

# BOOKS REVIEWED . . .

By Charles Bowen

IN 1958, Criterion Books of New York introduced to the English-speaking world a translation of one of the finest books on the UFO mystery ever to be written—*Mystérieux Objets Célestes* by Aimé Michel. The English language edition, with an appendix by Alex Mebane, is known as *Flying Saucers and the Straight-Line Mystery*. Now, eight years later, a new French edition of *Mystérieux Objets Célestes*, revised and augmented, has been published by Editions PLANETE, of 114 Champs Elysees, Paris 8.

Where long-serving researchers are concerned there is little more that can be said about this fascinating work: for those who are new to the subject, I suggest that their studies will never be complete unless they read the book. Aimé Michel skillfully draws the picture of the greatest UFO wave—in the light of present knowledge—which has visited this planet. The activities of the visitors over Western Europe particularly France, during the late summer and autumn of 1954, were so intense, and created such a deluge of reports that many cases were missed completely by the few interested, harassed researchers. M. Michel told me in a recent letter that hitherto unknown cases of the period are still coming to light eleven or twelve years later. And because only he himself and a tiny handful of others were involved in studying the phenomena, and because there was no attempt to make an official investigation, he described the period of the wave, regretfully, as the “great lost opportunity”.

In *Mystérieux Objets Célestes* one discovers practically every known manifestation of the phenomenon, from the giant vertical cigars of Vernon and St. Prouant which triggered off the wave, to the discs, the spheres, the “jellyfish saucers”, the objects with appendages, the dividing objects, to the egg-shaped objects, the landings, the small ‘operators’, and to the sugar-cube shaped ‘metallic’ figure of Prémanon. Above all there is the astounding pattern in the sequences of sightings unearthed by the author, the pattern of the manifestations along straight lines on the earth’s surface—orthoteny, the subject’s first important scientific discovery.

In January/February issue of the REVIEW I published a letter from M. Michel in which he expressed doubts about the value of his discovery: he speculated that the researchers had been intended

to discover the patterns so that they would be diverted from uncovering the real intentions of the visitors. M. Michel feels that he may have fallen into a trap for, because they no longer fitted the patterns, he ignored important cases after October 15, 1954.

Well, whatever the truth, the patterns he discovered were real and persistent, the cases that provide the patterns were very real indeed, and many of them are among the best-authenticated on record.

This is a welcome return of a most valuable contribution to the study of the mysterious objects from the skies.

A more recent addition to our libraries, another of the most important books on UFOs, has made its long-awaited appearance in a British edition. *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* by Jacques Vallée, published by Neville Spearman Ltd., 112 Whitfield St., London W.1. follows less than a year after the Henry Regnery (Chicago) edition. *Anatomy* is a careful study of all aspects of the UFO phenomenon, in which may be found accounts of staggering incidents unknown to the world in general before the arrival of this book. The author, who collaborated with Aimé Michel before leaving France to live in the U.S.A., presents a case for the study of the phenomenon by qualified scientists. Mr. Vallée attempts to show how their misgivings about studying something which is not on hand for precise examination can be overcome: how they can tackle the problem without loss of face.

One small quibble is that Mr. Vallée dismisses too many of the UFO groups rather loftily. We have had our say about what we considered unnecessarily sharp criticism of G.E.P.A. of Paris in our review of the American edition of *Anatomy*. We know that the capers of some groups have frightened away serious people who might otherwise have been tempted to look at the subject. We know also that some groups—and here the Lorenzen’s A.P.R.O. and Keyhoe’s NICAP spring to mind—have put in remarkable service and reliable work over the years, but Mr. Vallée considers their progress to have been ‘microscopic’. Possibly so, but one must not lose sight of the fact that these groups are amateurs (NICAP headquarters has a small paid staff, but the regional sub-committees are all spare-time amateurs). These groups—

A.P.R.O., NICAP and the rest—have had to rely entirely on their own efforts and slender resources, they have received no help or encouragement from Authority, they have had to ward off ridicule. Yet by some miracle they have survived and have amassed extensive filing systems of reports, some of which have gone on record in their publications, and all of which may one day be of extreme value in the study of the subject.

I feel certain Mr. Vallée has derived a measure of assistance for past researches from some of the groups. Perhaps it would be more profitable for

him to co-operate with, and encourage the most reliable among them.

The author's comments about FLYING SAUCER REVIEW are kind, but as an afterthought I cannot help wondering if he may have been too busy to observe all we have been saying since October 1964.

These however are but tiny complaints about what is otherwise an excellent book, one of the most comprehensive analyses yet to appear on UFOs, and one which must be read by all who are interested in the subject.

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## SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON DATA PROCESSING

*By William T. Powers*

Our contributor, an American electronics engineer with degrees in mathematics and physics and experience with radiation-measuring techniques, is at present working on low-light-level television systems for astronomy.

JACQUES VALLEE has offered a method for classification of UFO reports on the basis of the type of objective phenomenon apparently being reported. If one takes each report as an objective report, and as being sufficiently full of information to permit elimination of one classification over another, and if the reports do not yield any sub-classes worthy of differentiation within the five classes defined by Vallée, or any ambiguous cases, then the five Vallée classes should suffice for an analysis. In fact, this appears to be the case. Vallée has reduced most sightings to those major types which seem to be repeated over time and over the world, and his classification has introduced a regularising method into the analysis of UFO reports.

There remains, of course, the danger that the very existence of these categories will tend to form future observations into one or another niche, at the expense of information which in fact makes a particular sighting differ from any "prototype" sighting in significant ways. If a sighting were reported, for example, in which a cloud-like object swooped down, emitted smaller objects, and then turned bright blue and exploded, the tendency would be to class this as a Type II-B sighting, despite the colourful explosion which makes it wholly different from other Type II-B sightings. Such a classification would be recorded, and on later data-processing, only the fact that a type II-B occurrence had happened would be retrieved. Clearly, classification can be a hindrance to analysis as well as an aid.

Closely-related is the effect that use of classifica-

tions in terms of objective phenomenon can have on one's general impression of the regularity of UFO occurrences. If every occurrence is put in one of five major categories owing to the fact that just five such categories exist, then later on, in reviewing records of sightings, it is possible to gain the impression that UFO phenomena fall rather remarkably uniformly into five sharply-defined classes. One tends to forget the initial judgments whereby each recorded phenomenon was weighed and subsequently assigned to the class which it *most nearly fitted*. This is always the danger: classification schemes tend to be self-reinforcing and self-justifying. By looking only at those features which do match the criterion features for a given class, one tends to minimise and even obliterate differentiating and perhaps quite important features, which fall in no preassigned class.

These facts pose a problem for the data analyst. On the one hand, it is necessary to find generalisations which give dimensions to the phenomenon under study, so that one event can be differentiated from another and likened to still others. On the other hand, any such procedure seems to force one to throw away, in effect if not in strict fact, all information that might prevent finding a place for a sighting in one of the existing classes.

The answer to this dilemma, which offers rich ground for criticism of any approach involving classifications, is not to abandon classification as a method—after all, scientists have to rely on classification as the primary way to begin all studies of new phenomena—but to find a way to preserve