

SOMETHING IN THE MAKING

Ufology in Soviet times was essentially non-cumulative. One can discern in its history an evident "wavy" pattern: at first, a UFO pioneer, with a small group of adherents, tried to open society's eyes to real significance of the UFO problem; then, for a short time, the State and Party authorities looked at this attempt in dullish bewilderment; and finally, they realized their mistake and gave instructions to stop immediately this violation of common sense. In all, there were three big "waves" of such kind (dated 1961, 1967, and 1976).¹ During the short periods of half-tolerated existence of ufology in the USSR, there arose a small ufological community and some pieces of empirical information on UFO sightings and theoretical considerations accumulated in Samizdat manuscripts and very few publications. Between the "waves" the community quickly, though not totally, dissolved, and by the next "wave" practically everything had to be built anew.

Well, this was a sort of "external" non-cumulativeness, with an evidently "social" background. But as a matter of fact, the ufological movement which had existed in the rest of the world for almost 50 years under quite different social conditions, is also noted for its non-cumulative (if not just anti-cumulative) character. In this case "internal".

Until the late 1970's, the prevailing tendency in mainstream ufology was the desire to objectivize its empirical basis, that is to move from "stories" to facts. Emphasis was placed on CE-II and radar-visual (RV) UFO cases, as well as on searching for statistical regularities in the set of UFO reports.

True, even then a peculiarity of these regularities was detected: their falsifiability. Not a "principal" one, which is, according to K. Popper, a necessary feature of "good science", but, alas, a factual falsifiability. In this connection, Pierre Guerin has formulated the "only law of ufology". It states: "In Ufology, any law is immediately falsified by subsequent sightings just as soon as it is formulated". Aime Michel, whose brilliant mind did not tolerate any established truths, amended this law with a few words: "... including Guerin's Law" "but did not falsify it, nonetheless."²

Whether this peculiarity of ufology is related to the not-so-mature state of its methodology, or to the not-so-regular nature of the UFO phenomenon, or to something else, it is hard to say, since nobody "to the best of my knowledge" tried to analyze this question in sufficient detail. But the failure of all attempts to "solidify" the empirical basis of ufology has greatly contributed "directly, or indirectly" to turning mainstream ufology towards principally soft data "that is towards "stories" as such, first of all the stories about abductions and UFO crashes.

The highest point and symbol of the current stage of ufology seems to be Roswell, especially (but not only) the famous alien autopsy film. Here we are by no means dealing with scientific research, rather with a sort of investigative journalism, a Roswellgate. Scientific trends in ufology did not vanish completely (cf., for example, works of the Central European Section of MUFON), but they are, let's say, not dominant.

Is this "principal" deviation from hard data just an accident, or not? To what extent ufology may be considered as science in any definite sense of the word? "Strict" models of science, developed by philosophers and methodologists, are in fact not applicable to many established sciences, except for physics and some other advanced (and mathematized) disciplines.

But if we turn to the somewhat old-fashioned and a little bit "too broad" (but nevertheless quite reasonable) division of sciences into two types: natural and historical (which goes back to the work of W. Windelband), then we can find that ufology is much nearer to the latter, than to the former. It deals with phenomena non-reproducible in experiment, which can be investigated only indirectly, post factum, via eye-witnesses' reports (which from time to time happen to be supplemented with radar data, photographs, and supposed landing traces). In relation to the investigator, a UFO event is always a past one (whether it occurred 10 days, or 10 years ago, is not a principal question). Attempts to find in these events any regularities (not to mention laws) are even less successful than attempts to find such regularities in the history of human civilization (one should probably think about a version of "Guerin's Law" for the latter as well).

So, ufology is a "historical" science even if the UFO phenomenon is purely natural (something like "super-ball lightning"). If it does contain a "subjective" (alien) component, the latter will certainly add "lawlessness" to its picture. Does it mean that the investigator has to take the situation for granted and give up all attempts to find solid ground in this marshy field? Jacques Vallee once exclaimed: "Where are the UFO detectives?!"³ They have appeared... and brought ufology into the deadlock of Roswell.

The "journalistic" (and "detective") character of contemporary ufology shows itself, among other things, in constant renewal of its empirical basis. Any old case, lesser in scale than a saucer crash, gradually falls into oblivion, even if well-documented and unexplained. For a "historical" research discipline, it is a principally incorrect approach. As an example, let us consider the so-called "Petrozavodsk phenomenon" that is discussed in the paper by L. Gindilis and Yu. Kolpakov, included into this RB issue. In 1977 it was a really epoch-making event, for two main reasons.

First, by an oversight of Glavlit (the Soviet censorship) it was published in a few all-Union newspapers and hence became widely-known.

Second, it made the authorities of the former USSR understand that the UFO phenomenon is not just an invention of irresponsible saucer buffs. As a result, the military and science bureaucrats were charged to look into the question.

This decision did not make life easier for Soviet UFO amateurs; quite the reverse—it aggravated censorial prohibitions, making almost impossible even "low profile" ufological activities.⁴ But this (even relative and half-secret) "officialization" of the UFO problem has partly broken the then-dominant tendency of superficial and incompetent negation. The "waves" have stopped; the level of analysis of the UFO problem has radically altered.

It is important to remember that the Petrozavodsk phenomenon, as one can conclude from the paper by L. Gindilis and Yu. Kolpakov, is essentially anomalous. Absolutely anomalous? Of course, not. We cannot rule out the possibility of some rare (but explainable in terms of modern physics) large-scale atmospheric processes, triggered by ordinary technical experiments. But to treat this phenomenon just as a misinterpreted launch of an artificial satellite would be at least naive. The Petrozavodsk phenomenon is a significant part of the "ufological jig-saw puzzle" (this metaphor was very popular in the early years of ufology, and it is still quite meaningful).

Does all the above-said mean that the Roswell case is unimportant? Not at all. There certainly are some big lies on the part of the American military and *some* enigmas.⁵ But whether these lies are really connected with the UFO problem, remains, to my mind, an open question. If the "Roswell crash" is for real (and it can be proved), this will be the most important stage in the history of the problem, but not its final (rather—its "real beginning").

If, on the contrary, all this story is just a "gumboil", swollen and overshadowing almost the whole UFO problem, it should be allowed to come to its natural end.

Modern science has in fact many methodological limitations, both justified and far from it. One of the latter is probably its evident tendency to work "with experiment", not directly "with nature", using experimental results as a basis for the scientific picture of the world. This is quite understandable—since the ultimate aim of modern science is to create useful artificial systems and processes ("engineering" in the broad sense of the word), not just to explain natural phenomena. The atomic bomb, microprocessors, space rockets, and other technical achievements are not by-products of science, but a "concentrated" manifestation of its essence at the current stage of its development. In *this* sense science is very effective, and scientists may certainly be praised in this connection. But ufologists (even taking into account their regrettable inclination to resort to the ET hypothesis more often than needed) are to a greater degree *naturalists*, successors of those savants who studied lightning, meteorites and volcanoes and created herbaria, than the modern experimenters. Yes, the latter build a reliable factual foundation for rigorous mathematized theories, but events non-reproducible in experiments are, as a rule, ignored, discredited, or at best bashfully veiled. Ufology (and anomalistics in general) is more trusting as regards reality, which is not always a drawback.

On the other hand, UFO "stories", even corroborated by instrumental data (RV) or material traces (CE-II), cannot probably give us a basis solid enough to build on it a rational model of the phenomenon (nor, probably, can they supply us with a representative subset of true UFO events). Hence, like the well-known Roman senator who availed himself every good opportunity to remind his audience that Carthage must be razed to the ground, I would like to repeat:⁶ there is a strong need to move from collecting accidental stories to an active and systematic search for hard data on UFOs in the atmosphere and near space. Only the results of such work (if any) will lay the real empirical foundation for the discipline of ufology.

The "soft" stage of ufological development seems now to have reached its highest point. What will be the next stage? I am inclined to suggest the "hard" one, but, to tell the truth, it depends (first of all, it probably depends on solution of the main quasi-ufological problem—the problem of ufological funding!) Anyway, ufology is a "living" system: it grows up, develops, sometimes falls ill, and one day in the future it shall come to maturity... if not become extinct. Now we appear to be at a point of bifurcation. Something is in the making.

References

- ¹ For details, see: Rubtsov V.V. UFOs: From Polemics to Research... and Back. "Pursuit, in press.
- ² Michel A. The Mouse in the Maze. "Flying Saucer Review, 1974, Vol. 20, No. 3, p. 8.
- ³ Vallee J. *Messengers of Deception*. N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1980, p. 245.
- ⁴ For instance, beginning from 1978, ufological books and journals sent to Soviet ufologists from abroad were regularly confiscated. Before, in spite of the severe prohibition for the letters "U.F.O." to appear on printed pages in the USSR, the same letters on the cover of a foreign book were a sort of password for the Soviet postal authorities.
- ⁵ See, for example: Rodeghier M. What the GAO found: Nothing about much ado. "International UFO Reporter, 1995, Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 7
- ⁶ For more details, see: RIAP: Some Basic Data. "RIAP Bulletin, 1994, Vol. 1, No. 1.

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