The controversy over cultural stone landscapes in New England can be understood in two overlapping chapters. The first, fueled by the public visibility of these often-idiosyncratic sites throughout the region in combination with a noticeable dearth of information about them and attention paid to them by professional archaeologists, is the “ancient explorer” hypothesis. Though the idea that ancient or pre-Columbian European (more rarely African or Asian) travelers were the real architects of unusual North American stone and earthworks has its roots in the 19th century moundbuilder controversy of the Midwest, in the Northeast these theories exploded onto the public stage after Goodwin’s 1946 publication of *The Ruins of Great Ireland in New England*.

By the time Barry Fell’s immensely popular *America, B.C.: Ancient Settlers in the New World* (1976) hit the shelves, professional archaeologists had become increasingly concerned about what they saw as a harmful proliferation of pseudoscientific beliefs (Stengel 2000). The annual meeting of the Archaeological Society of Connecticut (ASC) in April of 1980 was devoted to this “exciting and controversial subject,” and they released a special theme issue of their *Bulletin* the following year titled “New England Megaliths: Fact and Fancy” (Kra 1981). One article stressed that “explanations for sites...cannot rest solely upon mystery, imagination,
fantasy, and wishful thinking,” and warned those who would “revise history” that unless they “can provide acceptable evidence, they are sadly deluding themselves—and worse, they are committing a serious mischief in misleading the public and confounding the archaeological record” (Jordan, Poirier, and Gradie 1981:3).

The avocational researchers championing such theories have been accused of extreme particularism, single-mindedness, oversimplification, flaunting Occam’s Razor, and other charges, and labeled by many as peddling “pseudoscience” (Cole 1981: 61; Cole 1980; Jordan et al. 1981). Philosophers of science have been famously unable to create a blanket definition of pseudoscience that separates it from ‘legitimate’ science (Pigliucci 2010), and in this sense it is more accurately an accusation, not an identity (Gordin 2012). There are numerous reasons why professional archaeologists have been so vehemently dismissive of these theories; while many are warranted (especially in light of the strong appeal some of these theories have to white nationalists), it should also be remembered that “being viewed as within the fold of science carries practical benefits: cultural authority, access to funding, and job opportunities. These things are scarce resources, and so scientists feel the need to police the boundaries of what counts as science” (Hecht 2018:15).

Challenging accepted scientific theory—in particular in cases like this that display little to no consensus even among “experts,” and which have real consequences for stakeholders attempting to preserve or disregard the sites—may not always be simply “mischief.” The scientific method is an ideal that does not characterize the actual practices that occur in the field (Cleland and Brindell 2013), and thus the line between pseudoscience and “real” science may be
more arbitrary than most of us would like to believe. Challenging long-entrenched scientific paradigms, though difficult and rare, is

the only path to significant scientific revolution (Kuhn 1962). Further, the disconnect between one person’s nonsense and another’s compelling data becomes more understandable when we realize these debates “aren’t really about science in the first place. They are about some issue of politics, ethics, or values that runs deeper than science...even knowledge that is true must be constantly defended, because it will inevitably encroach on the interests or values of somebody in society” (Hecht 2018:15). The kinds of knowledge being produced from different communities about these sites can reveal deep anxieties about a settler colonial past and showcase processes of identity construction through the furthering of scientific narratives on both sides of the spectrum; “science is defended so vehemently because it is cultural, not because it is extracultural” (Franklin 1995:165).

In her summary of prominent movements and figures within science studies in anthropology, Sarah Franklin (1995) notes that “both [Donna] Haraway and [Marilyn] Strathern exemplify a cultural hermeneutics of knowledge practices that foregrounds the constitutive role of metaphor, analogy, classification, narrative and genealogy in the production of natural facts” (172-173). Applying this to the situation at hand, it is apparent that there is an ongoing battle over not only cultural, but natural facts—how marks and forms have been created in stone, and with what materials; how old stone formations are, depending on botanical clues or by attempting to date the last time sunlight touched the quartz crystals in the soil around the stones. In both a figurative and literal sense, Haraway and Strathern’s concepts of metaphor, analogy, classification, narrative and genealogy are strikingly clear in the case of cultural stone features. For those willing to take a close look, the situation has the potential to present itself like the
1960s Visible Man toy—all the processes of hybrid knowledge creation on display, like the interconnections of muscles, organs, and nerves.