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THE LARGE SCALE STUDY
OF UFO REPORTS

UFO GLOSSARY

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EDITORIAL

Flying Saucer Documentary

Most of us who have been interested in the subject of UFOs for a number of years have by now become thoroughly inured to radio and television "documentary" programmes on flying saucers which consist largely of stale jokes about "little green men" and derisive comments by popular science pundits who know nothing about the subject.

It was, therefore, a pleasing experience to view Dr Stephen Black's programme, "Flying Saucers and the people who see them (BBC 1, May 9th, 1968). Dr Black pursued a course which is obvious to us, but does not seem to have occurred to previous compilers of programmes on the topic. Ignoring the George Kings and Yusuke Matsumuras on the one extreme and the Patrick Moores and Sir Richard Woolleys on the other, he confined his interviews to UFO witnesses and to scientists who actually know something about the subject.

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THE LARGE SCALE STUDY OF UFO REPORTS

by Bernard Wignall

Over the last 20 years two main approaches to the serious study of UFOs have emerged: the investigation of individual reports in detail, with the eventual aim of deciding the probable cause of the report, and the large scale study of the whole body of UFO reports. This article is concerned with the latter method and deals with not only the current state of the art but also with the prospects for the immediate future.

The essential tool in this aspect of the subject is statistics and most of the results obtained are of a statistical nature, a fact which must always be remembered when interpreting any of these results. Thus the fact that two things are correlated is of little use until the statistical significance of the correlation is considered. Essentially the problem is to find patterns that are somehow characteristic of the phenomenon and which can be used for predicting the results of future investigations. In this way we can begin to apply the full force of scientific method to a problem which seems so far only to have reached the stage of conflicting opinions with little immediate prospect of objectively deciding between them.

There are two main ways of finding patterns: first, the deduction of a pattern from some hypothesis about the phenomenon and second, the observation of some pattern in the existing body of data. In the first case the hypothesis can be tested by looking for the predicted pattern, and in the second case the pattern can be used to suggest a possible hypothesis, or to check existing ideas. In this way a high level of objectivity can be maintained and accuracy is not forfeit. Statistics is a precise science when properly applied.

We now come to the question of how we deal with large numbers of reports and just what sort of information is inherent in them. There are tens of thousands of UFO reports from the last 20 years in the files of various UFO groups, as well as any reports in government files and many uncollected press articles from all over the world. Even this number come from only a small sample of the people who have seen something unusual enough for it to be termed a UFO. A recent Gallup poll in the U.S.A. estimated that over 5 million Americans had seen a UFO. Most of the reports available have very little information in them, the date, place and a brief description being average, and almost all have a mundane explanation in terms of common natural or man-made objects. Even so, such reports can be useful in helping us understand the processes by which we receive reports and providing a standard by which to calibrate things. An important point is that this sort of report will not usually influence results as it will be eliminated in the statistical procedures.

The obvious method of coping with such large numbers of sightings is to use electronic computers and the associated data handling techniques. The first person to do this in any detail was Vallee(1) who eventually built up a catalogue of over 3,000 reports and published several results on the frequency of reports and a possible correlation with the proximity of Mars(2). The largest computer file of sightings is probably the Condon Committee's catalogue, which numbers over 7,000. These are drawn from about 20 sources, the largest contributor being Vallee. The only other computing project of which the author is aware is the joint Cambridge University and Imperial College scheme, the details of which will occupy most of the rest of the article.

Although some programmes relevant to UFOs had been run by the Cambridge Group previously, the joint project began last summer,

when the possibility of getting computer time on the I.C. I.B.M. 7094 was mentioned by a senior member of Imperial College. From there, after negotiations with I.B.M., the I.C. Group was given a job number and free computing time by the company. The main condition is that some of the time be used for a computing service so that everyone could benefit from this scheme. Computing time on a large machine can cost as much as £300 per hour and this would normally be beyond the scope of the largest UFO organisations. An announcement about the service follows the article.

The main difficulty is accumulating the raw data and processing it into a machine readable form. The first method tried was a multi-stage process which involved reducing the original report to a standard format which would later form the main reference file at Cambridge, coding the report according to the code used by the Condon Committee and punching the code on standard cards ready to be fed into the computer. Unfortunately this proved a lot slower than was originally intended and a backlog of unprocessed sightings quickly mounted up. To get round this difficulty, the computing section of CUGIUFO (Cambridge University Group for the Investigation of Unidentified Flying Objects) decided to write their own very simple computer language to help process the large numbers of reports. Using this language, which should be in routine use in the next month or so, whoever is processing reports merely writes the details of the sightings on a special form which is then sent away to be punched on cards. These are then put into the machine, which codes the report and also prints out a standard format for files. In this way it is hoped to build up a comprehensive file of world wide reports for use in research.

At this point a word about the type of problem that can benefit from the use of a computer will be of interest to those who may want to use the computing service. Anything that requires a large number of arithmetic operations can usually be done much more easily on a computer. This is especially true if the process is to be repeated for several sets of data, as once the programme is written very little effort is required to run it again and again with different data. The other applications use a basic body of data such as the list of reports described above. The machine can be used to data sort, i.e. prepare selected lists of reports which have some common factor, either geographical or qualitative. Thus one could ask for all reports of red spheres seen over Liverpool in 1966, or the proportion of reports where the principal witness was a woman over 40 years old.

When the data has been sorted in this way a statistical correlation can be performed, either with external data (e.g. the proximity of Mars) or more internal data (e.g. thundery weather). A special case of the latter is the analysis of the overall frequency of reports, which looks at any regularities or patterns in the number of reports per week or month. An example of this kind of analysis can be found in (3).

These are just some of the ways in which it is possible to build up a picture of the overall behaviour of the phenomenon, a picture that is independent of the observer and subject to scientific methodology. The construction of the main bank of data is just beginning. When it has reached a reasonable size it will be a very powerful research tool and, thanks to the generosity of I.B.M., it will be available to everyone.

References

1. Vallee, J.F. How to classify and codify UFO sightings. Flying Saucer Review, ix, 5. Also Vallee, J.F. and Vallee, J.M., Challenge to Science, Appendix 4, Analysis of UFO Activity.
2. Vallee, J.F. The study of the periodicity of the UFO phenomenon in its correlation with the oppositions of Mars. Flying Saucer Review, viii, 5.
3. Vallee, J.F. & J.M. Challenge to Science, Chapter 3.

COMPUTING SERVICE

If you have any problems or research proposals connected with UFOs that you think would benefit from the use of a computer, you are invited to send them to:- B.L. Wignall,
Jesus College,
CAMBRIDGE.

Please state your ideas as precisely as possible as this helps with the programming. The computing time is free, but it may be necessary to make a nominal charge of a few shillings for administration.

UFO TERMINOLOGY

There are so many special terms and abbreviations now in use among ufologists that those who are not acquainted with the subject frequently find it difficult fully to understand conversations and writings on UFOs.

We here begin a list of UFO terms and abbreviations. It will be seen that some terms are scientific, some pseudo-scientific, being borrowed from science fiction and various esoteric writings, while others are original inventions.

The purpose of this glossary is to provoke discussion of UFO terminology with the hope that this will eventually lead to the publication of lists of acceptable terms, with generally agreed definitions, for use by serious UFO researchers. The following list attempts to indicate some of the terms at present in use, or to be found in UFO literature.

U F O G L O S S A R Y

Part 1 - A to G

AFSCA Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America. A contactee-oriented group, founded by Gabriel Green in 1959.

Agitated cumulus (or, "turbulent cumulus") Cumulus-type cloud, sometimes reported as accompanying a hovering or slow-moving UFO.

Alien Being from another planet.

Alternate realities (or AR theory). Term applied to ideas which attempt to describe various UFO phenomena as belonging to a "different order of reality" from the physical realities explored by modern science. This concept is extremely difficult to describe in a few words, but some inkling of the ideas involved can be gained by reading some of the more esoteric UFO books and also the works of Charles Fort and literature concerned with mythology, folklore and fantasy.

Angel hair Material similar in appearance to cobwebs or gossamer, said to be formed by UFOs. This material disintegrates and disappears quickly, especially when handled and all attempts to preserve samples have been unsuccessful. Apart from the theory that this substance is merely spiders' webs--which cannot be taken seriously in view of repeated failures to preserve samples--there are two other hypotheses. The first is that this substance may be composed of metastable chemical polymers. These could be produced in extreme conditions, such as occur in a tornado. Secondly, they could be aggregates of electrically charged dust particles, which disintegrate on falling to the ground and becoming earthed. It seems that both of these effects can be produced without the agency of UFOs.

Antigravity Hypothetical propulsion system by which flight may be achieved by manipulating the force of gravity. It is often said that UFOs must be propelled by antigravity devices, because the reported manoeuvres of UFOs (e.g., right-angled turns at high speed) would be impossible using conventional means of propulsion and antigravity drive

would free the craft from the effects of inertia.

APRO Aerial Phenomena Research Organization. Address: 3910 E. Kleindale Road, Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A. Founded 1952. Oldest and one of the best-known and best informed UFO organisations.

AR Theory See "Alternate Realities."

Associated phenomena Unusual events or experiences which appear to be connected with UFO activity at a particular place or time. These include such things as odd coincidences, mysterious telephone calls and unexplained noises.

BAVIC Line joining Bayonne and Vichy, in France. (BAYonne-VICHy). Aime Michel discovered that 6 out of 10 sightings recorded ~~in the~~ ~~in~~ in France on September 24th, 1954, lay on this line. It has been suggested that this line may be a permanent feature, of global significance so far as UFOs are concerned. This is because, when continued around the world the line runs through areas which have experienced intensive waves of UFO sightings. (See also "Orthoteny.")

Benderism The giving up of active interest in UFOs, giving as a reason mysterious threats and unexplained happenings. In 1953, Albert K. Bender closed down the International Flying Saucer Bureau, saying that he had been threatened by "three men in black." Since then, other ufologists have ceased their activities under somewhat similar circumstances.

Binding forces In ufology, this term refers to the forces which hold matter together. According to the late Wilbert B. Smith, there are small areas of "reduced binding" which occur in various parts of the world. He claimed that such "vortices of reduced binding force were produced by atomic explosions and this was the cause of some unexplained aircraft disasters. He claimed that this information came from the powers controlling the UFOs. So far, no reliable evidence to support the binding forces idea has been presented.

BUFORA British Unidentified Flying Object Research Association. The largest and most influential UFO organisation in Britain. Various local UFO groups in Britain are affiliated to BUFORA.

Cigar Unidentified flying object shaped like a cigar. See "Mother ship."

Classic UFO sighting report or incident, which has become well-known to most people interested in the subject. Such reports are generally referred to in UFO literature simply by the name of the place, or principal witness, e.g. - Socorro, Itiapu Fort, Father Gill, Mantell, Captain Howard, etc.

Condon Committee (or Colorado Project) A group of scientists investigating UFOs under the chairmanship of Dr Edward U. Condon, based at the University of Colorado. The University was awarded a contract in October, 1966, by the U.S. Air Force, to carry out a thorough scientific investigation of the UFO problem.

Contactee Person who claims to have contacted the powers who control the flying saucers, either by physical encounter or by some other means, such as telepathy or mysterious telephone calls. The stories told by contactees are generally implausible, but they sometimes impress because of the apparent good character of the witness and the presence of some circumstantial evidence which appears to at least partly lend credence to the story. Contactees usually claim to have received a "message" to reveal to the world and often claim also to have received information which they must not reveal. The "message" is usually edifying, if somewhat unenlightening. Some researchers tend to place such reports which do not involve such a message in a different category from ordinary "contact stories." Stories similar to the modern contact story have been told throughout the ages and it is thus clear that they must be

taken seriously, if not literally. Although some contactees have admitted to fabricating their stories, many appear to be sincere. The main problem with regard to such reports is, therefore, to attempt to discover whether they have a purely psychological cause, or whether they are accounts--probably distorted--of genuine experiences.

Crackpot Term popularly applied to uncritical believers in flying saucers, who entertain confused and bizarre ideas on the subject.

CUGIUFO Cambridge University Group for the Investigation of Unidentified Flying Objects.

CULTIST Term applied to persons or organisations which appear to mix the UFO phenomena with religious beliefs, or who regard UFOs as having a mainly religious or occult significance.

Deltavolant Triangular-shaped UFO.

EM effects Electromagnetic effects. These are often associated with reports of close encounters with UFOs. Many reports from motorists of failures of lighting and ignition systems when approached by UFOs have been recorded. There are also many reports of power failures and interference with radio and television reception associated with UFOs. It has thus been theorised that UFOs are surrounded by intense, alternating magnetic fields, but it seems that such effects are not present in all cases in which one would expect them to be noted. (See "UFO detector.")

Explain away To dispose of a UFO report by fitting it to any conventional explanation that comes to hand, in order to avoid classifying it as unidentified.

Falling leaf According to reports, UFOs sometimes lose height by moving from side to side in the manner of a falling leaf, hence the expression.

Flap A number of UFO reports occurring in a particular area, over a fairly short period of time. (See "Wave.")

Flying saucer Unidentified flying object. The term flying saucer was coined by the popular press at the time of Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting in 1947. Since then the subject of UFOs has generally been referred to by press and public as flying saucers. Most ufologists, however, nowadays appear to favour the term UFO.

Fly-over Term applied to UFO sightings which consist merely of lights crossing the sky. Such reports are usually considered to be of little value--unless associated with other, more impressive sightings--because of the number of conventional explanations available.

Foo fighter Type of UFO reported by aircrews during the Second World War. Foo fighters were generally reported as resembling small, glowing spheres, without clearly defined outlines, which manoeuvred around aircraft in flight.

Fortean phenomena Unexplained or unusual occurrences, such as those recorded in the books of Charles Fort. Charles Fort (1874-1932) wrote four books:-- "The Book of the Damned" (1919), "New Lands" (1923), "Lo!" (1931), and "Wild Talents" (1932). These were later published in an omnibus edition, entitled "The Books of Charles Fort." Items recorded by Fort included reports of such things as mysterious substances falling from the sky, mysterious disappearances of people, spontaneous combustion and unidentified flying objects. Most writers on the subject of UFOs have made use of material from his books.

Gee-whiz group An American term applied to UFO organisations which consist of believers in flying saucers who apparently get together merely to enthuse over sighting reports and contact claims, as opposed to groups which attempt to carry out objective investigations and basic research.

G-field Gravitational field. Term sometimes applied to effects supposedly produced by a UFO using "antigravity" propulsion, e.g. a tendency to attract particles of earth, etc., when taking off.

Ghost rockets Mysterious rocket-like objects, reported mainly over Sweden during the Summer of 1946. They were described as being rocket or cigar shaped, with an orange or green flame and/or smoke at the rear. They were said to travel low on a horizontal trajectory, at altitudes estimated at generally between 1,000 and 3,000 feet and speeds estimated at about 400 m.p.h. The number of sighting reports of the ghost rockets was officially given as over 1,000, with unofficial estimates ranging up to 2,000.

Green fireballs Green, glowing objects, like meteors, reported mainly in New Mexico in 1949. They were said to move on straight courses, unlike ordinary meteors, and to explode silently, leaving no traces. The U.S. Air Force set up a special project--Project Twinkle--to investigate them.

EDITORIAL (continued)

Not only did Dr Black give a very fair picture of the situation, but he also provided constructive suggestions for further research into the psychological aspects of the subject. We hope to publish further comments on the programme in our next issue.

Letter to the Editor

From: Mr LIONEL E. BEER, Vice-Chairman of BUFORA

Dear John,

I write to you as a friend, but also as an official of BUFORA. From your recent letter telling me about MERSEYSIDE UFO BULLETIN, I have expected a responsible publication, even if it be only duplicated. Therefore it is disappointing to find that you indulge in sensationalism by voicing irresponsible comments about the well-being of BUFORA. For example you appear to have misinterpreted the reason for setting up a sub-committee (re: National Council) and to suggest that an expression used by John Cleary-Baker ("suffer fools gladly") reflects the general attitude is misleading.

In actual fact the administrative system has been working extremely smoothly for a number of years, and we are trying to tidy up the research side, as we have the chance of starting a major research project. The difference of opinion between officials is in no way indicative of a row, and I imagine that even you and Alan Sharp don't agree on every point. In fact the Association has a reputation for amicably settling internal dissension, should it arise.

Personally I always try to deal in facts rather than opinions, and I trust that you will publish this letter in your next issue to set the record straight. --- Yours sincerely, Lionel Beer, Flat 15, Freshwater Court, Crawford Street, London, W.1.

Editor's comments: I have received other information and comments concerning the disagreement in BUFORA. Some people have informed me that my assessment of the situation, published in the last issue, was accurate. However, the position at present appears to be that certain improvements have been made in BUFORA organisation, particularly on the research side. So far as BUFORA administration is concerned, I entirely agree with Lionel Beer that it is very efficient.

LOCAL UFO REPORTS

None received since our last issue, but there have been a few in other parts of the country.

NEW UFO MAGAZINE

The International UFO Bureau has launched a magazine- UFO ANALYSIS REPORT. The magazine consists largely of UFO reports from the Bureau's world-wide network of correspondents. It contains excellent illustrations of UFOs, based on witnesses' descriptions, by their Art Director, Hal Crawford. The Editor is Mr Robert A. Stiff.

Subscription--- 3 dollars a year for six issues from--- International UFO Bureau, 4305 N. Miller, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73112.

"SNIPPY"

The controversy over the Alamosa case still rages on and articles on the subject have appeared in various magazines, including LIFE, FATE, and several UFO magazines.

LOCAL PUBLICITY

The Editor was interviewed on March 25th by Graham Jones, of the Bebington News & Advertiser and his article in that paper on March 29th was entitled, "John, the Sceptical Saucer Spotter." In spite of the title, impressions of this bit of publicity were generally favourable, but it did not succeed in arousing any local interest.

On March * 26th, the Editor went to the studio of BBC Radio Merseyside to record a short interview concerning the Bulletin, but, so far as we know, this has not been broadcast.

Merseyside UFO Bulletin

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Note - Please keep your copies of the Bulletin for reference. We hope to provide an index for Volume I at the end of this year.