see there is no substance to their claims.²⁰³

The sections on the open minded, scientific and hoaxing elements of the crop circle community, past and present, have given an overall picture of the community in sociological terms and from an ethnographic perspective.

²⁰⁰ Elkington, Appendix B, p. 128.

²⁰¹ Carson, Appendix C, p. 135.

²⁰² Glickman, Appendix A, p. 125.

²⁰³ Blake, Appendix E, p. 141.

The following summary will integrate the comparisons of the crop circle community with the religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET group with the examination of the past and current community. It will also summarise the role of landscape and environment within the cultural understanding of the crop circle phenomenon in the community.

Summary

In this summary of the dissertation, the main points arising from the examination and analyses of the sociologies of religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET are emphasised, before summing the comparisons with the crop circle community to each of them individually and demonstrating the respective similarities and differences. The open minded, scientific and hoaxing elements of the crop circle community are summarised.

The results of these comparisons are integrated with unstructured interviews with five long term members of the crop circle community, with the resulting outcomes suggestive of an embryonic and tentative sociology of that community, particularly in respect to their relationship with landscape, environment and the heavens.

The crop circle community compared to other groups

In this dissertation, the sociology of religion and sect has been examined and compared to the crop circle community and any beliefs, theologies and philosophies that they may hold. Southwold's conditions for the establishment of a religion, as defined by Hamilton,²⁰⁴ define boundaries between what is and what is not orthodox religion. By comparing existing crop circle literature and the interviews with the crop circle community to Southwold's list of attributes, it can clearly be stated that the crop circle community does not come under orthodox understanding of what a religion is.

Religion as defined by Durkheim explicitly scorns the idea of the supernatural,²⁰⁵ yet religion as defined by York advocates a relationship with it.²⁰⁶ York suggests a link between humanity and the supernatural in terms of meaning assignment and value allocation. This link could be seen as opening a doorway into the crop circle world of symbology, sacred landscape and mystery. There may be a case for a phenomenological link between York's ideas of the supernatural and the awe and respect that the crop circle formations are treated with by the crop circle community as being religious, but if so then that link is tenuous and could easily be accommodated under other auspices. Were it not for the internet and modern communications technology, the crop circles may well be in the land of mythology and legend. If this were the case, the idea of folk religion, at least as Yoder²⁰⁷ defines it, might be seen as closer to the crop circles than orthodox religion, but even if that were to be the case it would still be a tenuous link.

It is clear from the analyses of what constitutes a sect by Stark and Bainbridge²⁰⁸ and O'Dea,²⁰⁹ and the comparisons of the interviews with the crop circle community to those analyses, that the community at large has nothing in common with the idea of sect, at least as espoused by those authors. However, the hoaxing element of the community fulfils the criteria for being a sect as espoused by Stark and Bainbridge, as they have had a schism with the parent body. The hoaxers also fulfill many of the criteria for being a sect as espoused by O'Dea, but there is some doubt as to whether or not they have 'a spirit of regeneration and an attitude of ethical austerity, often of an ascetic form.'

Similarly, an analysis of the sociology of cults as defined in the 1950s and 1960s by Lifton²¹⁰ and Singer,²¹¹ in the 1980s by the American Family Foundation,²¹² and by

²⁰⁴ Hamilton, M., *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, (London, Routledge, 1995, pp. 21-22).

²⁰⁵ Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (New York, The Free Press, 1995 [1912], p. 273).

²⁰⁶ York, M., 'A Report' in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 1995, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 197.

²⁰⁷ Yoder, D. 'Toward a Definition of Folk Religion,' in *Western Folklore*, 1974, vol. 33, no. 1, p. 14.

²⁰⁸ Stark, R. and Bainbridge, W. S., *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, p. 25).

²⁰⁹ O'Dea, T. F., *The Sociology of Religion*, (New York, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 68).

²¹⁰ Lifton, R. J., *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, (New York, W. W. Norton, 1961, p. 22).

²¹¹ Singer, M. T. and Ofshe, R., 'Attacks on Peripheral Versus Central Elements of Self and the Impact of Thought Reforming Techniques,' *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1986, vol.3, no.1, pp. 3-24.

²¹² American Family Foundation, 'Cultism: A Conference for Scholars and Policy Makers,' *Cultic Studies Journal*, 1986, Vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 119-20.

Hassan²¹³ in the 1990's shows no comparison with the crop circle community. As many interviews with the community show, they are antithetical to any idea of leader, guru or other charismatic figurehead, in direct contrast to the sociology of cults.

The sociology of the examined UFO/ET groups bears strong similarities in some ways to the sociology of cults. This is most notable where leaders, gurus or other such like charismatic figureheads are concerned. Every UFO/ET group examined had a charismatic or magnetic figure at the head of the organisation who either talked directly to 'God/ET', or else 'channelled' him/them. As with the cult groups, this bears no similarity to the crop circle community.

However, the crop circle phenomenon and its attendant community do have a link with the UFO/ET groups that they do not have with any other form of systematic religion or cult. Some individuals in the crop circle community are of the opinion that the phenomenon is not generated from 'above,' that it does not come from the heavens. These people agree with Rhoney Dougal in her advocacy of ETs as airy fairies²¹⁴ and that the UFO/ETs, fairies and crop circle makers are all indigenous to this planet, but live in a parallel dimension outside of the perceptive range of humanity. These individuals are in the minority, with the majority of the crop circle community choosing to believe that the generation or transmission of the crop circles comes from above, from the heavens in some way. But unlike the UFO/ET groups, the crop circle community also has a relationship with landscape, the environment and the horizon, as well as with the heavens, whilst the UFO/ET groups are solely concerned with the heavens and what comes from them.

It is clear that by comparing the existent literature concerning the crop circles and the interviews with the crop circle community with the espoused ideas of religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET group that they have very little, if anything, in common.

²¹³ Hassan, S., *Releasing the Bonds: Empowering People to Think for Themselves*, (Somerville, Freedom of Mind Press, 2000, pp. 5-10).

²¹⁴ Rhoney-Dougal, S., *Where Science and Magic meet*, (Shaftesbury, Element, 1991, p. 97).

The component parts of the crop circle community

From the interviews with members of the crop circle community, it can be seen that the attributes of the open minded element of the community can be characterised in a number of ways. There is a strong element of humility and respect, coupled with awe and wonder for the phenomenon and the backdrop of landscape that it appears in. In some cases, this can border on reverence. There is an openness to the supernatural, both in the literal sense of the word,²¹⁵ and in the quasi-religious sense of the word, such as implied by York.²¹⁶

All interviewees commented on their environmental attitudes, and how those attitudes have changed over the years. Individual attitudes towards environmental lifestyles and philosophies have undergone notable conversions at the same time as interacting with the crop circle phenomena, which is seen in the community as having opened people up to the majesty and wonder of landscape. As individuals experience the crop circle phenomenon and the landscape over a number of years, so they become more sensitive to their surroundings. As Carrasco, quoting Eliade, says: 'Their lives are deeply changed as a result of this encounter with numinous places which human beings have with what they consider to be supernatural forces.'²¹⁷

This sensitivity to landscape, environment and the notion of sacred space augments and compliments the individual's ability to engage with, defend and re-enchant the natural world, as suggested by Pearson.²¹⁸ The north Wiltshire countryside in the high summer months of June, July and August is evocative of contested landscape with its collection of crop circles, stone circles, long barrows and standing stones, and it inspires many open minded people to greater levels of sensitivity.

The scientific element of the crop circle community is active if quiet. Burke, Levensgood and Talbot are continually updating their research,²¹⁹ as is Ashby. Chorost and Dudley are no longer so active in crop circle research. The ongoing scientific inquiry into the crop circle phenomenon is not looking for explanations, reasons or origins. From an examination of the sources in this dissertation, it can be seen that the scientific element of the crop circle community is looking at the phenomenon from a perspective of the minute, the molecular and the atomic as opposed to the manifestly phenomenological and experiential.

²¹⁵ 'Above the laws of nature' OED

²¹⁶ York, M., 'A Report' in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 1995, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 197.

²¹⁷ Carrasco, D., *A Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimension in Chicano Experience: Bless Me, Ultima as a Religious Text*. Paper presented to the Chicano Studies Colloquium at the University of California, Santa Barbera, April 12 1979.

²¹⁸ Pearson, J., Roberts, R. H. and Samuel, eds., *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1998, p. 9).

²¹⁹ The BLT team responded to a claim by Ashby regarding the finding of iron filings in a formation on 23 May 2005. See <http://www.kornkreise-forschung.de/textHglazeNew.htm> [accessed 25 May 2005] for details.

The hoaxing element of the crop circle community, similar to the phenomenon itself, is reducing in numbers but increasing in effect. During the early 1990s a number of conspiracy theories arose concerning the crop circles, their originators and their meaning/purpose. Most of these theories have now been laid to rest, although as both Glickman²²⁰ and Martineau²²¹ acknowledge in the interviews with the crop circle community, there is an implication that the ‘powers that be’ (in this case, probably the government and the military) still maintain an interest in the phenomenon and its development.

As has been demonstrated earlier in this dissertation, the hoaxing community has been given a number of opportunities to demonstrate its claims – most notably by the television channels NBC and BBC. Given the amount of time and equipment that was required by the hoaxers to manufacture formations, there must be serious doubt as to the veracity of the majority of their crop circle making claims. The remaining hoaxers – primarily Irving, Dickinson and Lundberg, also known as the ‘circlemakers’²²² – are as active on the internet and in the media world as they are in the fields.

As comments by both Elkington²²³ and Blake²²⁴ show, there is considerable doubt and scepticism within the crop circle community about the both the numbers of hoaxers and hoaxed formations. There is still confusion as to what motivates the hoaxers, as demonstrated by the quotes from Carson,²²⁵ who has known these people for many years.

That the hoaxing element of the crop circle community exists is beyond doubt. From the available evidence, it seems that the numbers of hoaxers and hoaxed crop circle formations has been exaggerated over the years. However, it should be noted that as no hoaxer was available or willing to present their side of the story, that statement is tenuous.

²²⁰ Glickman, Appendix A, p. 124.

²²¹ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 133.

²²² See <http://www.circlemakers.org> [accessed 25 May 2005]

²²³ Elkington, Appendix B, pp. 127-28.

²²⁴ Blake, Appendix E, p. 140.

²²⁵ Carson, Appendix D, p. 135.

The importance of landscape

The landscape provides individuals with a framework to find their place in society and to find a degree of personal comfort. It gives a place to belong, to locate oneself in and to find personal space. It provides one with a sense of uniqueness coupled with a feeling of familiarity that comes with belonging, or knowing where one's personal space is. As Tilley comments regarding landscape: 'A landscape has ontological import because it is lived in and through, mediated, worked on and altered, replete with cultural meaning and symbolism – and not just something looked at or thought about.'²²⁶

Over the years, landscape has provided the backdrop for the crop circles in the same way that a musician writes on paper, or an artist uses an easel. It is often said within the crop circle community that the sight of a large field without a crop circle formation is much like a blank canvas for an artist. The crop circle formations on their own, with their symbolic and mathematical meaning, are splendid enough. But when placed in the background of landscape, they take on the majesty of a major work of art. As Martineau says, in the interviews with the crop circle community:

...the thing is recognised in every major city in the world. There isn't one subway in the world where if you flashed a picture of a formation you'd get a much higher recognition rate from your average neighbour than you would from an Andy Goldsworthy, or a Richard Long, or a Damien Hirst, or any one of the so called best of British artists over the last hundred years.²²⁷

It may be relevant that the majority of crop circles in the UK occur in the north Wiltshire countryside, an area replete with stone circles and avenues, long barrows, tumuli and many other ancient earthworks. It is a sacred landscape, and now that the crop circles have brought so many more people to it, it has also become a contested landscape. This is confirmed, in part, by Tilley when he states:

Landscape is a cultural code for living, an anonymous 'text' to be read and interpreted, *a writing pad for inscription*²²⁸, a scape of and for human praxis, a mode of dwelling and a mode of experiencing....A concept of place privileges difference and singularity; a concept of landscape is more holistic, acting so as to encompass rather than exclude.²²⁹

²²⁶ Tilley, C., *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford, Berg, 1994, p. 26).

²²⁷ Martineau, Appendix C, p. 132.

²²⁸ Author's italics.

²²⁹ Tilley, C., *A Phenomenology of Landscape*, (Oxford, Berg, 1994, p. 34).

The sociology of the crop circle community

The crop circle community is comprised of a group of unique people who pride themselves on their individuality as well as their ability to get on with like-minded others. The events in the community of the early to mid 1990s effectively purged the crop circle movement of those people who needed followers and of those who needed to follow. Those remaining are noticeably strong in their sense of individuality, whilst at the same time reaching out for a social community based on the experiences from many years of interactions with the crop circle phenomenon. This social community is by no means exclusive, as there is a strong desire within the community to educate, inform and acquaint the larger community with regard to the crop circles.

Again, because of this strong degree of personal independence and individuality, the crop circle community has no rules or regulations, beyond the voluntary code of practice when in the fields.²³⁰

The members of the crop circle community, as a result of the experiences learnt in the early 1990s, are antithetical to the idea of a leader, or leaders.

If these three attributes – no leaders, no rules and strong individuals, linked by choice – are evaluated, it is clear that no sociological boundaries can be established for the community if those boundaries are formulated upon existing orders of sociology, such as those proposed by Durkheim, Stark and Bainbridge, Smart, etc. There is no dogma, theology or priesthood in the crop circle community.

The sociology of the crop circle community is based on interaction. This is the interaction between the communities, both individually and collectively, with the crop circle phenomenon and its place in landscape and the environment. This is also the interaction between individual members of the community with each other, both in the fields and socially. It is with these considerations in mind that the following tentative and probably incomplete list of qualities, in no particular order, is proposed as an embryonic basis for a prototype sociology of the crop circle community:

1. Recognition of humility in the face of the intelligence of the phenomenon.
2. A steadily evolving environmental approach to life.
3. An acceptance of the irrational and an openness to all possibilities.
4. A desire to openly share all knowledge freely and unconditionally.
5. A need for discernment.
6. A relationship with and respect for landscape, horizon and the heavens.
7. Openness to spirituality.
8. A distrust of organised leaders or systematised organisations.
9. A wish to get on well with others at all levels of life.
10. An improving holistic attitude towards self-empowerment.
11. A quest for knowledge.
12. A willingness to suspend concepts of belief and disbelief.

²³⁰ See <http://www.cropcircleconnector.com/anasazi/conduct/html> [accessed 25 May 2005].

Conclusion

The crop circle community of 2005 is an eclectic group of people, comprised of independent, original and open-minded individuals linked by the humility and respect felt for the phenomenon that they are researching, a love of the landscape that the phenomenon occurs in and by the friendships and community that has arisen from the study and research of that phenomenon.

The reverence and wonder that is shown within the community towards the visible phenomenon in the landscape is matched by the respect and admiration shown for the symbolic, geometric and mathematical meaning inherent in the formations.

It has been shown in this dissertation by comparing the crop circle community against the sociology of religion, sect, cult and UFO/ET group that the community, such as it is, has nothing in common with orthodox religion. If the hoaxing element of the community could be shown to have a spirit of regeneration and an attitude of ethical austerity in their works, they could be classified as a sect of the parent church, as symbolised by the crop circle community at large. No evidence has been found to suggest that the hoaxers have this spirit or attitude. It can be seen from the existing literature and the interviews with the crop circle community that there are no similarities of any type between the community and cults.

There are minor similarities between the crop circle community and certain practices in the various UFO/ET groups discussed in this dissertation, but those similarities only have to do with the actions, interactions and reactions between the various groups and the heavens. There are no other similarities, and there are major differences – most notably that the crop circle community is antithetical towards the idea of leader or figurehead.

The question posed by this dissertation is can the crop circle community be described as a religion, sect, cult or UFO/ET group? After investigating a number of examples of the relevant sociologies, examining the existent literature, analysing the interviews with the crop circle community and collating the collective results and summarising them, it can be seen that the answer to the question is in the negative.

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Appendix A

Transcription of Interview with Michael Glickman, Professor of Architecture at the University of Southern California, and an active researcher and commentator on crop circle formations since 1989. Interview recorded at Professor Glickman's house in Wiltshire, UK at 12.30 hours, 17 March 2005.

SJ Would you say that intuition and synchronicity are two of the most important factors in crop circle research and researchers?

MG Yes. Yes. I reached a point and I said it in one of my lectures two or three years ago where I realised the two most important factors in crop circle research were number one – humility, and number two – discernment.

SJ Discernment – as opposed to discrimination?

MG Discernment. And the problem is that if you're finding that you are receiving/developing/being given/being transmitted information, there's an enormous urge to become very arrogant and think 'God speaks through me', y'know, but, of course, I've many years of looking at crop circle researchers who truly believe that God speaks through them.

SJ This is classic of cult or guru. We know of people who have gone down this road.

MG Yes. Yes. We certainly do, and we've learnt so much from them. I despise the bastards, but I thank them as teachers.

SJ Because they taught us which way not to go?

MG Absolutely. Because they're not here any more. Something I find very interesting is that – I believe that the whole hoaxing thing is a specific part of the curriculum. I find it fascinating to see the ways in which the whole community has been – I wouldn't say divided, I would say riven by this, and it is very much some kind of lesson. What it's done, is it has separated the components with the accuracy of some kind of production line in a factory, and the crop circle community is increasingly a microcosm of the world, and what has happened is that the community has been shifted into 'A' types and 'B' types.

The 'A' type croppie (crop circle enthusiast), one of which I'm proud to be, is the one who says "what's happening is astonishing and mysterious, and after several years, I don't really know what's going on but I want to stick around and see it through because it's so exciting. The fact that that I can't nail this to the floor and explain it is fine".

The 'B' type of croppie says "God, this is fascinating. But ultimately it is irksome, because I cannot arguably explain or justify it. So I will bring to bear a sledgehammer and a shovel to fit it into a consensus."

SJ I'd like to ask if the words awe and wonder come into either description.

MG Yes. The 'A' types are joyful; they feel privileged to have been close to it. The 'B' types, to a man, are miserable and envious, because the 'B' types have passed through that state of awe and wonder and couldn't sustain it, and have become embittered.

Now – there are the 'super A's,' who are so far gone they are affronted by the very idea that anything could be hoaxed. They won't have that. Everything that occurs in the field is divine. Simple as that. They won't take evidence to the contrary, God bless them. There are also the 'C's, who are hoaxers.

SJ Is there something in the hoaxers' group dynamic, are there any features that they all have in common?

MG I'll tell you what they all have in common. The hoaxers are, by and large, dysfunctional young males. They can't sustain a job; they can't sustain a relationship. They're often – not always – but often dressed in black, they're tattooed, they're shaven headed or ponytailed, they drink a lot and they dope a lot. Their prime motivation is the sense of fulfilment that they get from the deception of others. When people like me go round giving lectures, they are very, very intimidated, we make them feel small. When they fool us, they feel real. They have a whole set of techniques and protocols for working together to deceive us. Now there are several axioms here:

Axiom A is that 'everything that you hear about hoaxing is a lie'. Axiom B, which follows from it, is that in all these years I cannot recollect a single nugget of truth or wisdom which has come from the hoaxers. They pride themselves on the separateness and their secrecy. They pride themselves on their non-communication, and if they are ever berated by 'A' types who say 'for god's sake, you always moan about not being part of the community, but you never tell us anything', they respond by saying, 'we really want to try, we really want to tell you things but you'd never believe us'. They've been saying that for years.

SJ It seems to me that you're suggesting that the majority of people who are involved in deliberate hoaxing seem to have not so much of a hidden agenda as psychological challenges, and that they're doing this in a sense of desire to put one over on society, as opposed to the idea that some people have put to me that they are funded.

MG I do not know. I do not receive regular briefings from HMG, but, I cannot rule out the possibility, and indeed I embrace the probability, that, whatever the reasons for this hoaxing activity, authority is rather pleased by it. Therefore, it is not unlikely that in some way, there might be some kind of support for this activity. But, if I was sitting in

Whitehall, I wouldn't engage these guys to clean my garden. But their underlying ethos is that of a kid who scratches the paintwork of an unattended parked car. I think that even to describe them as graffiti artists who put tags on walls is to elevate them.

SJ Robin Heath uses the word "sacricity" to describe the effects and feelings one gets through observing landscape. Would you say that the crop circle community is linked by some type of worship of or relationship to landscape?

MG I wouldn't use the word worship. At the lower circle, I would use the word respect, and at the higher circle, a profound awe, but I wouldn't go so far as to say worship.

SJ What's your reaction to the idea that's beginning to form amongst the new age community that crop circles and in particular crop circle researchers are becoming a cult, a sect or a quasi religion?

MG They can think what they like, but they're wrong. It's an interest.

SJ To some people, it's a devout, life consuming...

MG To me it's a devout, life consuming interest, but it's not a religion. I mean it's fundamentally changed my life and my worldview, but I wouldn't call it a religion. I don't worship anything; I've come to have a greater sense of the divinity of it all.

SJ So when I see people walking around with crop circle tattoo's or crop circle amulets, -

MG They have a desperate need to find some type of subject with which they could vehemently identify.

SJ Not believe in, but identify?

MG Identify, yes. I mean, if you compare the crop circle community to the UFO community, it's very interesting. The UFO community is rooted in the past, it's rooted in the third dimension, it is rooted in mechanical reality, it's fundamentally a bunch of train spotters. I used to go to MUFON (Mutual Unidentified Flying Object Network) and open my talk with 'I'm going to be talking about crop circles and I must tell you that there is no conspiracy, government intervention, paranoia or CIA participation', eight or twelve of them would get up and walk out.

I live here on Salisbury Plain on the edge of a military active zone and in crop circle territory. Every year the crop circle tourists come over for a few months and see military 'black' helicopters and immediately think 'surveillance of crop circle researchers'. There is a very strong urge in humanity, a visceral need, to be scared.

Appendix B

Transcription of interview with David Elkington, author of “In the Name of the Gods” and crop circle researcher for twelve years, specialising in aural fields. Interview recorded at Mr. Elkington’s house near Bath, UK, at 10.15 hours, 31 March 2005.

SJ You’re familiar, I think, with the crop circle fraternity.

DE Yes I am.

SJ That’s a good way of describing it, I think. Fraternity.

DE Yes, that is a good word because they’re very much like a family. All of the internecine backbiting as well as all of the good things, the shared research and everything else.

SJ How do you describe your attitude towards the more sceptical/scientific side of the community? How do you deal with the sceptics, for example?

DE Sceptic’s are easier to deal with, I find, than those who believe. And I say that because the dogma of believers is that which says that if you go against something which they hold dear to their hearts, it makes them turn inward, it almost offends, they get very protective and all the insecurities arise. Whereas with the sceptic, in a sense you have a greater potential for open-mindedness. I find sceptics a lot easier to talk to because one can span over a broader range of subjects in terms of the potentials and the possibilities of what crop circles might be.

SJ Would you say that sceptics are the opposite end of one spectrum to the devout, the believers?

DE Yes, I would, actually, but in one sense it depends upon a level of open mindedness. This is a level open to all possibilities until evidence has arisen to dismiss them. The problem is that the people involved don’t recognise that they are a part of the process.

SJ Is that a collective statement?

DE Yes, it certainly is. They don’t seem to realise that this is prone to what I call purely objective thinking: it’s ‘out there’. But we’re living in a world now where the objective is changing. What that’s an admission of is that our ways of thinking, our consciousness is affecting the very phenomenon that we see. I like this it’s kind of mischief, whatever spirit is guiding this is not only mischievous but is guiding the objective and the subjective, the inner and the outer worlds.

SJ Is the mischievous nature of the generator of the formations aimed at the fraternity themselves, especially the more serious and earnest ones?

DE To a certain degree, yes. When we look at our fairy tales, we dismiss them as being 'only' fairy tales. But what was faery? Before Christianity came along it was a going concern, a religion in the more spiritual sense.

SJ Are you talking here about the old style pagan approach?

DE I think that it's a much more inclusive approach from what we know of paganism in this country. In a sense you have to ask the question 'Are we still in reaction against systematised conditional Christianity?' To a large degree, I think that that's very much the case.

SJ Still with the sceptics, I'm looking at the scientists who do the serious research, the analytical, the logical and the measurable. The seemingly objective, or at least as objective as one can be when investigating an anomalous phenomenon from a scientific perspective.

DE Well that brings to mind the misuse of logic by humanity. Logic has been used by rationalists to limit our understanding, not to extend it, but to limit it within a certain confine, a boundary of rules. The word rational has in it the words ration and ratio, the Greek word for reason. What that is stating is that we are taking a part of knowledge to explain the whole. And via the application of our observations and discoveries, which is a part of knowledge, we can discuss the whole. We can therefore go beyond that and say that we know what the whole is because the part, in a holographic sense, seems to explain the whole.

SJ Are we talking gnosis here?

DE We're talking irrationalism. This is a part of gnosis, but the rationalists have used their part of knowledge to limit, they won't go beyond the boundaries of possibilities, they cannot see the connections between things. So when you cannot connect different forms of knowledge to get a sense of the whole, how can you get a sense of the whole? That is therefore irrational.

SJ Then there's the hoaxing community, and those few people who have personally witnessed formations occurring.

DE Personally, I think that a large part of the hoaxing thing itself is a hoax. We look at the time scale of these things being created, and we look at the complexity of some of the patterns, is beyond belief.

SJ This is a rational deduction

DE It is a rational deduction. Now on the ground, it's very easy to see the difference between a hoaxed crop circle and a non-hoaxed one.

SJ So what motivates the hoaxers?

DE I think it's the same as the early Christian period, where you had lots of sceptics talking about the physical resurrection of Christ. You had a truth that was being ultimately obscured. The first mention of the physical resurrection of Christ was inserted at the end of the gospel of Mark about 248 AD. It was not to be seen prior to that, the resurrection prior to that was purely spiritual. Suddenly you see a truth being subsumed within a wider set of rumours. You have the same with the hoaxing community. I think that they play a very valuable role in that they raise the questions that some of the scientists and some of the believers are very reluctant to face. We need these mischievous tricksters, these sprites in human form, to trip us up, so that when we fall down on to the pavement, we see our reflection in the puddle. Because otherwise, where's it going to go? Humanity loves going off on tangents, but that's the nature of life on Earth. The hoaxer is bringing us back and actually taking complexity to new levels in a funny way.

SJ It's not so much a question of if hoaxers are doing it as why hoaxers are doing it. With the exception of the few hoaxers who have made an art form of the business, and have now formed a professional business where they get employed by Weetabix and Honda and Hamlet, there is still the question of why the others do it.

DE Perhaps the hoaxers are part of the answer instead of a distraction. What inspires them to go and do it? Perhaps they are inspired like the poet is by the sheer beauty of the landscape, the energy coming from the landscape.

SJ One of the more unusual phenomena reported amongst the hoaxing community concerns teams setting out at night into a field, and through lack of time, they've had to leave things unfinished. Then dawn has come, and there have been 'bits' added, additions, or a new formation next door. It's as if the act of hoaxing has attracted the real phenomena.

DE And I find that fascinating. But what is a hoax under these circumstances? You're suggesting that it's a hoax, because we had expectations of non-human construction. So the hoaxers are exposing the expectations of people. Similar to the Americans, who believe that Christ will come at the end, in a Second Coming, you have in the crop circle community people who want to see the UFO's creating the formations, which is never going to happen, because we are responsible for our planet. We're not going to attract investors from off world, because we're in such a state, such a mess.

SJ Would you say that the crop circle fraternity en masse, or that separate segments of the crop circle community constitute a cult?

DE Yes I would.

SJ An audience cult, where people just go and listen? A participant cult where people take active part? Or an internal cult where individuals can't get out?

DE It's not an internal one, because it's very easy to get disillusioned with it. It's a cult of brotherly love, and therefore where there's love there has to be the opposite. It's very tense.

SJ Whenever anyone sets themselves up as a leader, they get knocked down.

DE Precisely, and the idea of debate is very interesting here. It can get very cynical; it can get very passionate. Then there are those who are looking beyond those boundaries, but of course we don't see those people.

SJ Is it a cult, as opposed to a religion?

DE Well, what is bread made out of?

SJ Flour

DE Which is from wheat and corn and rye and barley, where the crop circles appear.

SJ Ceres, cereals, the great Goddess?

DE Your average crop circle person, where have you met them?

SJ In a cornfield, or in a pub.

DE And what does a pub – for example, the Barge (a pub in the Vale of Pewsey used as an intelligence hub by crop circle enthusiasts) - serve? Beer. And what is beer? Hops, barley etc., which is the blood of the God. So by imbibing the blood of the God, they're partaking. There's a greater sense of Eucharistic rites in that pub with all the passions that it inspires – I mean passion in the religious sense of the word – than anywhere else, which is why people get so involved in it.

SJ And enjoy the drinking.

DE Yes, they do. They wake up Monday morning thinking 'that was a fantastic day.'

Of course it was. They discussed mysteries, they got slightly squiffy, that squiffiness induced feelings of looseness, it inspired – because of course the God is in one, in the beer, because the body of the God is the beer itself – and therefore they felt great, they could unburden themselves. Of course they felt inspired.

SJ Now that we've had the phenomenon for so long that we now have an established crop circle community. It's worldwide. Do you feel that this community is

something that is going to continue to fragment and segment or do you feel that there's a hope for some type of consensus to come out of this.

DE No. We're living in a world where we've been busy objectifying things for too long. We have separated everything. We see an almost irrevocable surge towards us wanting to know more beyond the boundaries of what we do know at the present. I've been amazed to discover how ready people are now to dismiss science and the scientific attitude has been patronising and arrogant. What's really heartening about that is that people will take on board the information and the knowledge that they have to offer, but they'll subsume it into their own wider sense of the world. And that has been a really pleasant surprise to me personally.

SJ Robin Heath has introduced the word 'sacricity' to encompass not just the aura of the landscape, so to speak, but also to capture the intent behind a person's motivation for researching this type of thing.

DE I think the key here is rhythms of language. I don't mean just language in terms of words that we speak, but also in terms of music and of sound. We can now take birdsong, slow it down and see that it is symphonic movements. We can do the same now with the wind blowing through the trees. What I'm saying here is that all forms of language in terms of sounds beyond human language are themselves poetic and rhythmic, and therefore poetry is the key to this. Wordsworth and Blake walked this extraordinarily sacred landscape, and they understood it full well. Yet our gift from them has been a terrible one, in that we've over-intellectualised it.

When the prophets read the word from God, be they Moses, Ezekiel, Uriel or Mohammed, God didn't sit down with them on top of the mountain and say 'Now, look here, sit down Moses, I want to talk about the eschatology of the last times', he didn't say any of that. He turned round and gave them rhythmic, poetic words that speak to us down through the ages. The poets were the prophets. The prophets were the poets. In understanding those rhythms, and the numerical nature of those rhythms, they therefore understood the mind of God. Where as today, we take everything so literally, if you go back to read the poetry of Wordsworth or Blake, Keats or Shelly, and understand it more numerically, you understand and see something far more profound within its use of number and rhythm.

Appendix C

Transcript of telephone interview with John Martineau, crop circle researcher since 1990, author of “A Book of Coincidence”, and publisher of Wooden Books. Interviewed on Monday 4 April 2005 at 10.00 PM, by telephone.

SJ Are you happy with the term crop circle community, or would you perhaps describe it as a fraternity?

JM I would describe it as communities, it's a fragmented and fractured thing nowadays. I think there are very different groups of people involved, with very different agenda's and very different belief systems. There are large elements and groups that never, ever talk to each other.

SJ I've split the community into two different groups, with the sceptics and scientists on one side, whilst the opposite are the believers, the New Ager's and the pagans. Inbetween these two polarities are the witnesses, the conspiracy theorists and the hoaxers. You've had experience of all of these groups?

JM Yes, but it's not that simple. There's the pagan sceptics, for example, who believe that there's a kind of pagan ritual magic about it all. Likewise, there's also the hybrid scientist/hoaxer type as well. There is a kind of sociology there.

SJ Do you find the sceptics easier to deal with than the believers?

JM There are many different types of sceptic. The most influential type of sceptic over the last few years is the full on, avowed crop circle hoaxer. You can't necessarily call these small groups of hoaxers sceptics, because they're not necessarily people who have an opinion as such about the real phenomena, they're just people who hoax circles and think that all crop circles are hoaxed. They're not even sceptical, they're dismissive, I suppose. There are still old style sceptics out there, people who haven't direct experience of hoaxing but nevertheless suspect that the whole phenomena is a hoax. But generally speaking, once somebody falls into the hands of the hoaxers, or people cross over into the hoaxing camp, it is very hard to call them sceptic any more. They've become angry, very disillusioned, certainly aggressive, and quite changed as people once they've gone into that camp.

SJ So where would you put someone, for example, such as Professor Terence Meaden?

JM Meaden was definitely a scientist, who thought that the formations were being made by plasma vortices, but he over-stretched his theories by trying to incorporate the more complex formations into it. It seemed to work well when he was just accounting for the circles, or circles with rings and/or satellites, but when he started to include the extended phenomena of the 'mandala' like formations that didn't start until the early

1990's, a lot of people gave up on him. A number of sceptics said 'look, come on, these intricate formations are not made by plasma vortices, they're either made by UFO or human'. Meaden was working very closely with the Japanese researchers at that time, and they were finding very simple triplets and quintuplets (specific geometric types of crop circle formation) in the Tokyo subways.

SJ Might it be that the term sceptic is almost irrelevant these days, because it seems that the only sceptics left are those who have either never visited the phenomena, or those who are in complete denial?

JM I think it's changed. Go back to 1990, when we were getting 1,000 events (crop circle formations) in Wiltshire, sometimes fifteen events a night, all seemingly linked by geometry and landscape, an incredibly organised and coherent thing. You never see anything like that any more. Now we're talking about twenty or thirty formations each year, all of them a kind of set piece, set diagrams almost. I'm not suggesting that they're all hoaxes, but I'm not suggesting that there's anything like the amount that we were getting in 1990. In 1990 there was something to believe in. I'm not convinced that anyone looking at what's going on now isn't just saying 'Oh, this is a very big and complicated thing; was this made by an alien or was this made by a human?'

The choice we have these days is between one biped with gadgets and another biped with gadgets. I don't think that anyone seriously these days thinks that these things are natural, spontaneous products of the collective unconscious, or Gaia, or anything more complicated than bipeds with gadgets.

SJ So where do you stand with regard to the opposite of the scientists, the sceptics and the hoaxers, that is the believers?

JM Well, hats off to anyone who still believes that completely. Personally, I refuse to believe either way. I don't think one can have beliefs where one does not have information.

SJ I'd like to canvass your opinion regarding the phenomenon of a formation being hoaxed during the night, only come morning for it to be found with extra additions, or the real phenomena next to the hoax. Might it be that the real circlemakers, for want of another word, are 'cherry picking' or influencing the hoaxing mind?

JM Yes. Yes, I would assume that that is going on. The real thing is always playing with people. The game is being played at the highest of levels. This is the most extraordinary thing happening in the visual arts in the world. There's no competition. There is no work that compares with this in the modern visual art field. It's ecological, it's non commercial, there's no ego involved, there's no money changes hands, the thing is recognised in every major city in the world. There isn't one subway in the world where if you flashed a picture of a formation you'd get a much higher recognition rate from your average neighbour than you would from an Andy Goldsworthy, or a Richard Long, or a Damien Hirst, or any one of the so called best of British artists over the last

hundred years. This thing has run, it's run without anyone pushing it, so it's not something that's easily dismissed, but it's not something that one can easily talk about in terms of whether one believes in it or not. One simply has to deal with the fact that as a transmission, it has succeeded. This is quite extraordinary. One has to look at it as a cultural phenomenon on a massive scale where each one of our individual responses to it is almost like a litmus test of us, actually. It doesn't state anything so much about the phenomenon, or it's originators as much as it states something about us. Each one of our individual responses to it are simply part of the magic that's enabled it to get this far, with absolutely no commercial influence whatsoever behind it.

SJ Apart from the financial gain to a few hoaxers who have made money by advertising, what do you think motivates both the hoaxers and the believers?

JM It's a strange subject. The obsessives on both sides, both the sceptics and the believers, I think, are people who try and build certainty out of nothing. Really, they haven't got anything. They could have a gut feeling, which might be completely wrong, and as a result build a personal religion out of it.

SJ This leads me nicely on to the next question. Would you agree that the crop circle fraternity or community has a lot in common with a religion, a sect of a religion, or a cult?

JM I think you might have been able to say that up until 1991/2, but it ended with Doug and Dave (two crop circle hoaxers who were sponsored by a national newspaper). I don't think that there's really much of a cult left these days. There's not enough formations, I think that all you've got left are the little research groups, the Earth Mysteries gatherings. I think that there's still a few of the old researchers around who have seen a thing or two and who have been seriously staggered and amazed, who are still there and keeping an open mind, but... It looked like it was going to turn into something massive, but I don't think it did, actually. It kind of fizzled out. So I don't think that you can describe them (the researchers) as a cult, or a religion any more, or anything like that. You've simply got a collection of minds around a phenomenon, which I don't think is a religion or a cult, because a cult often has a creed to identify with, and a leader.

SJ Do you think that the research community is going to continue to segment and fragment or do you think that a consensus can come out of this?

JM I think at the core of this is something extremely serious from a human perspective, playful maybe from another perspective. The core of it is that there is a paranormal psychic phenomenon that has a distinct reality. That reality doesn't necessarily manifest all the time, but it certainly was popping its head up in quite a massive way fifteen years ago, in my opinion. So when this sort of thing happens and there is a breakthrough on the scale of ordinariness, I think that forces swing into being that have proved very successful. My best guess is that those forces are still there, and it's in those forces best interests to see a fragmented psychic research community. So I

think that there's a certain amount of opposition to this thing ever being stitched up or put together. The history of paranormal research in itself is such an interesting subject, because everybody always falls out. There's so many fraudsters as well as the genuine phenomenon but the two are utterly intertwined, there's the fakers and then there's staggering things happening. The world attracts these two equal and opposites. The idea of there ever being a unified community in and around the embryonic new sciences is a dream for the future but it's certainly not going on at the moment.

SJ How do you relate to the recent upsurge over the last ten years of crop circles jewellery, bangles, T-shirts etc.?

JM That's because they represent a certain iconography

SJ Might this iconography represent not so much a search for identity, but a search for something to identify with?

JM I think that they have come to represent a fusion of – they represent the X Files, in a nutshell. If you have a set of symbols that represent weird psychic 'techie' phenomena, crop circles are it. There's nothing else that does it. All we had before crop circles was the pentagram, which was a kind of catch all for everything under the sun. But whether or not there's a set of beliefs that go with that iconography, I don't know, which is why I go back to the fact that their cultural success and what the individual thinks about them is more important than what is behind them. So they (the circles) have triumphed culturally and the reason that they've found their way into jewellery is simply because they're staggeringly well designed symbols.

When you see a design that integrates magically geometric, harmonic and cosmological principles all in one diagram, it's a bit like saying who wrote good music, Mozart or Bach? The impact of the artist is irrelevant to the beauty of the art. I was at a friend's house the other day, and he had a symbol of a crop circle above his hearth, and he didn't even know it was a crop circle. He just found it an agreeable symbol, so I do agree that the iconography of crop circles is pervasive.

SJ Robin Heath uses the word 'sacricity' to describe the sense of wonder and awe that one feels with landscape when one is in that state of profound awareness of where one is in relation to that landscape. Is that sense of wonder and awe still to be found in some crop circle researchers?

JM I know what you're referring to. It's a great word. The feeling of awe is indeed wonderful, seeing these incredible formations at what seems like just the right place in the landscape. There's also this extraordinary sense of recognition, which I think is something very common in researchers across the board.

Appendix D

Transcript on an interview with Polly Carson, resident and farmer in the village of Alton Barnes, near Avebury in north Wiltshire, UK. Ms. Carson's farm has seen crop circle formations appear on it every year since 1990. Interviewed on Tuesday 5 April by telephone at 6.00 pm.

SJ Over a long period of time, you've become familiar with the crop circle community. Would you still regard it as a community in this day and age?

PC I think there are remnants of the community. I think that there are people who have made old connections through the crop circles, and they will never lose that. They feel in some way bound together. It's a much more tight community, a lot fewer people in it as opposed to a large, amorphous blob, which it was for many years.

SJ Over the years, your property has seen many examples of the real phenomena as well as the hoaxes. What do you feel it is that motivates the hoaxers?

PC I can't imagine.... I mean, I just cannot imagine what motivates them, which is why I don't believe that they exist to any great extent. I know that people have done them, and I know that there are one or two very driven individuals, but what the heck drives them, I have no idea.

They do not go public. If it's art that they're doing, they're not actually laying claim to it. Some of these formations are so mind-blowing that I can't imagine anyone doing them and not laying claim to them. It would cost very little to compensate a farmer to go into a field and 'do' their art. The formations are total masterpieces, and if you are capable of creating something like that, I can't imagine why you would keep it quiet.

I can't imagine why you would keep it quiet for thirty years, and why you would go out, night after night, in all weathers, all over the country doing it. And how many people are we talking about? And where do they practice? But as to what motivates them, I have no idea. It's not a mischievous prank against other people, because it's been going on for thirty years.

SJ Some hoaxers have been employed by corporate firms such as Honda, Weetabix and Hamlet to go into the fields and make designs advertising their products, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule.

PC Absolutely. And they're minimal. Very few of them at it.

SJ And the formations are not up to that much, are they?

PC They are not. And they've been videoed making them, doing them in daylight and taking days over them. And they're not very good. And that kind of offer, it's not going to keep anyone employed, let's face it.

SJ At the other end of the spectrum, how do you see the devout, the people who firmly believe that every formation comes from the Creator, or God, or the Universe – that everything in the fields is from the Divine?

PC I don't know any of them anymore. Everyone that I know accepts that there is a hoax element. If there still are people like that, then I think that they're deluded. You cannot exclude the hoaxing element. We know the individuals. I personally know people who have gone out and done it. We know that the hoaxes are there. The argument is as to what extent they are there. But to say that all crop circles are hoaxes is just plain stupid.

SJ But neither can one say that one hundred percent of crop circles are real, either.

PC I don't know anyone who thinks that.

SJ There's the widely accepted phenomena within the crop circle community of hoaxers going into a field, constructing a formation and leaving, only to return in four or five hours in daylight to find additions, of a new example of the real phenomena right next door. It might be said that the generating force behind the real phenomena is using the hoaxers in some way. Are you familiar with this?

PC I am familiar with that. Having met the hoaxers, I cannot believe that this phenomena, which I admire, and feel is great, good and intelligent – I cannot believe that it would choose these individuals as emissaries, or to work through them. Although, having said that, look at Jesus and his disciples, perhaps there's a parallel there. I think that this is representative of the 'cosmic joker'. I think that this intelligence has a sense of humour. I think that it does interact directly with the personal human brain – I myself have had direct experience of that – and whatever reason, I think that it is perfectly feasible that it would interact with a hoaxed formation.

SJ In the early nineties, there was such a big movement in the crop circle community that it became almost like a quasi-religion, or a cult. Would you say that that type of energy is still around today?

PC If I think of a cult, I think of something sinister, and there was certainly nothing like that. What I came across was this phenomenal awe; people were in awe of what was happening. I found the movement in the early nineties was one of joy and spirit and just – WOW! Y'know, it was kind of like just 'What is this!'. That's what I experienced. I didn't experience anything cult like or religious like, and I think that was because no one ever crystallised it into a particular reason, and they still don't. There isn't and never has been any doctrine. It was just like 'What the bloody hell's been happening here?', and that's the energy that I got.

SJ I've noticed over the years how as soon as anyone sets themselves up as a leader or voice for the crop circle researchers, events happen very quickly that knock them down again.

PC Absolutely. You have to be humble. If you don't show humility before this phenomena, you're going to fall by the wayside. Anybody who sets themselves up as an 'expert' is very quickly dealt with. And they have been, all the way through.

SJ Many people have used words like humility, reverence and awe in connection with this phenomenon, as well as with the sacredness, or sacrificiality, of the landscape that it occurs in. Does worship come into this, or does that border too much on religion?

PC There is certainly wonder and awe. That is because; overnight, amazing patterns appear, with no evident explanation. When you go in them, you don't feel threatened. You do feel inspired. You do feel in awe, in amazement, in wonder at this incredible creation. How is it done? Who could have done it? Why is it here? All those questions.

SJ The phenomena still isn't being picked up on by the mainstream scientific community, which is perhaps why it is still sacrosanct to those chosen few who are attracted by it. There's an element of not wanting to have it 'explained', of enjoying the mystery.

PC I think that's right. This phenomena doesn't want to be explained at the moment, but has allowed a certain amount of knowledge to be gleaned from it. For example, Dr. Levenson's work?

SJ Yes. I'm familiar with that.

PC Well, he's slowly becoming more mainstream. As the years go on and he collects more data, so the results are becoming more statistically significant, and I feel that we have scientific data there that can be put forward if necessary. It doesn't explain it, but what it does do is state that there is something happening, and that's enough, that's kind of all that's needed really. We're not going to get an explanation really, because it's not in our realm. We can point to the measurable and demonstrable phenomena like the blown nodes that says that the phenomena is happening, but it's not telling you where it comes from, and nothing we do is going to tell us that, until it reveals itself.

SJ The iconography of the crop circles seems to be becoming ever more popular, with jewellery, t-shirts and bracelets etc. Perhaps people are looking to identify with crop circles in a broader way by wearing them?

PC When I was younger I wore CND jewellery and t-shirts because I believed in banning the bomb. People wear Celtic knotwork patterns in their jewellery, because

they like that patterning. But it's more than a pattern. There's something within that pattern that attracts them very deeply.

I think that there's two reasons why people will show these patterns. One is that they are beautiful, beautiful patterns. They stir in us something from memory. They're also saying 'Hey. I believe in this. Have you seen this?'

SJ I've recently seen these formation patterns being projected onto the walls and dancers at disco's and nightclubs. It's as if people have picked up on the art form, and are carrying it into the mainstream of society now.

PC That's maybe the way it's meant to be. Seeing the patterns means that you are affected by them. I think that it doesn't matter where you believe in crop circles or not, whether you think that they're made by hoaxers or whether they're genuine. The fact that you've seen that pattern does something to you. It's stirring something in you, triggering your consciousness. The more people see these patterns, the more will be stirred in us. And that's what they're about. That's the way that they're working.

SJ Do you think that over the years there has been any consensus amongst the crop circle community as to the nature of the phenomena?

PC The analogy I would use is that of a colony of ants. Highly socially organised, highly intelligent. They have a Queen, they have workers, they have soldiers. And do they know that we exist? Do they hell. If we tread on them they put it down to natural disaster or divine intervention. This highly organised group lives alongside us, but has no knowledge that we exist. I think that we're like that to the crop circle generators. There's a good parallel here. There are organised intelligent species living on this earth that don't know that other, also intelligent and organised species exist.

Appendix E

Transcript of an interview with Francine Blake, co-ordinator of the Wiltshire Crop Circle Study Group, and editor of The Spiral, the group's magazine, currently in its tenth year. Ms Blake was interviewed by telephone at her home on Friday 15 April at 2.30 pm.

SJ You're familiar with the crop circle community/fraternity. Would you say that there is still such a sense of community as there was some years ago?

FB Crop circles attract all sorts of people and for different reasons. We assume that everyone who comes to this subject will have something in common with us but it is not necessarily so. Some people come in because they are troubled by the phenomenon, and wish to disclaim it. In other words, we don't all have the same aim. It's not a community. It's an aggregate of people with different viewpoints, different mindsets, different agendas. The only thing that unites us is the phenomenon.

SJ I'm thinking of splitting the community into two main groups, with on the one hand the methodologists, the scientists, the sceptics and the hoaxers, whilst on the other hand there are the devout and the believers –

FB - I don't like the word believer, you know because it is used as a deprecation to make us feel we lack seriousness. The term believers is synonymous with faith; in other words you believe in something because you can't find any evidence. The crop circle study has nothing to do with belief. In actual fact we're all believers; we all believe in something, even believing in nothing is a belief, so it's a misnomer. The pro- hoaxers and sceptics believe crop circles are man made, I believe they are not.

SJ When using the word believer, I was aware of the derogative nature that could be connected with that, I've yet to come up with a better term. I'm trying to label those people who are spiritually open to the phenomenon, those who experience a sense of not so much religion but respect and humility and awe for the phenomenon and for the landscape in which it's placed. In that way I differentiate between the sceptics, the hoaxers and those who are looking for logical explanations.

FB The pro-hoaxers may be looking for logical explanations but what they are coming up with is not based on logic as far as I can see. It's more based on emotion. One could say that what should unite us is searching for evidence. I don't see any indication of this in the hoaxing group.

SJ I realise that the crop circle community is now smaller than it was in the early 1990's, but would you say that there is or was a sense of not so much religious as cult like behaviour

FB I was involved in it in 1991, but I wasn't living in Wiltshire at the time. I wouldn't

say that there are less people involved in it now than there were then. There was a lot more innocence. There hadn't been any debacle, there had been no mention of hoaxing and no idea of human intervention. No one was attacking the community, or the phenomenon. I wouldn't say there was religious fervour, the early researcher would really take exception to this claim, it was just a lot of excitement. People were fascinated, as they should be, and having a good time.

In 1991, there was a big formation at Barbury Castle, involving lots of ancient symbolism as well as modern geometry which confounded the scientists. Up until then there had been limited success, mainly by Terence Meaden, in ascribing the phenomenon to plasma vortices due to unusual meteorological activities. But Barbury Castle could not, with the best will in the world, be attributed to a rogue wind. Meaden who admitted in print that "it showed signs of consciousness and therefore it must be man made." Wingfield (another prominent researcher of the early 1990's) asked, "why would anybody do that?" to which Meaden replied "they're doing that to make us look ridiculous." That was the beginning of the hoaxing theory. A theory based on a man's fear of being laughed at, on a man sudden realisation that his research was no longer valid, and that consciousness was involved. At that moment many researchers turned pro-hoaxers. Far from being a time of religious fervour in the early 1990's, they were pragmatic, trying to find a logical, scientific explanation for the appearance of these circles. It is the researchers themselves who started the hoaxing theory and the researchers who are continuing to push it. But their opinions are usually based on nothing more than on personal like or dislike of the designs, assumptions, hearsay and gossip. The only thing that seems to be lacking in the hoaxing theory is evidence. That is why I say that it is based more on emotion than on rationality.

SJ With the exception of those very few hoaxers who obtain work making designs for companies such as Honda, Hamlet and Weetabix, what do you think is the motivation of those other hoaxers who are left?

FB I disagree with the idea that lots of people at work making crop circles. There is nothing to back that up. Living in the area, I speak to the farmers, the villagers and such like, and I just know that this is not true. Those who claims to be hoaxing are usually very active on the internet. That's their main thing. It is easy enough to claim something but much more difficult to do it. In French there is an expression 'Big Talkers - little doers'. That just about sums it up. Of course they will come here and do commissioned designs for companies such as National Geographic, Japanese television and so on when they are paid and protected, it's not a criminal offence then, and when they have plenty of time to do it in the open. That is very different. We see them at work, often they bring mechanical cranes and spotlights in the field to see what they are doing. It's not the same thing as a formation that appears out of the blue that no one, no matter how many are watching, ever sees in the process of forming. People are very ignorant about the subject if they think the two are comparable.

SJ There are a number of alleged incidents where hoaxers have set out to create a

formation, only to leave it unfinished either by discovery, approaching dawn, rain etc. Yet come the dawn and sunrise, there is often an example of the real phenomenon either next to the hoax or appended on to it. Could it be that the generating force of the formations cherry picks' the minds of the hoaxers in some way?

FB I really wouldn't give them any credit, I don't believe a word they say. They are liars and manipulators. People who fall for that kind of talk are very naive and have little understanding of human nature. Hoaxers are not part of this phenomenon, however much they would like to be. They're hangers on. They wish to gain notoriety and prestige by posing as the authors of the designs, and due to the general lack of knowledge about this phenomenon, they usually succeed. But probe them a little bit and you will see there is no substance to their claims.

SJ In my interviews so far, the words reverence' and humility' are regularly used in the overall group dynamic in relation to the phenomenon. Would you go along with these words?

FB When you realise that something momentous is happening and symbolic designs appearing out of the blue in crops is truly a momentous event, something changes in you. It is difficult for people as it is so far removed from our usual way of thinking. But when you realise there is a lot of solid evidence such as the effects it has on the nodes and seeds of plants and on the soil, the effects on cameras and electrical instruments; the speed at which it comes, the amazing complexity of the designs, the depth of the meaning of the symbols and so on you begin to take note. And when you read them through the mathematics, the geometry and the symbology then you realise that the information is from a very high level of understanding and that immediately makes you feel humble. It is not at our level as we are sweating blood trying to understand them and we are all learning as a result. For many of us they are invitations to study and when we do we gain knowledge. I think their purpose is to pass information. When we begin to study these symbols, we begin to realise that the world is a very big place and full of mystery. It gives us a feeling of awe and gratitude and that realisation is the essence of humility.

SJ One thing that does seem to be linking the community is that the formations are bringing us into a steadily increasing degree of appreciation and reverence towards both landscape and the environment. The formations appear in places that can evoke a degree of almost religious fervour when we look at landscape, and suggests that the true circlemakers, or transmitters of the designs, want us to look at the planet.

FB They are located in some very special places in the world, whether it be in the UK, Germany or the USA, they come near long barrows, stones circles, dolmen etc. If you want to see a crop circle, go to ancient temples or monuments. Crop circles bring us to the monuments which gradually makes us appreciate the ancestors who built them. It also brings us to the landscape. Nowadays of course, most people live in cities and rarely venture to the countryside. With crop circles we are taken physically to beautiful

landscapes full of ancient monuments. This opens our hearts and when you start to open up, you get a feeling of reverence. It's a natural thing. Going to a wonderful cathedral brings a feeling of reverence. There's an atmosphere that elevates the spirit. I wouldn't call that religion, but an elevation of the spirit of human beings. Nature can do that, crop circles can do that; it doesn't have to be a religious building.

SJ So the formations do evoke in us a much greater attitude towards spirituality but not religion.

FB There's a big difference between spirit and religion. Religion, as we understand it, is an institution based on dogmas. Spirit is the essence, the soul of a human being, or of anything alive. Spiritual means of the spirit. That's all it means. Spirituality should not be confused with religion.

Appendix F

List of crop circle internet websites

Crop circle connector - <http://www.cropcircleconnector.com>

Lucy Pringle - <http://www.lucypringle.co.uk>

The crop circular - <http://www.lovely.clara.net>

Circlemakers - <http://www.circlemakers.org>

Invisible circle - <http://www.invisiblecircle.org/uk>

Tree, ice, snow and sand circles - http://uk.kornsirkler.org/relaterte_fenomen.htm

Swirled News - <http://www.swirlednews.com>

Crop circle hypermaths - <http://www.hypermaths.org>

Janet Ossebard - <http://www.circularsite.com>

Andreas Muller - <http://www.kornkreise-forschung.de>

Patterns of Consciousness - <http://www.darroch.dircon.co.uk>

Burke, Levengood and Talbot - <http://www.blresearch.com>

The crop circle website - <http://thecropcirclewebsite.50megs.com>

Canadian crop circle research network - <http://www.cccrn.ca>

Crop circle archive - <http://www.x-cosmos.it/cropcircles>

Total wordage	36,387 words		
Less footnotes of	3,224 words	=	33,171 words
Less interviews and bibliography	10,310 words	=	22,859 words
Less indented quotes	2,699 words	=	20,159 words
Total original content	20,154 words		