

THE FUTURE OF UFOLOGY

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МАЙБУТНЄ УФОЛОГІЇ

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Abstract: This article describes some of the shortcomings in the perception of UAP and their solutions.

Анотація: Стаття описує деякі недоліки в сприйнятті ААЯ та способи їх вирішення.

Introduction. In the July 2014 CAIPAN workshop organized by GEIPAN (French CNES), Dr. Jacques Vallée delivered an interesting lecture entitled «UAP: A Strategy for Research» [1].

Main part. Vallée presented a good historical background to UFO databases as a basis to develop a number of future avenues of research. I would like to make some comments on this paper. The first is a general one: it highlights that after 68 years of modern UFO history, we do not know anything about the nature of an alleged UFO/UAP phenomenon. At this day, we are still starting from zero, because all basic questions regarding the phenomena are open and none is yet resolved, as Vallée points out by outlining a list of crucial “unanswered questions” that appertain to key topics like search for patterns, physics of the phenomenon, geography, socio-cultural impact, effect on human witness, and methodology & epistemology. Is it as Vallée proposes in the section «Obstacles to Analysis» because «the phenomenon has demonstrated a level of complexity that challenges analysis and even rational description»? Or is it – my view – because there is not any genuinely new phenomenon in progress? It is evident that we can attest a failure in finding either long-lived statistical constants or admissible extraordinary evidence (material, recorded or observational) for a brand new type of physical or para-physical entity manifesting in our environment. What if UFOs were something more linked to our inner world than to the outer world? What if this wouldn't have to do with complexity at all? What if it were simply due to the fact that we are actually handling a Σ phenomenon, where an infinite number of causes, stimuli, objects and processes, both natural and artificial (man-made) conjure up the false impression that every sighting belongs to a unique whole? We cannot forget that UFOs were tagged extraterrestrial by press and paperback authors (a theory currently accepted by most ufologists) long before it was academically studied. Even the popular flying saucer form and motif that shaped millions of further reports may have been originally wrong, created by headline writers [2].

Vallée, whose early work inspired my personal dedication and approach to the UFO study, cleverly advocates for a «platform of screened, calibrated data». I would be the first to hand my own FOTOCAT databank [3] to any such repository. But the key problem here is the screening. Beyond the preliminary, simple discrimination of aircraft, stars & planets, balloons, fireballs, reentries, missile launches and so forth, we should agree on a second-level screening. And here is where ideology or belief commences to affect the process. As I have walked myself the route from expectancy to open-minded skepticism, I know firsthand what I am talking about. It is sort of an intellectual chip you must change: from imagining that the witness words (and beliefs)

truly reflect the reality of a given observation, to the conviction that the error bar in the witness testimony is very long. Surprise, fear, mistaken senses, imagination, tall tale propensity, publicity seeking, you name it, may produce intriguing stories that do not relate to what actually occurred. But here the big divide emerges. An ambulance driver cannot mistake a UFO by the Moon [4]. A well-established scientist cannot invent a close encounter [5]. Experienced airplane pilots cannot misinterpret flying objects [6-9]. A military man cannot fake a UFO photograph [10]. You hear that both from fanatic, gullible and credulous ufologists and from scientific-oriented students. They cannot admit it, in contradiction to their adherence to the recognized mantra that establishes that «most sightings are explainable». *What is the real full range of observational error and human conduct associated to UFO sightings?* It represents the core of the enigma because the evidence shows that sane, sober people spin tales, fool and deceive fellow humans, and that well-trained people misinterpret unexpected objects or natural phenomena much more often than might be imagined. When you finally realize that this is not a rhetorical question, then your mind is able to contemplate sightings under another wavelength, and reports start to fall one after another as a house of cards. And flying saucer reports look like just an epiphenomenon associated to a certain mental mode. So we are back to the old GIGO anthem, after all. How do you quantify reliability for a top professional who reports an abduction? How do you class an event that ends up being the star Sirius? Not something I dismiss, as I was one who actively worked on defining standards in this regard [11], a system presently adopted by the largest UFO organization in the world, the US-based MUFON [12].

Nowadays, when enough data have been acquired and many research papers have been published on them, we have the means and the know-how to reevaluate past patterns. The «law of the times» has proved to be nothing but a consequence of the combination of social habits and observation conditions [13] and the «inverse correlation» between UFO reports and population density, as initially designed, is an incorrect model [14]. But I agree with Vallée that progress requires diving into the major databases, and also that the search for patterns should be one of the most important exercises in 21st century ufology/UAP study. Patterns need to be systematically compared with the IFO database to test their originality and robustness, i.e., checking the problem of indiscernibility [15]. In modern-day science we can find papers showing different findings when working with the same set of raw data, but rarely opposite results. On the contrary, this is exactly what happens in ufology. By working fundamentally with the same type of reports (no one disagrees about the universality of UFO reporting), French colleague J.F. Boëdec concludes that the record points to «a novel phenomenon with stable patterns, independent of group delusion» [16], while my own study over 4 decades infers that probably there is not a new phenomenon but a summation of explanations within a chaotic universe of data where misunderstanding and inadvertence figure significantly. Absence of verified data and distorted data collection can explain the «unknowns». There is another fundamental difference between the ways science and ufology operates. In science one shows a set of facts and proposes a hypothesis to rationalize them. It remains valid until new events contradict it and a new one is revamped. Through a scientific approach, when we analyze UFO reports and propose a hypothesis (Venus, an aircraft, the Moon, a reentry, faked photographs, etc.) we try to demonstrate this is a suitable or at least a coherent hypothesis to explain the occurrence (assisted by astronomical data, space records, or technical analysis.) A different approach is taken by most ufologists who instead of seeing UFO reports just as neutral «anomalies», a stand we can accept assume that UFO reports are examples of vehicles coming from the stars, a parallel universe, time travelers, etc. but this is presented without any kind of verification, other than a personal speculation or hope. (Nothing to do with the concept of the high probability of extraterrestrial life in the universe, generally endorsed by the astrophysical community). For me, and this is not a preconception but an empirical conclusion, ufology must be an eyewitness-centered research, not report-centered. In the study of UFO photographs, for example, this is quite evident. We examine a story and a picture. After lots of work on the

analysis of the presumed sighting, we find out that the image is unrelated to any visual observation, as it turns out to be just an accidental image, a film flaw or some sort of fake that photography experts can reveal. We work in a field where the witness is both the recording apparatus and the reporting station, most is subjective. We are guilty after so many years of not having noticed the chief role played by the observer, full of conditioning properties. Vallée is still energized and optimistic about the future of research. I am also energized but pessimistic, although certainly willing to develop databases, organize the information and check hypotheses. But, realistically, how can we agree on a definitive screening process? Vallée suggests that an international cadre of experienced students creates new data structures. At this stage my cooperation is full and my resources plainly available. In summary, Vallée's strategy (2014) implies a complete re-examination of the UFO/UAP phenomena, it encompasses a full review of the history of UFO events from top to bottom, a job to be done by ourselves (with our biases and emerging ideas), and a job that will exceed our own life-times. Is that a realistic scenario? But are there any other alternative strategies?

Conclusions. The Selective Strategy. I offer an alternate, more viable strategy. Let us select the best ~100 worldwide instances of well-documented or potentially documentable air or ground-level anomalies that describe a phenomenon whose features seem to defy current knowledge, point to an alien visitation or suggest an alteration in the space-time continuum. Let us look for scientists in the Universities, the Industry, the Government or the Military who have the expertise and volunteer to investigate them in depth. Or finance a fund to reimburse them for the job (crowdfunding or other.) Not any Condon-styled committee but a contracted large group of professionals based in several countries who invest their best capabilities in analyzing hard-core cases. Scientists and scholars unrelated to UFO research and independent. Although limited in scope it seems more practical than Vallée's strategy because if funds are in place it could be resolved in a maximum of 10 years, soon enough for many of us to see. The role of the cadre of experienced researchers Vallée described is paramount in this project, in two main areas: (a) the coordination of the whole program, and (b) to prepare a synthesis of all written bibliography generated on this topic, focused on scientific and objective findings. Some of us have already reached tentative or final conclusions after a long-term study. It can satisfy us personally but I am convinced that many would also like to see a globally-accepted solution to the UFO/UAP enigma, either as the manifestation of ETI contact or as a social myth with no physical basis. In his noteworthy paper, Vallée writes: «Ufology has no ontology». But what if «Ufology has no substance» instead? UFO/UAP phenomena have been with us at least from 1947. Mainstream science has dismissed it. Governments have released their past classified archives to the amateurs. The Military announced it is not their cup of tea. As Vallée recommends, it is time for designing a brand new strategy to avoid 70 more years of ignorance and frustration. I believe a global discussion is required in order to push the optimal strategy.

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