



Of Flying Saucers and Social Scientists: A Re-Reading of When Prophecy Fails and of Cognitive Dissonance (Palgrave Pivot)

Timothy Jenkins

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What happens when prophecies fail? Timothy Jenkins' re-reading of Leon Festinger's classic work on "cognitive dissonance" seeks to answer this question by studying a 50s doomsday group. Jenkins offers a different account of the motivations and meanings of a group expecting the arrival of spacemen from another planet and predicting the End of the World.

This volume explores the relations between anthropology and psychology, and between social scientific and natural scientific accounts of human behavior. In so doing, Jenkins re-draws the relations between science and non-science (including occult practices), so that the social scientists (and third parties such as the press) are drawn into the anthropological description.

First, Jenkins considers the presuppositions and motivations of the three parties involved – the social scientists, the spirit mediums and the groups around them, and the press. Next, he describes a linked sequence of topics: the difference between prophecy and prediction, the sociology of secrecy, and the language ideologies of social scientists and occult groups.

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