

UFO REPORTS

Some notes on the
need for a Rational
approach.

by John Harney

E D I T O R I A L

Physical Aspects of UFOs

Scientifically and mechanically minded ufologists have been dismayed by the course taken by ufology since the publication of the Condon Report. Increasing emphasis has been placed on the psychological aspects. Many investigators now seem to be more interested in the witnesses and, indeed, other ufologists than in the actual content of UFO reports.

The impression which is given to many these days is that there are no genuine physical phenomena to investigate in connection with UFO reports. This is not so. There are unexplained radar/visual sightings and many strange effects associated with UFOs reported seen at close quarters. For example, Roy Craig writes in the Condon Report: "Of all physical effects claimed to be due to the presence of UFOs, the alleged malfunction of automobile motors is perhaps the most puzzling."

Such baffling reports are well worth investigating by the "nuts and bolts" ufologists, but before they can begin we must first demythologise the subject, so that they can investigate the facts unobscured by fashionable fantasies and misinterpretations.

Over the past few years, contributors to this Bulletin have attempted to draw attention to the subjective aspects of ufology. The reason for this is not to ridicule serious students of the subject, as some critics think, but merely to eliminate the subjective aspects in order that the genuinely inexplicable phenomena can be seen more clearly. Thus, the mechanically minded can concentrate on the car-stopping cases and radar/visual reports instead of wasting their time on reports which can be shown to be merely modern versions of ancient delusions and superstitions.

THE MYTHOLOGY OF UFO EVENTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

a new examination

by Peter Rogerson

During the last few years or so there has, within ufology, been a growing complexity of phenomena, accompanied by a rise, which is also a transformation of mythological statements.

One of the basic myths behind the UFO interpretations until recently was that of the deus ex machina, which would bring an end to history. (1) In Michel's latest article (2) we can see this theme repeated; the UFO is the precursor of a new mutation of the human species, which will produce an irrevocable discontinuity in evolution, the final, oceanic, unbridgeable generation gap.

These early myths were nurtured, not primarily by the absurd UFO cults, but by the professional myth makers, the comics, films, science fiction writers, even advertisers. The first great contactee came, not from the Californian "saucerites" of happy memory, but from Hollywood; in the form of the allegorical science fiction drama, "The Day the Earth Stood Still" (1951). This concerns the coming of a prophet, Klaatu, in a flying saucer. His arrival interrupts the electrical supplies of the world; the weapons of his assailants melt

away. He brings a message of universal peace, and is martyred for it, releasing the robot Gort, who begins a campaign of destruction. Only the cations of two ordinary citizens, a widow and her young son, save the world and by their love temporarily resurrect Klaatu. But now only the threat of the destructive power of the robot remains to prevent war.

As with the later contactee stories, this film was conceived as a warning against nuclear war. (3) Its symbolism is powerful. If men of humanity are ignored, then humanity will be at the mercy of the elemental forces of blind technology. If peace by love is rejected, then there will inevitably be peace by terror. In the dark days when it was made "The Day the Earth Stood Still" made a deep impact. In its wake the contactee cults grew and flourished. Few if any possessed the vision of the original. Many degenerated into whimsy and were lost completely.

Established science fiction writers also used the UFO legend as a basis on which to build mythological statements. Among the most important of such tales was Arthur C. Clarke's "Childhood's End", another allegorical work. The Overlords, symbolic of scientific rationalism, arrive from space ~~like~~ to end men's squabbles and create a rationalist utopia on Earth. In the closing chapters it is seen that this utopia is sterile, its rationalist materialism a defence against aspects and powers of the human personality which must be hidden until man has gained wisdom. The release of these powers comes in a generation of divine children, whose arrival means the end of the world, the final collapse into futility of man. The vision of Alpha and Omega at the close is one of the most remarkable passages in science fiction. It is a vision of science as creator and destroyer. The myth of the super-human child is also seen in John Wyndham's "The Midwich Cuckoos". In both we are confronted with a generation of "changelings" who possess the wild talents and threaten the end of history.

The growing power of the myth of the changeling can be detected in a variety of literature. An idea which undoubtedly began as a primitive interpretation of the birth of a subnormal or deformed child has achieved a new significance. The growing rumour of a coming generation of children possessed of strange and supernatural powers occurs in a variety of guises. The so-called "cross-correspondence" scripts of the early years of this century, allegedly dictated by the post mortem Myers, Gurney and Sidgwick (the founders of the S.P.R.), make much of a coming mutation of the human race engineered from "the other side". (4) Such myths also occur in UFO situations (e.g., the Appleton case) and black magic cults have talked of children of Satan. These myths suggest a subconscious fear and awe of children, who are seen as a repository of the dark powers within man, unrestrained by culture.

Similarly the myth of the adult taken to Magonia is growing. Those taken are either destroyed or, like Monsieur Vincent, (5) possessed of new powers. There is a reorientation and men change, draw apart, or are set apart by strange incommunicable knowledge. We can sense this in the case of Dr X, (6,7) with the appearance of the strange stigmata, not only reminding one of the markings used to identify birds, but also forming, as John Rimmer has pointed out, (8) a symbolic figure of a third eye in a triangle. The third eye as a symbol suggests both an increased inner awareness, and incipient

splitting of the personality.

During the last few years, as noted before, there has been a movement away from these simple images towards more complex patterns. The first hints came with the study of the 1897 airship reports, similar legends to which may have provided the basis for the airship tales of Jules Verne. (9) In these, as with some of his other work, Verne is concerned with the corrupting effect of scientific power on the idealist. The power originally intended to liberate mankind corrupts and then destroys its creator. An apt symbol of the science behind the railroads, threatening the survival of the Mid-western farmers.

It is the work of John Keel and his supporters from which the elusive turn in the myth developed. The basic theme of Keel (and British counterparts such as Gordon Creighton) is that a dark force threatens man, prevents him developing his faculties to the full, and can destroy him. In an effort to comprehend this force, both Keel and Creighton have turned to the primitive belief in "elementals" the impact of which seems to strike some deep chord in the unconscious. How did this myth arise?

"Primitive" man (as with modern children) had no conception either of the distinction between animate and inanimate nature, or of causality. All nature had spirits, who directed the natural order of things, and who possessed the qualities of the aspect of nature they represented. These qualities were anthropomorphisms, projections of aspects of the human personality onto the environment. With the arrival of the new intellectual religions, the old myths were driven underground, becoming symbols of the dark instinctive side of man which the new faiths had rejected.

The very name "elemental" suggests an identification with the dark instinctive aspects of man's personality. The childishness and general hostility to man, which are said to be attributes of the elemental, confirm this identification. In the case of the poltergeist there is evidence that this is so. (10) The poltergeist is the projection of emotional conflict from the interior reality of the mind to the external reality. The poltergeist allows anti-social actions to be committed without guilt. In a similar manner the violent and sexual "messages" received during "automatic writing", etc., can be accepted by projecting them on to "evil spirits", thus allowing repressed desires to be expressed.

The term "elemental" also gives a vision of terrifying mindless power, an apt symbol of which can be found in numerous reports of "monsters", "robots", Etc., reminiscent of "Gort" in "The Day the Earth Stood Still". The reports of one-eyed giants from South America are also an aspect of this symbol. The Cyclops is totally mindless and instinctive, the lowest depths of mental deficiency capable of post-natal existence. There is also a hint of blindness, and the robot-like behaviour suggests a de-humanised humanity. The totality is a symbol of great but mindless power.

One of the most important, powerful symbolic figures in the new ufology is the Man in Black. The wealth of possible interpretations is great. The popular descriptions of the MIB are, self-evidently, a projection of all the images of the comic book villain; spy, foreigner, gangster, anarchist, devil. He is the universal scapegoat

onto which men project their undesirable qualities. Such projections in the past, onto various minority groups, have led to the great tragedies of human history, the attempts to exorcise the Man in Black merely confirming his existence. In the European witch tradition the devil is portrayed as the man in black. Black is the colour of the night, death and the hidden side of things. That the MIB is an aspect of ourselves, not an external "ting" is evident from much of the earlier tradition. Mrs Jones mistook the MIB for her brother, emphasising the close relationship. On her prayers the vision ~~was~~ changed to that of a dog (11) --the phantom dog, which is both a folk tradition of the wolf, and a projection of the symbol of the dog within. (The dog possesses several symbolic significances.) (12)

To have too close a relationship with Magonia is dangerous. The MIB has thus an element of taboo; by observing UFO events man has encroached upon the territory of the gods and retribution follows.

The MIB is also the "censor", preventing men from obtaining knowledge which will destroy them, the knowledge and power of the gods. Similarly, those "taken", such as A.V.B. and the Hills are prevented from taking artefacts. Paradoxically the same symbol portrays the MIB as the elemental force within, preventing the discovery of precious secrets.

The MIB features in many ghost stories. It is a "stock apparition" often interpreted as an undertaker, a monk, in female form as a nun or a widow. The persistence of such traditions suggests the power of the symbol. In a recent folk song, the MIB is explicitly presented as the dark hidden side of man, which men desperately attempt to avoid seeing.

Closely associated with the MIB in some aspects of UFO mythology is the Dero. The Dero has several important symbolic aspects. Clearly the Dero, a terror from the interior responsible for human tragedy, is a symbol of the dark atavistic forces in the unconscious; it is also a symbol of dehumanisation by the wrong use of knowledge, a theme often expressed in science fiction.

Yet these dark aspects of Magonia are not the whole picture. We have already seen the symbol of the sun maiden (13) and there are other symbols of a similar nature. Keel created a great deal of amusement in some quarters with talk of "hermaphrodite angels", yet the hermaphrodite angel is a symbol in many cultures--a symbol of primal unity, a reconciliation of opposites. It is a not infrequent dream image, and has great prominence in alchemical lore.

Thus the UFO myth is of a dual nature, capable of creating or destroying, thus mirroring the power of science, and knowledge in general. It echoes powerful symbolic themes which are also to be discovered in literature, especially science fiction. It also serves as a "translation" of older universal myths in modern terms.

The Myth of Magonia is total and universal to human experience. It is difficult to present a total meaning of it. Magonia seems to be the symbol of the impersonal, totally alien forces of the natural world, and its duality represents the varying moods of nature. It is those aspects of man which identify him with the natural world, the unconscious, archaic part of ourselves, that is suppressed in civil-

isation. It has given us our greatest visions and terrible nightmares, the extremes of beauty and hideousness. The conservatism and timelessness of Magonia symbolises the timelessness of nature, the slow passage of geological time, compared with which the lifetime of man is so insignificant. Its capriciousness is that of nature and the instinctive part of ourselves; its power dwarfs our achievements, rendering them powerless.

At its best Magonia confirms an identification with man in the universe, giving meaning to an otherwise sterile existence, providing great leaps to our culture. At its worst Magonia gives an escape from the real world, a retreat to the womb, preventing men from achieving true self knowledge and maturity, or allows the darkest and most irrational impulses. The two aspects appear inseparable. The myth of Magonia presents great dangers if it is not channelled, and an examination of UFO literature can be something of an unnerving experience, for one can see through the cracks in the surface rationality to the dark elemental forces in all of us, what Lionel Chassin called "the credulity of the savage". It is a mistake to deny the existence of Magonia, as does Alan Sharp. It is also dangerous to regard Magonia and its legends as having a literal reality; that really is a misunderstanding of the nature of myth.

Our comments should not be interpreted as necessarily indicating that the UFO phenomena are wholly internalised: such a view, despite great scientific difficulties, should not be dismissed out of hand, but the mythological nature of the UFO reports holds true whatever the physical nature of "real" UFO phenomena. The relationship between the "real" and "mythological" UFO phenomena is a field fertile for speculation, speculation best left to science fiction writers however.

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UFO REPORTS: SOME NOTES ON THE NEED FOR A RATIONAL APPROACH

by John Harney

If a theory is to have any scientific value, it must be set out in a form such that it is capable of being disproved, if it happens to be invalid. The various theories which seek to explain UFO reports are all unsatisfactory in this respect, except the one put forward by Menzel, and others, in the early years of the flying saucer controversy.

Menzel insisted that all UFO reports are capable of being explained without resorting to speculation about beings from other planets, from other states of existence (i.e., spirits), or natural phenomena as yet unknown to science. Thus all UFO reports are misinterpretations, delusions, hoaxes or unfounded rumours. Many UFO mysteries remain unsolved because, as Menzel has pointed out: "No single answer suffices, because the apparitions stem from not one but many dozens of causes." (1)

All serious students of UFOs agree that Menzel's theory can explain the great majority of UFO reports. This still leaves an accumulation--over 25 years or so--of thousands of unexplained reports and it requires only one such report to be conclusively demonstrated to have been generated by an encounter with an alien spacecraft to invalidate the theory.

Armed with this theory the sceptic can deal with the residue of unexplained reports by asserting that they are incomplete or inaccurate. When really pressed he is often able to point to various details which suggest that a psychological explanation may be in order, particularly in view of the invariable fact--his main trump card--that no unequivocal physical evidence of the reality of the flying saucer is available.

Menzel's theory is extremely unpopular with ufologists. It has been attacked because of his failure to explain all UFO reports and because some of his explanations are unsatisfactory. Keyhoe, for example, gleefully pointed out that Project Blue Book did not accept Menzel's explanations of several important UFO reports, including the Mantell case. (2) From this sort of thing the UFO believers tend to draw the highly illogical inference that because some of the sceptics' explanations are wrong, then their own explanation must be correct--that is, that UFOs are spaceships from other planets.

The irrationality of the believers has been unwittingly encouraged by some sceptics who have confused the issue by failing to employ the essential qualities of firmness and fairness. The irresolute begin as sceptics, but gradually become overawed by the massive accumulation of testimony and eventually come to believe in the flying saucers, even though the definite physical proof which they originally insisted upon is still not available. Then there are the prejudiced, who attempt to dispose of the subject by dishonest means, notably by ignoring or distorting awkward observations which do not seem to fit any neat explanations.

All this does not make life easy for those whose task it is to carry out official investigations of UFO reports. Believers point indignantly to the findings of official enquiries into UFO reports and accuse their authors of evading the issue. Official reports, such

as those issued by Project Blue Book or the British Ministry of Defence (Air), generally deal with reports they are unable to explain by claiming that insufficient evidence is available. The implication, of course, is that if these reports were more accurate and complete the natural explanations for them would become apparent.

Now this attitude is not intellectual dishonesty, as it seems to the believers. It is simply the strict application of Menzel's theory, as we have outlined it above. If Menzel is correct, then the true explanations of the unexplained reports must be of a natural or conventional nature. Logically, the onus is on the UFO believers to prove otherwise.

Many ufologists have spent years trying to prove Menzel wrong, with the aid of the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH). In the 1947 UFO wave many of the reports suggested--if taken at face value--that the Earth was under surveillance by beings from other planets. Accordingly the ETH was evolved. Note that it is only a supposition; there is no conceivable method--open to present-day science--of disproving it if it is not true. It is rational enough in the circumstances, but a mere supposition nevertheless. The main advantage of the ETH is its plausibility: many UFO reports, if accepted as genuine, tend to suggest that it is the obvious explanation.

Most of the UFO literature, at least until recently, has the ETH, in one form or another, as its main theme. Unfortunately the hypothesis has a number of serious weaknesses:- lack of physical evidence, difficulty of deciding which observations to accept as genuine and which to reject as fantasies, etc. Proponents of the ETH have long been aware of these weaknesses and have adopted various ploys in the attempt to prop it up.

The methods adopted by Keyhoe have been widely emulated by other writers. Keyhoe's technique is to take a number of good reports and to allege that there would be more and better ones available if the government were not so secretive about them, or the scientific community so irrationally biased against the whole idea of flying saucers. In order to enlist the sympathy of reasonable people, space is devoted to ridiculing contactee stories and deprecating the activities of hoaxers and cranks. The fact that many of Keyhoe's reports come from official sources gives his writings an aura of respectability. (2,3,4) The point here, of course, is that whereas the actual reports are authentic, the interpretations placed upon them and the inferences drawn from them are Keyhoe's.

Keyhoe is perfectly right to draw attention to the size and complexity of the UFO problem. However, he and some of his followers in attacking the U.S. Air Force have been attacking the right people for the wrong reasons. They have insinuated that the Air Force has proof of the reality of the flying saucers and is concealing it. A more reasonable attitude was taken by Hynek, who has complained that many very puzzling reports have not been adequately investigated.

The spectacular UFO reports of the 1960's, which led to the setting up of the Colorado Project, caused many intelligent people to consider that the ETH might well be the answer. However, although Dr Condon's team were unable to explain all the reports which they investigated, their conclusion was that there was no reason to believe

that further investigation would be likely to add anything to scientific knowledge. (5)

The Condon Report, although much criticised, dealt a great blow to the ETH. There were two main reactions among ufologists. Some either came to accept Menzel's theory or became convinced that the problem was insoluble. Others turned to the remaining major hypothesis which regards the UFO as a psychic phenomenon, along with the alleged phenomena of telepathy, hauntings, mediumship, etc.

Now, although psychical research seems almost respectable when compared with ufology, it labours under similar difficulties and uncertainties. These problems are familiar to any ufologist--the emotional involvement of investigators, the accusations and counter-accusations of prejudice and fraud, the unpredictability of the phenomena. As with the ETH, and even more so, there is no conceivable way to prove the non-existence of the parapsychical flying saucer.

Many ufologists now insist, however, that if the ETH is not the answer, the parapsychical hypothesis must be pursued. They point to some of the more spectacular landing reports as evidence and insist that some of them are so detailed and well-witnessed that merely psychological explanations must be ruled out.

If we attempt, though, to examine a report of a mysterious craft seen at close quarters by a number of intelligent, independent witnesses, our main difficulty will be actually finding one of these reports. Most of the much discussed Type I reports share the fatal weakness of having only one witness each. When one finds a report allegedly involving several witnesses, it is disappointing to note the lack of detail. For example, from one of the Lorenzens' books:

"On September 30, eight construction workers near Marcilly-sur-Vienne, France, saw a disc-shaped object on the ground, and a small man-shaped being wearing a helmet, standing nearby." (6)

Eight witnesses, yet only one sentence to describe the alleged incident, whereas some one-witness reports have had entire full-length books devoted to them.

Even more exasperating is the Monza, Italy, landing report of November 2, 1954. A disc set on three legs, emitting a blinding white light, was said to have been seen in a stadium. Figures dressed in light colours and wearing transparent helmets were standing close by. They seemed to communicate with 'guttural sounds'. The craft eventually flew away silently. No further details are given although the number of witnesses to this incident was estimated to be 150! (7)

There are some classic cases, reported with a wealth of detail and involving several witnesses. However, these witnesses generally have close ties with one another. They are usually family groups, as in the cases of Trancas (8) and Kelly-Hopkinsville. (9)

Although these factors point the way to psychological explanations, many ufologists object strongly when these are suggested. They protest that most UFO witnesses appear to be perfectly sane. The notion dies hard that a person has to be stark, raving mad to be under the illusion that he has seen a flying saucer and its occupants.

Let us look at the case for the UFO being an essentially

psychological phenomenon.

One of the major occupational hazards for the psychiatrist is insanity. He risks becoming emotionally involved in the problems and fantasies of his patients, and eventually losing his reason. The UFO literature abounds with stories of ufologists who have suffered similarly. Enthralled by the tales of contactees, frustrated in their efforts to discover physical evidence to back the ETH, they begin to go to pieces. They come to believe that there is a vast conspiracy designed to prevent them learning the truth about UFOs. Even some of the steadier persons on the UFO scene sometimes reveal signs of this widespread paranoia, but it would be invidious and impolitic to mention any names.

The persecution fantasies of ufologists have been recorded in a number of books, including works by Steiger and Whritenour, (10) Barker, (11) Bender (12) and others. Critical reading of such books reveals some of the reasons why such imaginings proliferate in the UFO world. It is seen that many ufologists lead rather dull lives and tend to be imaginative and suggestible. In some cases an interest in UFO reports, a craving for excitement and a taste for the macabre combine to produce truly weird results. Bender's Kafkaesque story of his persecution by three mysterious, black-clad entities is a notable example.

Thus psychological explanations seem more or less adequate to deal with contactee stories and with those who have reported seeing UFOs on numerous occasions. Multi-witness sightings can be explained, in many cases, by the presence at the scene of someone with a strong personality who is able to persuade others present that a light in the sky is a flying saucer, rather than a satellite or high-flying aircraft.

A number of serious writers on UFOs have noted that the main difficulty is the high "noise level" generated by the thousands of spurious UFO reports. In other words, if there are really any actual, physical UFOs, genuine reports of them would have little hope of detection among the heaps of mistaken observations.

There is one possible way to sort out the genuine UFOs, if there be any. Every UFO event should be presumed to have a psychological cause and every effort should be made to find psychological explanations which fit the details of each case. It is already agreed that most cases can be disposed of in this way and explained as misinterpretations, etc., but others are more difficult to explain. It will be seen, though, that in many such cases it can be accepted that the witnesses have indeed seen something unusual, but have obviously been greatly alarmed or excited by the experience, thus distorting and exaggerating their perceptions and descriptions of the object or phenomenon. By taking such considerations fully into account we have more chance of isolating the objective content of a UFO event from the subjective.

It must be emphasised that this approach is not the same as that adopted by many sceptical popular science pundits and journalists of insinuating that all UFO witnesses must be liars or habitual drunkards. Even so, many ufologists resent the psychological approach, be it crude or sophisticated, simply because they are a part of the phenomenon themselves. The notion of the UFOs as spaceships is a "frame of reference", as Keel calls it. Within a frame of reference

various "games" can be played, and Keel has discussed some of these games at length in a recent book, Operation Trojan Horse. (13)

Many ufologists have complained that Operation Trojan Horse is a farrago of nonsense and that Keel's assertion that ufologists and UFO percipients are manipulated into playing bizarre games by some mysterious external force is ridiculous. Critics would find this book more useful if only they would take it less literally. The mysterious forces and influences which control the UFOs--or at any rate, the overwhelming majority of them--are simply the forces of nature, the limitations of the human brain, the fallibility of the human senses, and that ready-made frame of reference, the ETH. When something not readily identifiable is seen in the sky, the flying saucer frame of reference is available for percipients and investigators of the mysterious occurrence to make use of and to begin playing the UFO game.

The psychiatrist, Thomas S. Szasz, has ~~the~~ discussed the idea of game playing as a model for describing human relationships in a broader context, with particular reference to mental illness and its treatment. (14) Szasz makes many interesting points in developing this idea, some of which could well be applied to ufology. For instance, he says that a game can only continue if the players continue to observe the rules. When everyone starts cheating or when the rules become generally unacceptable, the game collapses. However, the players are still subject to the same needs and desires, economic, emotional or whatever, and a new game must be devised. One can see this sort of thing apparently happening in ufology: the ETH game seems to be collapsing and the parapsychical game is gradually taking shape.

There is nothing new, of course, in using the games analogy to describe human behaviour and we must be careful not to take it too far. However it can be useful if we employ it in order to gain fresh insights into the pursuit known as ufology. If we view ufology as a game, then a number of puzzling factors may be explained and we will have a better chance of seeing the situation as it really is.

The most familiar game, then, in the UFO field, is the ETH. The basic rules are fairly simple. The principal conflict is between two sides--believers versus sceptics. It is the aim of the believer to convert as many sceptics as possible to a belief in flying saucers. Each convert scores points, but the more highly educated or well-known the convert is, the higher the score. The aim of the sceptic is to weaken the faith of the believers by exposing hoaxes and providing ingenious explanations for puzzling reports. Naturally, the more impressive the sighting satisfactorily explained is, the higher the score.

Apart from players, games also have spectators. There are naturally two kinds of spectators, those who know the rules of the game and those who don't. The players readily recognise their fans; they refer to them as "armchair ufologists". As for those who don't know the rules, imagine asking someone who knew nothing about football and had never seen a game before to write a report of a match. The result would certainly look pretty silly to a football enthusiast. Yet this is the position in which many journalists have been put when commissioned to write articles on UFOs. Some of them have done remarkably well in the circumstances. Witnesses to UFOs are more difficult to deal with in this analogy. They can be mere

pawns in the game or they can get involved and join in the play, usually on the side of the believers.

If we continue to elaborate the analogy we will soon see that the behaviour of witnesses and investigators tends to fall into definite patterns and it thus becomes possible to make predictions about certain aspects of future UFO events. For example, take the typical reactions of most percipients on seeing their first UFOs. One man who, with his wife, saw a strange hovering object is quoted as saying: "I'm no addict of flying saucer stories. But I am quite certain what my wife and I saw that night...It seemed like nothing made by man", and "My wife is tremendously excited". (15) Another typical reaction comes at the end of an account of a not very impressive sighting by policemen. "Sergeant Irwin said he had always laughed at the idea of flying saucers. But he's not laughing any more. 'I feel sure what we saw was a flying saucer', he said". (16) And from another report by policemen: "Said 20-years-old P.C. Parsonage last night: 'I have never believed stories about people seeing flying saucers but now I have seen one myself'". (17)

Many similar reactions could be quoted. We can see from them how readily the witnesses play their parts in the UFO game. As soon as they see something in the sky which they do not understand they obligingly accept the assumptions of the ufologists and call the phenomenon a "flying saucer", as if that explained it.

We can thus predict that the same sort of thing will happen in future UFO reports. The witnesses will be excited and probably newly converted to belief in flying saucers. This is likely to distort and exaggerate their accounts of the incidents. Further, when approached by UFO investigators the witnesses, newly aware of their ignorance of the UFO phenomenon, will be receptive to any ideas on the subject which the investigators may impart to them. They will then pass these ideas on to their friends and so involve them in the UFO game.

To sum up these, admittedly sketchy, notes; if we take full account of the various roles unconsciously adopted by UFO researchers and witnesses and the distortions of perception caused by excitement and preconceptions as to the true nature of UFO events, we will be better equipped to investigate the more puzzling aspects of the UFO phenomenon. Also, a more detached attitude on the part of the investigators, reminding themselves not to make unwarranted assumptions about UFO reports, will help to win the interest of the scientific community when really baffling reports come to light.

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LOCAL UFO REPORT

Liverpool

August 6, 1972 2045 BST

In a letter published in the Liverpool Echo on August 16 the witness, Mr Vic Stephens, of 12 Meldrum Road, Liverpool, wrote:

At 8.45 p.m. on Sunday, August 6, my wife and I were sitting in our car at the Pier Head watching the sunset when we noticed a very bright iridescent object stationary in the sky at a tremendous height. We both watched it through binoculars and after it had remained in one position for about three minutes it veered rapidly in a westerly direction and then remained suspended without movement for another two minutes. During the movement there was a condensation trail similar to that caused by a jet but a few seconds after it had stopped the condensation trail disappeared, but whilst hovering there appeared to be red flames issuing from the rear. At three minutes to nine it sped rapidly out of sight in a westerly direction. There was a jet plane also in the sky at this time but this was the orthodox, easily recognisable object.

About 12 months ago, too, my wife and I saw a similar object, much lower this time, hurtling across the sky at tremendous speed for about five seconds before disappearing from view.

MERSEYSIDE UFO BULLETIN

Volume 5 Number 3

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Mersoyde UFO Bulletin: an informal, small circulation UFO magazine. Letters to the editors, for publication, welcomed. Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily shared by the editors. Printed and published by the editors.