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Disputation by Design

Sally Jackson
University of Arizona

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Abstract:
In normative pragmatics, a kind of empirical discourse analysis organized by normative theory, the analysis of any communication process begins with an idealized model of the discourse that can be compared with actual practices. Idealizations of argumentation can be found, among other places, in theoretical descriptions of 'critical discussion' and other dialogue types. Comparing ideal models with actual practices can pinpoint defects in the models (leading to theoretical refinements), but it can also identify deficiencies in practice. This latter possibility invites redesign around well-justified idealizations. This paper outlines an approach to the design of discourse processes and illustrates the approach with contrastive analysis of several recently developed protocols for discussion and debate on the worldwide web.

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UFOs over Arizona

While the Heaven's Gate cybercult was having its going away party, I happened to be having a party too, for a professor visiting from Chicago. One of the interesting Tucson sights we had to show him was a clear view of the Hale-Bopp comet over the Santa Catalina mountains. As two members of the party were staring at the comet, an unidentified object, W-shaped and luminous, covered a wide arc at a speed about like a meteorite, then abruptly disappeared. Other Tucsonans reported seeing the same object, some describing it as a W and others as an M. I missed it, but later I looked on the worldwide web and discovered a very active discussion of UFOs over Arizona, concerned not with the Tucson sightings but with other sightings of similar objects over Phoenix.

You might suppose that I mean to talk about how we evaluate eyewitness reports of this kind. In fact I have no such intention. I'm going to talk about discourse design, and I only mentioned the UFO because later, when we talk about how to create protocols for online discussion and debate, I would like you to know how it is that my attention came to center on a UFO discussion group. I could try to pretend that I started following a UFO discussion because it is a good source of arguments *ad ignorantium*—which it is—but the plain truth is that I started following the discussion because I wanted to find out why there were UFOs over Arizona and hoped that someone somewhere knew.

At some point I noticed that the content of the discussion was starting to interest me less than its form, and that's where my UFO story ends and my theoretical story begins. My objective in this talk is to outline a methodology for discourse design, treating argumentative discourse as something whose varied structurings can be analyzed, critiqued, and sometimes re-engineered. My own work over the past 2 years has been almost exclusively focussed on creation of discussion protocols for the worldwide web, and I want to share with you some thoughts about how argumentation theory feeds the design process.

Discourse Design

What does it mean to engage in 'discourse design'? What is the nature of the work?

Discourse design involves some sort of deliberate effort at management of talk. The effort to create discussion procedures is not new, of course. Any negotiated method of dispute settlement, such as majority rule, is a discourse design. But only recently has the design process itself become a subject for explicit consideration. It is one thing to design one locally-adapted system for dispute settlement and another to attempt some general analysis of the design of discourse.

What would it mean to give a general analysis of the design of discourse? The conceptual tools for this project come from many different fields of communication study: from rhetoric, from linguistics, from empirical discourse analysis, and from other allied fields. Most fundamentally, an analysis of the design of discourse requires a sophisticated description of what I will simply call design features. I have in mind something closely akin to Barbara O'Keefe's (1988) message design logics, except that my focus is not on message production but on more global interactional organization.

A design feature is something more or less purposefully incorporated into a message or a message exchange system, and open to some sort of more or less deliberate variation. How aware participants are of the purposes served by design features is highly variable; some design features are not planned in any sense, while others are consciously worked in to a way of talking. To get a handle on what might count as a design feature, and on what might be designable in discourse, I want to describe some simple protocols for incorporation of argumentation into teaching and learning and discuss what some of their important design features seem to be.

One very interesting protocol is what I will call the Mazur peer learning protocol (http://mazur-www.harvard.edu/Education/PI.html). It is a method used in science teaching to encourage more theoretical reflection on the part of students by getting them to engage in argumentation, and one thing you will notice is that it is easily adapted to any subject whatsoever. The protocol has six moves, as follows:

Presentation of problem
Silent reflection
Commitment to answer
Effort to convince partner
Revision or reaffirmation of answer
Discussion of answers

Let's examine the protocol. The professor who developed this protocol, Eric Mazur of Harvard, claims that it leads to significant improvements in learning as compared with traditional teaching methods built around lecturing and problem-solving. The improvements, by the way, occur not only in understanding of physics concepts but also in problem-solving, so this isn't a substitution of one desired learning outcome for another. Why should a sequence like this offer improvements over lecturing and problem-solving?

Mazur says that he thinks the most important feature of this sequence is that it is interactive. Because students are forced to engage their classmates in discussion, they are more motivated to think through the problem. And because they each try to convince the other, they get to see at least one other person's reasoning processes. I

have no doubt that he is right in thinking that interaction is indispensable here. But it may not be interaction per se that accounts for the effects of this protocol.

There are at least two other features of this protocol that could be its active ingredients: the fact that the interaction is peer-to-peer and that it involves opposition, confrontation, or contradiction.

Peer-to-peer interaction—the most distinctive feature of collaborative and cooperative learning—seems to improve students' understanding of content. A common account is that explanations by experts are not as well adapted to the student's level of readiness as are explanations by peers. But it may also be that interacting with a peer is more useful than interacting with an expert because one is more likely to disagree with or challenge a peer than to dispute an expert. In other words, inequality may encourage simple deference and in doing so, suppress independent thought altogether.

The oppositional quality of the Mazur sequence is another feature to pay attention to. The protocol fails if the problem is either so hard that everyone gets it wrong or so easy that no one does. Mere talk is apparently not enough to produce the effect. But as Mazur points out, discussion between two students almost never results in a right answer yielding to a wrong one; the confrontation between two answers is an effective way to force review of the reasoning leading to the answers. Possibly it is this oppositional quality, not interactivity or peer learning, that powers this device.

What concerns me at the moment, however, is not which of these various qualities is the active ingredient in the Mazur protocol. I mention them not to set up three distinct conjectures about why the protocol has the effects it does but to illustrate what might count as a design feature. We have three examples of features that can be designed into or designed out of instruction: its structuring of talk time, its distribution of authority, and its orientation to disagreement. The Mazur protocol structures talk as a dialogue rather than as the monologue of the lecture that leads up to the problem. Authority is equally distributed between the two partners engaged in the sequence, whereas authority is very unequally distributed between the lecturer and the listeners in any subsequent discussion. Finally, the Mazur sequence is explicitly oppositional and oriented to testing ideas against other, divergent ideas; in a standard question/answer sequence within a classroom, discrepancies between the lecturer's answer and the student's answer are resolved through correction rather than through mutual efforts at persuasion.

As a second example of designed discourse, consider the extensively analyzed 'confrontation sequence' (Bleiberg & Churchill, 1975; Jacobs, 1986). In a confrontation sequence, one speaker (the confronter) helps another (the confronted) to recognize weaknesses or self-contradictions by calling out commitments one at a time and juxtaposing those that are in contradiction—a straightforward dialectical structure. The confrontation sequence has three 'stages': an opening in which some statement triggers a decision to confront; an exploration in which question/answer pairs or challenge/response pairs establish commitments; and a punchline or predicament in which the confronter draws out the contradiction or inconsistency in the confronted's commitment set.

Question/Answer

Statement Challenge/Response Predicament

Refutation/Concession

Confrontation might prove as useful in teaching as the Mazur protocol, if it can be deployed in such a way as to bring less sophisticated ways of thinking into dilemmas that motivate progression to more sophisticated reasoning. A classic application of the confrontation pattern would be to lie in wait for a student to say something with a vulnerability that could be exploited to expose the weakness in a certain way of thinking. In teaching social science research methods, one problem I encounter over and over is that students do not see that their personal beliefs may be incompatible with their professional or disciplinary values. And one way to get them to see this is to let them voice a lot of opinions and then challenge them for acceptable social scientific evidence of their views. Unhappily, this kind of protocol has some design features we might not want. It is likely to make the student very uncomfortable, not only with his or her own reasoning, but also with being put on the defensive.

Like the Mazur protocol, the classic confrontation sequence is interactive and oppositional. Unlike the Mazur protocol, the classic confrontation does not cast participants into symmetric roles. There is a kind of corrective quality to the confrontation sequence that makes it slide easily into ridicule or derogation. The predicament, the punch line, puts the confronted 'on the spot,' compelled to respond and unable to do so without repudiating something previously asserted. Where the Mazur sequence subjects a student's reasoning to self-test and self-evaluation, the classic confrontation applied opportunistically subjects a student's reasoning to public critique and potential loss of face.

But don't you just feel that confrontation could be a useful tool in teaching? I mention unwanted features of the confrontation sequence because they give us something to design *out* of the discourse. The features we want are oppositionality and interactivity. The features we don't want are the face implications associated with being in the public role of the confronted—what an interaction analyst might call a 'one-down' position. A skillful teacher can find ad hoc strategic solutions to how to confront without face threat, but it is also possible to design structures of this kind that are independent of the skill of the confronter.

These two protocols, juxtaposed this way, point to how we might go about a systematic redesign of discourse. I want to outline a general methodology and consider how this methodology might be applied to the creation of discussion protocols for the worldwide web.

A Methodology for Discourse Design

The theoretical framework for my design work is what my colleagues and I have called 'normative pragmatics,' the general position laid out in *Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse* (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, & Jacobs, 1993), and especially the pragma-dialectical model developed within the Amsterdam school of argumentation research (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984). Normative pragmatics is empirical discourse analysis organized by normative theory. In normative pragmatics, the analysis of any communication process begins with an idealized model of the discourse, as it would look if produced by ideal actors operating within ideal circumstances. Comparison of communication practices with the ideal model may uncover discrepancies between real and ideal discourse, whether because in real discourse people face paradoxes that force departure from one ideal or another, or because real discussants have deficiences in competence, or because of other situational or dispositional constraints.

Normative pragmatics has several strengths as a framework for design work.

First, normative pragmatics is "practical" in the sense of being centrally concerned with practices. Ordinary

argumentation practices are presumed to embody situated norms and are taken as a source of information about communicative presumptions. The centrality of practice is reflected in an insistence on examination of actual arguments and on empirically-grounded models.

Second, normative pragmatics is value-oriented, meaning that it focusses on the ways in which discourse embodies or fails to embody important social values. Normative pragmatics is oriented to critical examination of discourse as a form of social engagement, and its objects of study are practices that are in some way consequential for society. While practices are assumed to be rational solutions to communication problems, they are not presumed to be optimal solutions.

Third, normative pragmatics is attentive to the unintended consequences of natural and designed systems. There is no guarantee that discourse designed for some purpose will in fact serve that purpose, and even if it does, it may do so at the cost of other purposes. Normative pragmatics assumes that any communicative choice will have unanticipated effects that must be examined and critiqued, and further, that any designed system will have unanticipated effects.

The focus on discourse practices, the orientation to communicative values, and the attentiveness to unintended consequences cooperate to guide design work. Where many "practical" approaches to improving argumentation target the individual arguers (aiming, for example, to cultivate critical thinking), the approach my colleagues and I have taken targets the discourse practices themselves, seeking to manage the discourse with any sort of workaround that comes to hand.

In broad outline, our methodology for discourse design has four components: an empirical examination of discourse practices, a critical analysis based on comparison of practices with an ideal model, a specification of designable features, and a proposed redesign.

Examination of discourse practices

Practices are solutions to problems; they provide materials for conjectures about what participants are trying to do and what obstacles they face in accomplishing their objectives. To redesign discourse, we begin with careful examination of discourse practices. In our empirical work, this has often involved recording and detailed transcription of argument collected both opportunistically (in conversation) and systematically (in formal disputation procedures like third party mediation). We search the discourse for insight into such things as interactional functions (Jacobs, 1989, 1992; Jacobs, et al., 1991; Walton, 1992), organizational principles (Jackson & Jacobs, 1980; Jacobs & Jackson, 1983; O'Keefe, 1988), and "situated ideals" (Craig & Tracy, 1995).

Critical analysis

Redesign is motivated by something amiss, and to specify what is amiss we must apply standards of some sort. In normative pragmatics, the device used for this purpose is an ideal model of argumentation or other discourse processes. One such model is the 'critical discussion' model of pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1984). The critical discussion model is a set of speech-acts based rules for the conduct of argumentative

discussion, elaborated through a series of higher order conditions that define predispositions and preconditions for ideal performance.

Of special interest in this discussion are two first order rules: the rule that every participant in a discussion must have full and free opportunity to raise objections, and the rule that every participant must stand ready to defend any statement in his or her commitment set. Any condition that prevents participants from raising objections is a threat to the underlying function of critical discussion, which is to resolve differences of opinion by convincing all parties that one opinion is more defensible than any other. We can critique discourse systems in which viewpoints are suppressed either intentionally or unintentionally. For example, coercive systems in which only the powerful dare to speak are often afflicted by broad undercurrents of dissensus and resistance, and we readily recognize this as a weakness in such systems. Less obvious are the weaknesses in systems built around unrestrained competition for the floor; in these systems, the danger is that floor time will be distributed in a fashion only loosely related, if at all, to the quality of a participant's thinking.

Elsewhere I've suggested that gaps between ideal models and actual practices present opportunities for engineering of argument. Alternatively, we may say that such gaps invite redesign to shape practice toward the ideal.

Specification of designable features

When a gap between actual practice and ideal model—a problem—is noticed, a search for the cause of the gap may yield one or more design features considered potential contributors to the problem. Design must focus on what can be altered. Only some of the factors that influence the quality of argument will turn out to be designable. Designable features include devices for allocating speaking rights such as turns at talk, devices for distributing authority, devices for managing impasse, and so on.

Not all problems in argumentation can be traced to design elements, of course. Defective or deficient performance can occur because the participants themselves lack the attitudes or aptitudes required for good performance. However, even in these cases, the search for designable features may prove worthwhile as these features sometimes permit workarounds for such fundamental problems as uncooperative attitudes or inadequate ability.

Proposed redesign

A discourse design is some sort of plan for the management of discussion. Examples of discourse design range from conversational protocols like the Mazur peer learning protocol to semi-formal procedures like third party mediation to very heavily theorized schemes like Science Court (Mazur, 1993) for regulation of complex disputes.

Designs proposed as solutions to problems of practice are part of normative pragmatics as a theoretical enterprise. Normative pragmatics does not merely monitor the environment for new designs to take as objects of study but generates its own proposals for how to redesign talk. This process of design is the only obvious avenue for investigation of 'problem validity,' a model's ability to deliver the kind of discourse it represents as ideal.

Apart from a few fast talkers (e.g., Willard, 1985), argumentation theorists do not usually envision themselves as designers, inventors, tinkerers, or engineers. This, however, is the direction I am advocating. My own work takes this direction, not metaphorically but literally, in computer software written for the worldwide web. The instructional applications of my designs are incorporated in a web course construction kit I created, known as POLIS (*http://www.u.arizona.edu/ic/polis*), that allows instructors to introduce various argumentation structures into interactive web-based lessons in any subject. POLIS offers a version of the confrontation sequence, for example, and an automated adversary system is in development for POLIS.

With design as our objective, let's get back to the UFO discussion and see what can be done.

Designing Online Discussion

A consensus view among expert and lay observers is that the most significant feature of the worldwide web is not the 'information' it delivers but the opportunities it presents for participation in public discussion. Electronic newspapers do not merely deliver the same stories on line but pair stories with discussion space or other even more participatory structures. For good or ill, most of these discussion spaces are unstructured and unmoderated; anyone can post anything, no matter how ill-considered.

The unrestricted openness of public discussion on the web presents a challenge to argumentation theory, to find a balance between a commitment to 'first-order conditions' for critical discussion such as the unrestricted right to raise questions and make claims, and a basic practical recognition that the exercise of this right by very many people produces discourse that is essentially unexamined and unproductive. Letting everyone 'have their say' means accepting and archiving false assertions, irrelevant objections, repetitions, blatant abuses such as argument ad hominem, and other argumentative missteps.

I want to share two postings from *alt.UFO.reports*, a usenet news group devoted to discussion of UFO sightings and related phenomena. Much of the argument is over interpretation of evidence, especially how best to explain sightings and other occurrences. We will consider several very obvious problems with the practices that have emerged within this group and others like it. Exhibits 1 and 2 show two individual messages posted to *alt.UFO.reports* in recent weeks; apart from abbreviations of the headers, these excerpts are given exactly as displayed by my news reader. Both are complicated by quoting of messages that quote other messages to produce a tangle of remark, response, and rebuttal. While reading messages in sequence gives a much better sense of the technical and theoretical problems inherent in discourse design, even these two individual posts suggest some challenges we could take up.

Exhibit 1 is included because it is a fairly bad case of what many people think usenet groups are all about: unsupported assertions, nitpicking, name-calling, and other abuses. The message is quite confusing, but it is easy enough to see that the main action in this thread is derogation of each side by the other.

Even for practiced participants in usenet newsgroups, the message in Exhibit 2 presents some complexities. The writer's name is Garry. His comments are the ones with no special punctuation at the left margins. The back and forth involves four distinct writers, not all of whom have a clear standpoint. Why all the clutter? Because the web is an asynchronous medium, which is to say that replies to a comment do not occur "next" in a conversation but can occur anytime a new reader joins the discussion. Some news readers will organize discussion into "threads," meaning that the order in which comments are submitted is preserved only within a list having a common subject.

But other news readers simply keep a chronological listing of posts, presenting writers with the problem of contextualizing their replies to other writings. This is commonly done by quoting the relevant sections of the contributions to which a writer wishes to reply. In Garry's case, his reply is to a reply to a reply . . . so, many levels of quoting are involved.

Besides the special organizational difficulties presented by chronological listing of contributions to an asynchronous discussion, this message exhibits another well known weakness of the internet, a receptivity to information of any level of quality and a failure to discriminate between the valuable and the valueless. While this message and the messages it replies to are nicely focussed on evidence and on the credibility of observers and analysts, the dialectically irrelevant complaint about "cross-posting" is equally included.

The two messages show usenet news groups not at their worst but near their best—and that should worry us a little. These messages are of *relatively* high quality, in that they are topically relevant, responsive to the surrounding discussion, and reasonably planful. One common response to the sort of discourse exhibited here is to denigrate the web as a public forum for debate, decision-making, or education. A different sort of response is suggested by normative pragmatics, starting from the recognition that new communication contexts often present dilemmas for which theoretically informed solutions are needed.

To recap, we noticed in just these two messages at least three distinct problems of practice: the receptivity to abusive content, the imposition of a simple sequential ordering on an asynchronously produced text, and the lack of differentiation between important and inconsequential objections. How can we set about the task of designing protocols to solve these sorts of practical problems?

To begin with, this is not a technical task so much as a theoretical task. When we know how we want argument regulated, it is not very hard to write programs that will implement our ideas. In this case, the most important thing to see is that an online discussion is not just an electronic conversation but a form of discourse with its own distinctive design features and its own distinctive interactional difficulties. In an idealized critical discussion between two equal opponents, any new contribution by one party is subject to immediate and indefinitely prolonged scrutiny by the other party. This repair mechanism is massively weakened, if present at all, in unrestricted, sequentially-built, indiscriminately-archived discussion.

I'll take up the easiest of the three problems first, the problem of how to structure an asynchronously produced discussion. Since connectedness between two contributions has little to do with how closely one follows the other in time, why preserve contributions as a temporal sequence, even within threads? One obvious alternative is to preserve contributions as components of a hierarchical structure, with successively more localized objections represented as successively more removed from the main question. This is the basic idea behind Expand-o-Matic, a discussion tool I created and programmed as a substitute for a standard conferencing tool. Expand-o-Matic represents a discourse as a series of "layers," with each layer containing any number of coordinate points that can be expanded independently of the others. Exhibit 3 shows how the thread leading to Garry's message would have developed within Expand-o-Matic. Quoting is superfluous in Expand-o-Matic, since any reply is automatically indexed to its stimulus.

Having abandoned temporal sequence or standard threading by topic as an organizing principle, we might well ask why preserve contributions as discrete turns at all. Many radical ideas can be tried in designed discussion forums online. For example, if the purpose of the discussion is either to come to a resolution of disagreement or to refine participants' thinking through critical engagement, it does not matter who said what but only how each proposition figures in an overall case for or against some proposition. In the case of *alt.UFO.reports*, the

general question is whether extraterretrials are visiting Earth, and the case *for* is composed of arguable instances. Apart for inclusion of observer information in instances, there is no particular reason why a discussion needs to divide contributions into messages or turns rather than into cases and components of cases. A discussion organized casewise instead of turnwise would look like collaborative writing, except that two or more documents taking contradictory standpoints would develop simultaneously and in relation to one another. I can't exhibit such a structure, because I don't think anyone has created a discussion tool like this just yet, but the technical problems involved in the programming would be inconsequential compared to the theoretical problem of specifying what counts as a case and what standards govern inclusion of material in a case or deletion of material from the case.

What about the harder problems, the quality problems? If a discussion is to be an open forum, with no editing by a moderator or other authority, anything can be posted. Obvious fixes (like automated filters or human moderators) eliminate the problem by eliminating openness. Are there any other avenues?

A design solution to this design problem is to incorporate into the discussion tool a kind of automated interlocutor that requires a certain investment of effort and thought before submission of a comment. Standard usenet newsgroups take contributions in a format similar to e-mail, so as soon as the message is constructed it can be sent and posted. However, very simple programming of web-based forms could implement a sort of 'pre-qualification' step for each contribution, requiring contributors to address certain standard issues of sincerity, quality, and responsiveness. For example, suppose that submitting a comment brought up a kind of inventory that included questions like the following:

> Would anyone disagree with your argument?
>
> yes
> no
>
> If a person agreed with this argument, would it affect their overall position?
>
> yes
> no

Answering yes to either question should bring up a new set of questions designed to deepen the discussion through exploration of reasons for disagreeing in the first case and exploration of potential obstacles to agreement in the second. Answering no to either question should bring up a warning that a point no one disagrees with is likely to be irrelevant to the dispute. Although no pre-qualification step of this kind can prevent posting of abusive or irrelevant messages, a conscientious writer could profit from it and produce stronger contributions with fewer obvious targets for rebuttal.

Conclusion

An unresolved question for contemporary argumentation theory is what are its 'deliverables.' What has it done for us lately? It seems to me that there are three sorts of answers we might give, representing three forms of engagement with contemporary argumentation practice.

First, we might enter into argumentative discourse as arguers, pointing out fallacies, weaknesses, and even

procedural missteps. This would be easy enough to do on usenet newsgroups, since we argumentation theorists are allowed, along with everyone else, to post anything we like. But this is not very satisfactory; one of our complaints about usenet groups, after all, is that people divert attention from the issues discussed by engaging in a great deal of peripheral criticism.

Second, we might try to affect the quality of argumentation practice through teaching. Most of us do. But teaching people to recognize fallacies and other missteps generally seems to make them better only at critiquing others' arguments, not at controlling their own output.

The third form of engagement is to try to shape better practice 'on the fly,' through better discourse design. It is this form of engagement that I have advocated and tried to illustrate.

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Exhibit 1

From: "Etherman" <etherman@mdc.net>

Subject: Re: UFOs over Arizona

Newsgroups: alt.ufo.reports,alt.alien.visitors,alt.paranet.ufo,alt.alien.research,sci.skeptic

Brant Watson <brantw3@erols.com> wrote in article

<336d657a.32155816@news.erols.com>...

>

> On 28 Apr 97 18:54:53 GMT, "Etherman" <etherman@mdc.net> wrote:

>

> >

> >

> >

> >Robert Imrie, DVM <aleonis@{spamsnip}aleonis.seanet.com> wrote in

article

> ><5juia1$30b@q.seanet.com>...

> >> You're deluding yourself. The reason "good scientists" aren't

"joining

> >> in" with UFOlogists is that UFOlogy isn't good science.

> >

> >An interesting claim. Do you have any evidence whatsoever to back

> >it up? I'm talking about the reasons why scientists shy away from UFOs.

> >If you can't offer any unambiguous support for this theory of yours I

> >hope you have the backbone to admit it.

>

> Okay, Etherman, her are a couple more possibilities you might

> ponder:

Okay, but why don't you present some evidence that Imrie's assertion

has any basis in fact. A simple poll of scientists will suffice.

> 1) All scientists are fundamentally bored with the world and are only

> interested in looking in microscopes and reading highly technical

> books. They have no interest in things like beings from other worlds.

>

> 2) Scientists are all essentially humble folks who would rather let

> the greatest discovery in human history be claimed by a bunch of

> media-hyped non-professionals.

>

> 3) All scientists are part of a government conspiracy to shut up

> about aliens. If they don't agree with the policy, they still stay

> away from the subject because they know that men in black will kill

> them if they start looking too hard.

>

> (Why do I feel that you may already have "pondered" my three

> suggestions?)

>

> Brant

I forgot, in Skeptibunkzealot science no evidence is needed for

the claims of Skeptibunkzealots.

-

Etherman

Exhibit 1 is included because it is a fairly bad case of what many people think usenet groups are all about: unsupported assertions, nitpicking, name-calling, and other abuses. The message is quite confusing, but it is easy enough to see that the main action in this thread is derogation of each side by the other.

 (Back to text)

Exhibit 2

From: garry@sr.hp.com (Garry Bryan)

Newsgroups: alt.ufo.reports,alt.alien.visitors,alt.paranet.ufo,alt.alien.research,sci.skeptic

Subject: Re: UFOs over Arizona

Followup-To: alt.ufo.reports,alt.alien.visitors,alt.paranet.ufo,alt.alien.research,sci.skeptic

Date: 6 May 1997 15:24:57 GMT

Organization: Hewlett Packard Sonoma County

Brant Watson (brantw3@erols.com) wrote:

: On 21 Apr 1997 16:34:25 GMT, garry@sr.hp.com (Garry Bryan) wrote:

: >

: >Sherilyn (sherilyn@sidaway.demon.co.uk) wrote:

: >

: >: In article <5jbeo1$r0f@canyon.sr.hp.com>, Garry Bryan <garry@sr.hp.com>

: >: writes

: >: >Sherilyn (sherilyn@sidaway.demon.co.uk) wrote:

: >: >: In article <5j8rre$2tp@canyon.sr.hp.com>, Garry Bryan <garry@sr.hp.com>

: >: >: writes

: >: ...

: >: >: >

: >: >: >The range camera footage from Nellis air base does provide us with some good

: >: >: >documentation regarding an unknown object with dramatic flight

: >: >characteristics.

: >: >: >Is this proof of an extrateresstrial craft? No, but the ETH is a working

: >: >: >hypothesis.

: >: >

: >: >: An airbase! Golly! Of course it couldn't be an aircraft.

: >: >: This is a pretty basic question to ask.

: >: >

: >: >No, it was not an aircraft. David Rudiak has a very thorough analysis of the

: >: >radar range data that was recorded on the video. If you actually want to do

: >: >some research into it. . .

: >

: >: Enlighten me. What are David Rukiak's qualifications to state that the

: >: radar trace was not of an aircraft, and on what basis did he make this

: >: claim? Has the trace been corroborated from other radars, to check it

: >: was not an artifact? Has Nellis air base anything to say on the matter?

: >

: >He is a frequent poster here who actually took the range data and calculated

: >the flight movements of the object. It hovered and then keeping a precise

: >distance from the camera ascended at speeds varying from 200 to 450 MPH, as I

: >recall. I can search for a copy of the analysis and send it to you . . .

: How reliable can his analysis be, when Rudiak rules out camera

: movement in the Edwards video? (It can be seen at Gilgamesh's "Ovni

: Chapterhouse" site.)

But the camera movement wouldn't affect the RADAR range data being provided by

the computerized range analyser. The camera tracks the object best it can from

servo motors which try and keep the radar object centered as best it can. . .

: <snip>

: >Not my job to convince you. . .

: If it is your intent to make extraordinary claims without attempting

: to support them, then you should consider deleting sci.skeptic from

: the list of newsgroups to which you are posting.

I wouldn't think providing data for someone to analyse would be considered

"extraordinary claims". The only claim I have made is that the video is from

Nellis Airbase and that Dave Rudiak made an analysis of it. So be it. . .

Sure, I am guilty of not editing the headers when I reply to a post. Sort of a

"key-jerk" reaction. . . ;)

Garry (%^{>

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Exhibit 3

http://www.u.arizona.edu/ic/polis/demo/Expand-o-Matic.cgi?DEMO101%%Evidence_for_Extraterrestrial_Visitors^^yes

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