



Down-to-Earth UFO Experiences

by Matthew J. Graeber

Is the UFO experience a real encounter with aliens, or is it mainly of psychological significance?

While examining UFO reports over the last 30 years, I have come to realize that some UFO sightings and close encounters have a symbolic relationship to the observer's psychological state at the time of the experience.

This is not intended to imply that there is something wrong with the witnesses. But, knowing something about their psychological makeup at the time of their UFO experience might provide a better understanding of the human side of their encounter and its impact upon the observer's life. This is important to the UFO researcher, because it offers him/her the opportunity to explore new avenues of in-

vestigation concerning these fleeting phantoms of the skies.

One avenue might be to consider UFOs as seemingly unintelligible imagery rather than advanced technological marvels, and to pursue the notion that the ambiguous imagery can be deciphered by analyzing the perception of it in much the same way as a therapist might analyze a patient's dreams. Not that all UFO experiences are dreams or even waking dreams, although some small percentage may be, which several ufologists have pointed out.

In a previous study of a "dynamic display" UFO experience (the Raefield Affair, *UFO Universe Magazine*, Spring 1997), I discussed the remarkable UFO encounter of a young man who observed four air-

borne oddities while driving to work in the early morning of August 26, 1976. I explored the possibility that the UFOs were symbolic representations, a dynamic display of his innermost personal anxieties and conflicts regarding his failing marriage.

The Raefield encounter involved a UFO observation by a lone witness, but how could multiple witnesses be involved in a dynamic display that is supposed to be rife with the same subjective symbolic meaningfulness for each individual involved in the sightings?

In examining the Bailey encounter, an unpublished UFO report, I will attempt to explain how self-perception/dynamic display UFO experiences of this variety are possible for a small group of individuals.

The Bailey Case

This report was passed on to us by the officer of the guard at Willow Grove Naval Air Installation in southeastern Pennsylvania at 10:00 P.M. on November 17, 1977. However, the actual time of the sighting was fixed at 7:30 P.M. This was important, for at that time it was raining and completely overcast in the vicinity of the occurrence, about 18 miles from the base.

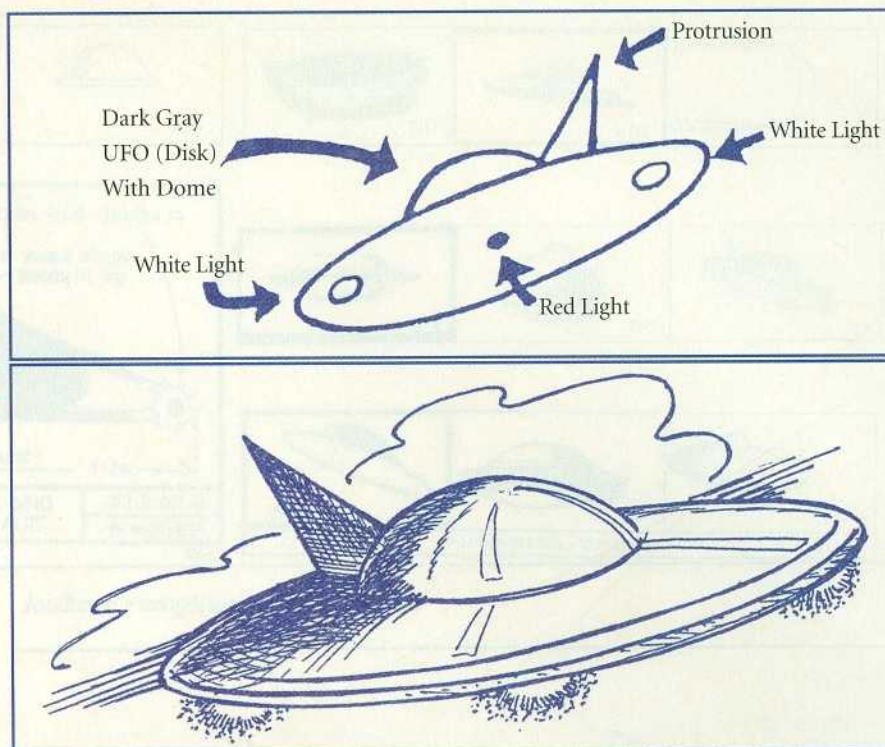
We contacted the primary witness (Mrs. Bailey) by phone that night. She was still excited about the experience. We gathered basic information before dispatching our field investigator to interview her. Three interviews took place during the two-month inquiry.

The Report

Mrs. Bailey said that she had observed several strange lights in the sky when she first noticed the UFO. The initial light was yellow in color, then seven appeared, or was it five? One object came into view, a disk flying very low, so close that it flew right over her car. The saucer was gray in color; it had a dome on top and sported a white light on its leading and trailing edges. It also had a red light centrally affixed to its underside. According to Susan, Mrs. Bailey's 13-year-old daughter who was present during the event, the object had an inverted V-shaped protrusion on its topside trailing edge. Apparently Mrs. Bailey did not see this protrusion, because, she said, "The UFO flew on a kind of slant."

The witnesses—Mrs. Bailey (36), Susan, Betty (11), and Debbie (5)—all agreed that the object made a humming sound, had several lights that blinked as it approached them, and seemed to slow down as it passed over the car. The observation time was about a minute and a half in duration, with the UFO being positioned no more than 100 feet overhead. Mrs. Bailey guessed that its size was "something like seven or eight feet thick and about 20 feet long" (diameter).

The initial investigation was handled by Gordon Myers of UFORIC (the Philadelphia-based UFO Report and Information Center). His report concerning the witnesses' sincerity and his attempts to



The Bailey UFO

shake them from their story reads as follows:

"The people appear to be sincere about their sighting. The mother seemed to be still shook up about it, but did not seem to be afraid to talk about it. Her daughter, Susan, said very little, but appeared to be interested in knowing exactly what they saw.

"After talking with them, and after all the data were obtained, I showed them the book with the pictures of the different UFO configurations in it. The mother picked out P44, P21 (only upside down), and P13 (with the bottom removed).

"The daughter, Susan, picked out case 22 (but with no windows or triangular protrusions), also U16 and U102, except with an inverted 'V' on top."

The references pertain to illustrations found in the investigator's handbook. This method of determining the object's appearance is only utilized after the witness's sketches were gathered.

"I tried to make them confused about the object's size, distance, and the experience in general, but could not change their stories," concluded Myers.

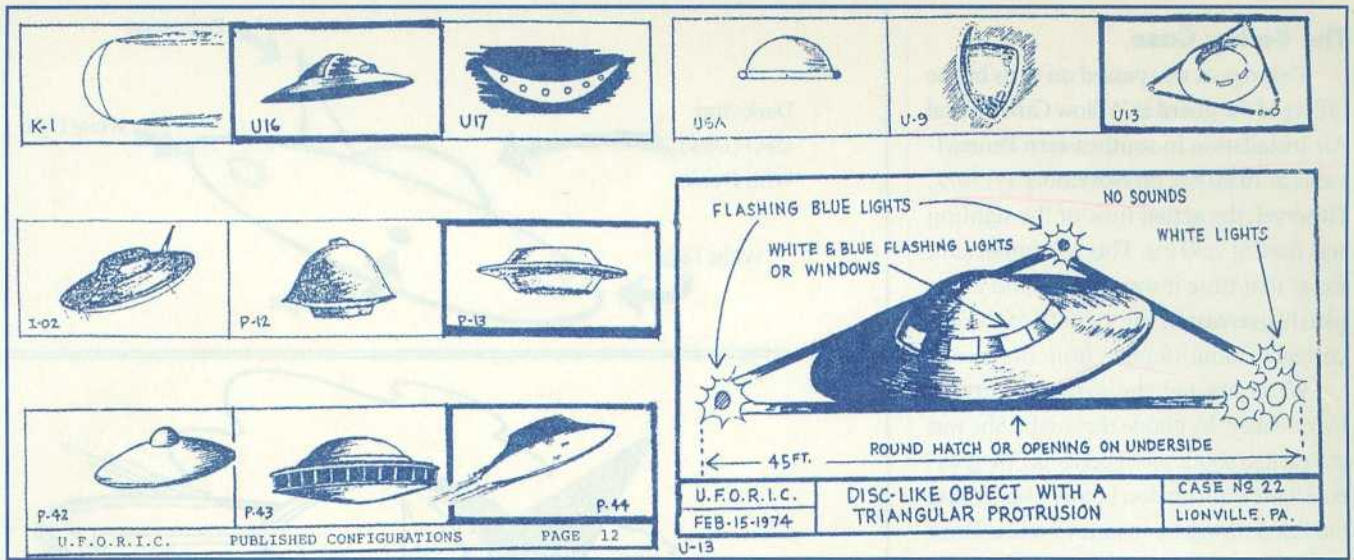
After gathering all the information required for the investigative process em-

ployed at UFORIC (a search for both a physical and/or psychological basis for the event), we reached this tentative conclusion regarding the Bailey family's experience.

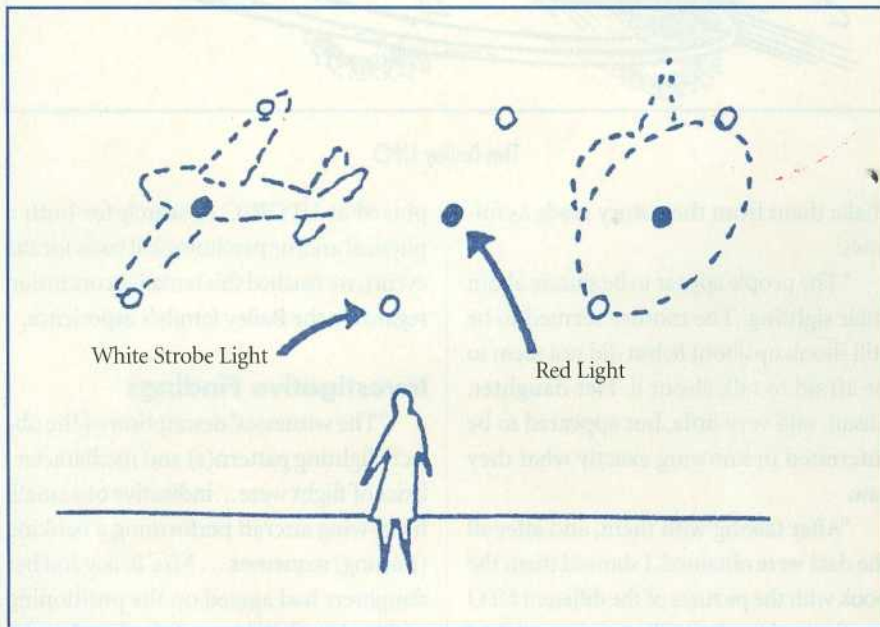
Investigative Findings

"The witnesses' description of the object's lighting pattern(s) and its characteristics of flight were... indicative of a small, fixed-wing aircraft performing a banking (turning) maneuver.... Mrs. Bailey and her daughters had agreed on the positioning of the object's lights and the fact that the UFO made a humming sound 'something like a motor' as it passed over their car. The only puzzling factor remaining was why they saw a fin-topped disk and not an airplane's outline."

We have encountered this type of misidentification many times at the UFO Center and found that when the human eye fails to obtain a clear image because of observational distances, darkness, restrictive atmospheric conditions, etc., the mind frequently fills in the missing pieces of the image with a subjective outline, or even creates several UFOs from a single object. In such instances, it is important for the investigator to ask if the objects appeared to be flying in formation.



Saucer types from investigator's handbook



"The only puzzling factor was why they saw a fin-topped disk and not an airplane's outline."

According to the Bailey report, the sky was totally gray and so was the object reported. In all likelihood, no true outline was actually discernible to the witnesses at the time of the event.

Moreover, Susan mentioned during her interview with Myers that the object first looked like two automobile headlights in the sky. Such is the appearance of aircraft approach lights—which points to the fact that many small and medium-sized aircraft fly over the sighting area, which is close to a civil airport that services small helicopters, and many privately owned and

shuttle-type corporate aircraft.

It was obvious to the investigators that the sighting was a misidentification, and it seemed that even the discrepancy involving the odd protrusion on the object's top side, which the girls had observed but Mrs. Bailey did not notice, pointed to a banking fixed-wing aircraft as being the object reported.

The airplane was flying at an angle that turned its tail away from Mrs. Bailey's line of sight while making it a fleeting but noticeable characteristic to her children.

The Impact of the Sighting

Mrs. Bailey and her daughters were tremendously affected by the sighting, and no amount of persuasion involving a logical explanation for the event could diminish the validity of their UFO encounter. Like Raefield, Mrs. Bailey staunchly maintains that she observed an alien spacecraft.

In fact, the profound impact of the observation rekindled her desire to write poetry. Her first effort, about her UFO experience, reads as follows:

An Experience

A lonely single little gray
Not at all reflected
A moving night sky
And I, the selected.
No beauty of its own
No moon to chaperon
No cheers, no welcome
I, the audience alone.

No mystery, no illusion
No trick of the eye
Yet, in my wonderment
I did not ask why.

You came to me in motion
I do not know from where
If memory serves me right
You just happened to be there.

You were my childhood dream, come
back

On the seventeenth of November
A dream I'd often dreamed
And now always will remember.

A child's dream come true
But as real as real can be
Born of elements unknown
Somewhere in the galaxy.

And in all your elegance
You stood without a glow
But I'll remember always
My little gray UFO.

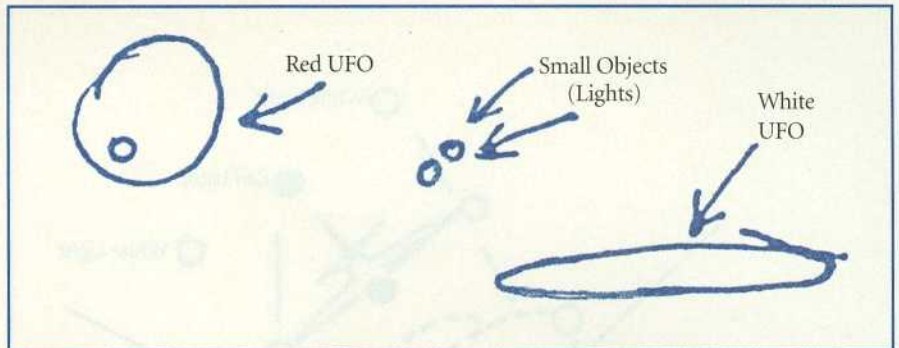
The Psychological Probe

During our inquiry, we asked Mrs. Bailey if she would be willing to permit a psychological probe of her experience. She complied, and the investigation revealed a rather remarkable point-for-point symbolic relatedness between the sighting particulars and her immediate personal situation, a sad state of affairs. She had recently been separated from her husband (Doug) and was living in a small apartment with three of her five daughters. (Kathy and Susan were living with their father. Susan was visiting with Mrs. Bailey at the time of the sighting.) She said she felt good about getting away from Doug but was concerned about how things might turn out for her and apprehensive about the children.

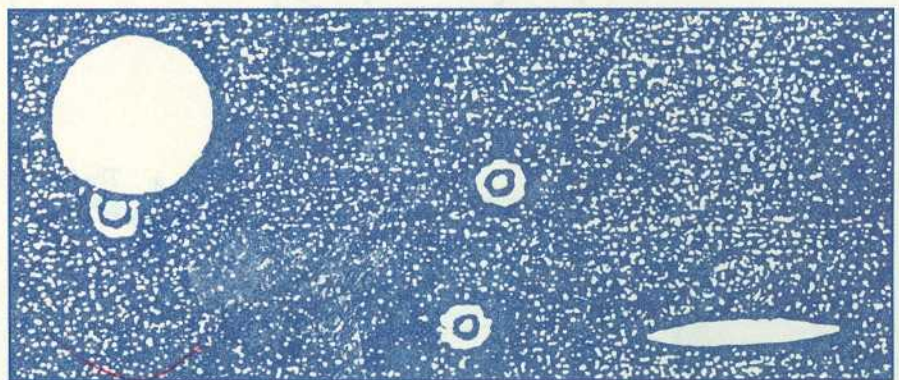
Mrs. Bailey's Dynamic Display

At first, Mrs. Bailey reported observing one yellow point of light in the overcast sky—an ominous tone. Because her first perception was that of a yellow (caution) light, we might suspect that an intuitively apprehensive attitude was in keeping with the coming event—simply because of its ominous likeness to her intrinsic tensions and fears.

Seven lights appeared (the total number of family members), then five lights (the number of children), then one UFO, which was a disk-shaped (tri-lighted) contraption that featured a dome on top and a fin-like protrusion toward its trailing edge. At the closest approach, Mrs. Bailey said that "the saucer passed directly above her car," causing much excitement and a curious mixture of fear and fascination. Mrs. Bailey's at-



UFOs as sketched



UFOs as observed



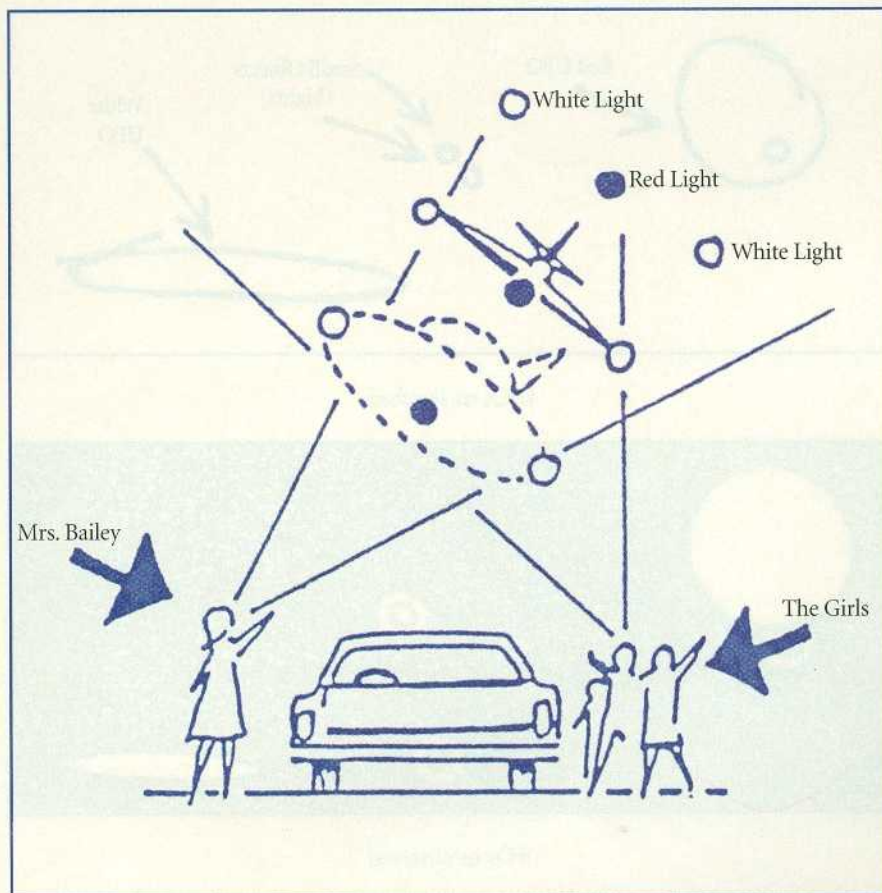
Actual object: Red tail section of aircraft illuminated so corporate logo may be seen; approach lights illuminate portion of aircraft's nose section

tention was so riveted to the object that she was unaware that her five year old, Debbie, was standing on the hood of the car, jumping up and down and screaming. Now the object symbolically took on great emotional significance, which was primarily kindled by a deep-seated fear she had harbored concerning the potential of an incestuous episode taking place between Mr. Bailey and their oldest daughter, Kathy.

This fear was not a product of fantasy but a reality that tore at her from many

sides. Doug had already attempted "this unspeakable act" more than once when he was drinking heavily. Her two oldest daughters, who were still living with him, were receiving little meaningful guidance. Kathy and Susan were also creating additional stress on Mrs. Bailey because they were succumbing to a variety of teenage peer pressures.

The financial situation was so dire that even though Mrs. Bailey deeply yearned to have all the children living with her, it was



impossible to make the arrangements, primarily because of Doug's obstinance and lack of financial support.

But, Mrs. Bailey's problems did not start in recent times—indeed, they were ongoing long before she was married.

Mrs. Bailey's Background

Her childhood was a hurried affair; she was the oldest of four siblings and was called upon to help out at home. Mom and Dad were alcoholics. She attended parochial elementary and secondary schools and obtained the equivalent of an academic high school diploma from a trade school. Her grades were average, and she excelled in writing short stories and poetry.

At the age of 21, she married Doug, who had recently inherited a small business. He would lose it about 18 months later as a result of his alcoholism. He then took a job as a truck driver, and Mrs. Bailey lived with the constant fear that his drinking problem might cause a serious accident, or cause him to be fired, jailed, or even kill someone.

His addiction grew worse, and it was not until too late that it dawned on Mrs. Bailey that she had foolishly used her parents' drinking habits to gauge his. Obviously, they were all hopelessly hooked, but Doug's problem had become more serious, and he was more dependent upon her than her parents ever were.

Priestly Advice

She consulted two priests about the mounting problems. They patiently and sympathetically listened, but offered little actual help. After several meetings, she felt that they could not understand what she was going through, "being unmarried persons themselves," just as she could not understand why they insisted upon referring to the living hell she was enduring as a blessing, let alone something sacred.

Although her faith was still intact, the Church's strict rules on divorce and their die-hard save-the-marriage posture had become unacceptable. Something had to give. "Why should I die hard?" she said. "I didn't do anything wrong!" She began looking for something more down-to-earth to

believe in. She knew she wanted some affection, respect, understanding, appreciation, and someone she could depend upon.

She ventured forth on her own for the first time in her life. She had grown weary of doing for others who did not appreciate it, and she refused to wait for some reward for her years of doing without, while hoping for a change for the better to develop in others. "God helps those who help themselves," became her motto, and a developing self-confidence was her vanguard.

Latent and Manifest Content

It appears that Mrs. Bailey's UFO observation was played out and experienced through a dual process of perception: a sudden interruption of her consciousness by direct sensory stimuli (i.e., the observation of a fleeting UFO) and a completely unconscious form of recognition and emotional response to the symbolic drama unfolding in front of her, a dynamic display of her own anxieties and fears.

Mrs. Bailey said that her existence was not mundane, but exceptional and filled with new purpose (a sentiment often expressed by UFO observers). These remarks were not an ego-inflating statement reflecting an unbalanced mind, but rather the kind that bolsters an already battered personality, defending it from more harm.

Her expressions were of a soothing nature, emerging in a rapid-fire form of cognition. In them she found refuge, strength, and hope. Was her UFO sighting the modern-day equivalent of a genuine religious experience? Surely, her philosophical and spiritual transformation seem to be, at least in part, related to the event.

She found herself writing more poetry, sleeping, and eating much better. Interestingly, a nightly sky watch performed with binoculars borrowed from her brother became a family ritual for about three weeks. (Nothing unusual was observed during this time.)

After that, her situation steadily improved—all of her children began residing with her and she met someone very special. She finally started to really live.

Bailey Case Summary

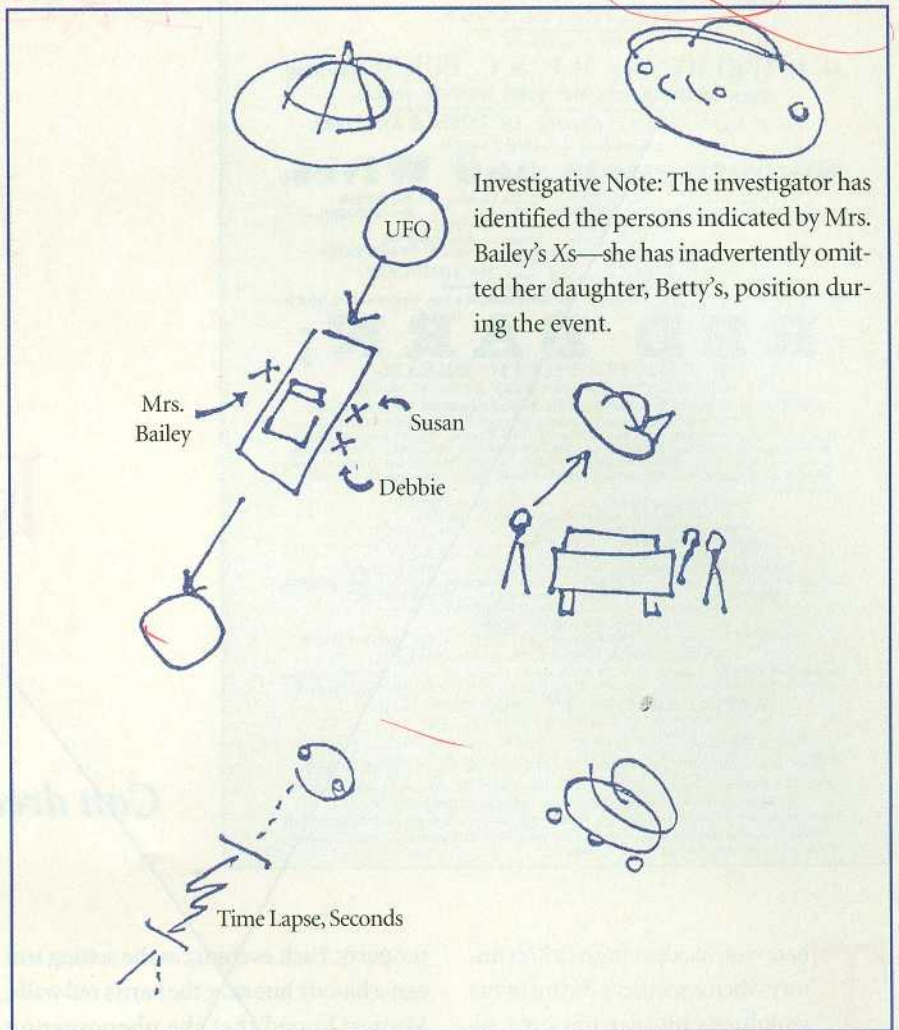
We are left with several possibilities regarding these enigmatic objects that people are seeing in the skies.

Perhaps UFOs are seemingly weightless alien spacecraft or holographic transmissions of unknown origin that mimic mental mechanics and human emotions.

Maybe they are psychical projections that can leave a trace on a photographic negative and even return a radar echo, just as the late Dr. C. G. Jung mentioned many years ago. Or they could represent something only perceived by people caught in a synchronous psychical and physical state or situation.

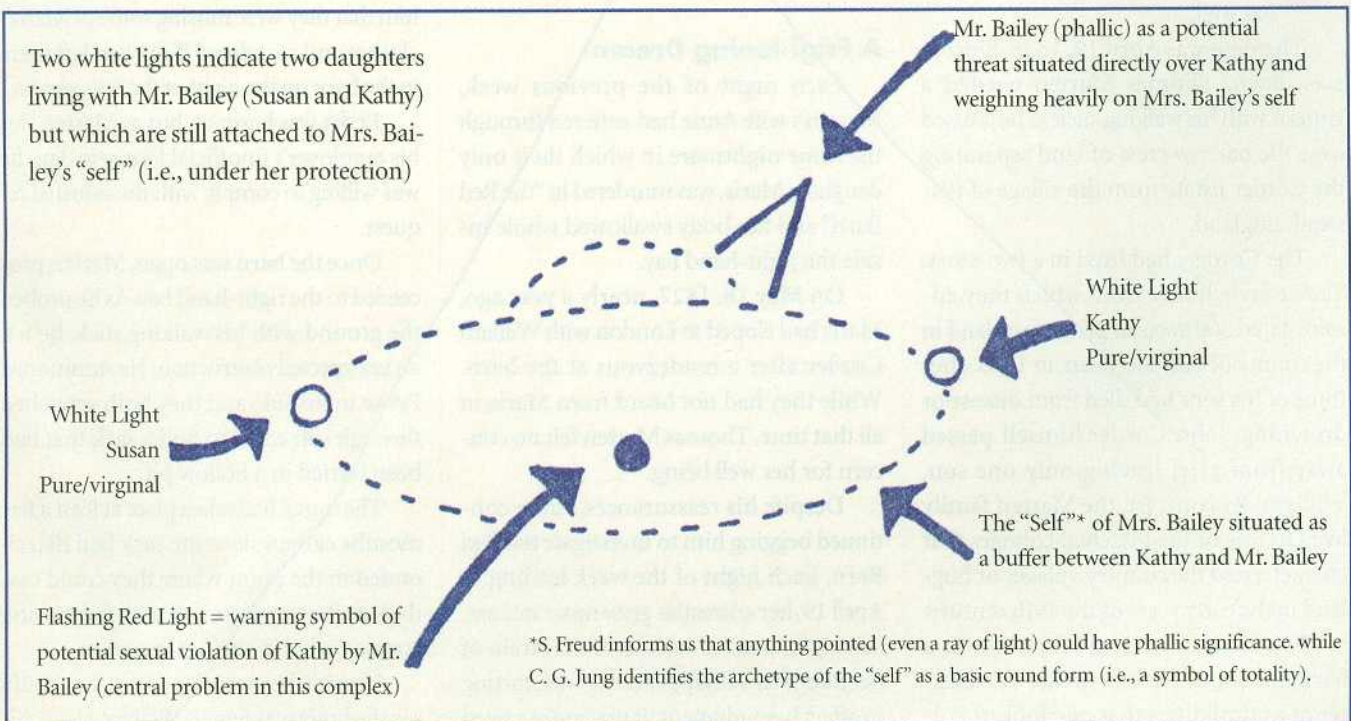
This is a problem that challenges our concept of reality, because it may illustrate that the observer and the phenomenon observed are one. If true, one could hardly be ridiculed for thinking of such UFOs as modern-day signs in the skies.

Matthew J. Graeber founded the Philadelphia-based UFO Report and Information Center (UFORIC) in 1972 and served as its director until 1980. The group received reports of alien encounters through police, media, technicians, and engineers.



Investigative Note: The investigator has identified the persons indicated by Mrs. Bailey's Xs—she has inadvertently omitted her daughter, Betty's, position during the event.

Mrs. Bailey's sketches of the object that buzzed her car



Mrs. Bailey's UFO as a psychical assemblage