



Jung

Flying Saucers

Flying Saucers

'convincing and impressive.'

New Statesman

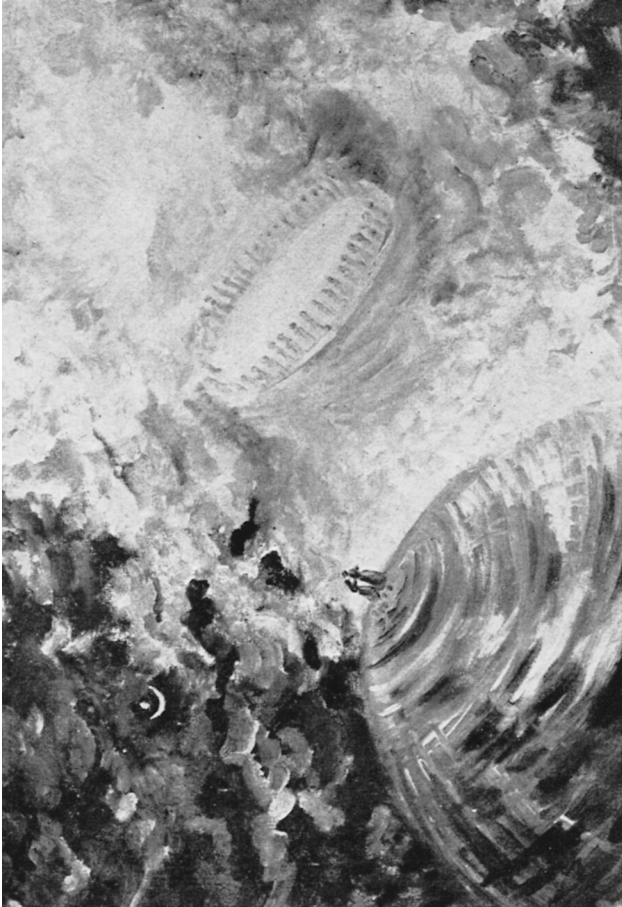


Plate 1 A UFO Vision (*frontispiece*)

Carl Gustav
Jung

Flying Saucers

A modern myth of things seen in the sky



London and New York

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PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The worldwide rumour about Flying Saucers presents a problem that challenges the psychologist for a number of reasons. The primary question—and apparently this is the most important point—is this: are they real or are they mere fantasy products? This question is by no means settled yet. If they are real, exactly what are they? If they are fantasy, why should such a rumour exist?

In this latter respect I have made an interesting and quite unexpected discovery. In 1954 I gave an interview to the Swiss weekly, *Die Weltwoche*, in which I expressed myself in a sceptical way, though I spoke with due respect of the serious opinion of a relatively large number of air specialists who believe in the reality of UFOs (unidentified flying objects). In 1958 this interview was suddenly discovered by the world press and the “news” spread like wildfire from the far West round the earth to the far East, but—alas—in distorted form. I was quoted as a saucer-believer. I issued a statement to the United Press and gave a true version of my opinion, but this time the wire went dead:

nobody, so far as I know, took any notice of it, except one German newspaper.

The moral of this story is rather interesting. As the behaviour of the press is a sort of Gallup test with reference to world opinion, one must draw the conclusion that news affirming the existence of UFOs is welcome, but that scepticism seems to be undesirable. To believe that UFOs are real suits the general opinion, whereas disbelief is to be discouraged. This creates the impression that there is a tendency all over the world to believe in saucers and to want them to be real, unconsciously helped along by a press that otherwise has no sympathy with the phenomenon.

This remarkable fact in itself surely merits the psychologist's interest. Why should it be more desirable for saucers to exist than not? The following pages are an attempt to answer this question. I have relieved the text of cumbersome footnotes, except for a few which give the references for the interested reader.

C. G. JUNG

September, 1958

INTRODUCTORY

It is difficult to form a correct estimate of the significance of contemporary events, and the danger that our judgment will remain caught in subjectivity is great. So I am fully aware of the risk I am taking in proposing to communicate my views concerning certain contemporary events, which seem to me important, to those who are patient enough to hear me. I refer to those reports reaching us from all corners of the earth, rumours of round objects that flash through the troposphere and stratosphere, and go by the name of Flying Saucers, *soucoupes*, disks, and “UFOs” (Unidentified Flying Objects). These rumours, or the possible physical existence of such objects, seem to me so significant that I feel myself compelled, as once before¹ when events were brewing of fateful consequence for Europe, to sound a note of warning. I know that, just as before, my voice is much too weak to reach the ear of the multitude. It is not presumption

¹ “Wotan”, *Essays on Contemporary Events*, London, 1947; first published in the *Neue Schweizer Rundschau*, 1936.

that drives me, but my conscience as a psychiatrist that bids me fulfil my duty and prepare those few who will hear me for coming events which are in accord with the end of an era. As we know from ancient Egyptian history, they are symptoms of psychic changes that always appear at the end of one Platonic month and at the beginning of another. They are, it seems, changes in the constellation of psychic dominants, of the archetypes, or “gods” as they used to be called, which bring about, or accompany, long-lasting transformations of the collective psyche. This transformation started within the historical tradition and left traces behind it, first in the transition from the age of Taurus to that of Aries, and then from Aries to Pisces, whose beginning coincides with the rise of Christianity. We are now nearing that great change which may be expected when the spring-point enters Aquarius. It would be frivolous of me to conceal from the reader that reflections such as these are not only exceedingly unpopular but come perilously close to those turbid fantasies which becloud the minds of world-improvers and other interpreters of “signs and portents”. But I must take this risk, even if it means putting my hard-won reputation for truthfulness, trustworthiness, and scientific judgment in jeopardy. I can assure my readers that I do not do this with a light heart. I am, to be quite frank, concerned for all those who are caught unprepared by the events in question and disconcerted by their incomprehensible nature. Since, so far as I know, no one has yet felt moved to examine and set forth the possible psychic consequences of this foreseeable change, I deem it my duty to do what I can in this respect. I undertake this thankless task in the expectation that my chisel will make no impression on the hard stone it meets.

Some time ago I wrote a short article in which I considered the nature of “Flying Saucers”.² I came to the same conclusion as the semi-official report by Edward I. Ruppelt, one-time chief of

² “Weltwoche”, 22. Jahrg., Nr. 1078, July 1954.

the American Bureau for observing UFOs.³ The conclusion is: *something is seen, but one doesn't know what*. It is difficult, if not impossible, to form any correct idea of these objects, because they behave not like bodies but like weightless thoughts. Up till now there has been no indisputable proof of the physical existence of UFOs except for the cases picked up by radar. I have discussed the reliability of these radar observations with Prof. Max Knoll, a specialist in this field. What he says is not encouraging. Nevertheless, there do seem to be authenticated cases where the visual observation was confirmed by a radar echo. I would like to call the reader's attention to Keyhoe's books, which are based on official material and studiously avoid the wild speculation, naïveté or prejudice of other publications.⁴

For a decade the physical reality of UFOs remained a very problematical matter, which was not decided one way or the other with the necessary clarity, despite the mass of observational material that had accumulated in the meantime. The longer the uncertainty lasted, the greater became the probability that this obviously complicated phenomenon had an extremely important psychic component as well as a possible physical basis. This is not surprising, in that we are dealing with an ostensibly physical phenomenon distinguished on the one hand by its frequent appearances, and on the other by its strange, unknown, and indeed contradictory nature.

Such an object provokes, like nothing else, conscious and unconscious fantasies, the former giving rise to speculative conjectures and pure fabrications, and the latter supplying the mythological background inseparable from these provocative observations. Thus there arose a situation in which, with the best

³ *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*, New York, 1956.

⁴ Major Donald E. Keyhoe, *Flying Saucers from Outer Space*, New York, 1953, and *The Flying Saucer Conspiracy*, London, 1957. Cf. also Aimé Michel, *The Truth about Saucers*, London, 1957.

will in the world, one often did not know and could not discover whether a primary perception was followed by a phantasm or whether, conversely, a primary fantasy originating in the unconscious invaded the conscious mind with illusions and visions. The material that has become known to me during the past ten years lends support to both hypotheses. In the first case an objectively real, physical process forms the basis for an accompanying myth; in the second case an archetype creates the corresponding vision. To these two causal relationships we must add a third possibility, namely, that of a “synchronistic”, i.e., acausal, meaningful coincidence—a problem that has occupied men’s minds ever since the time of Geulincx, Leibniz, and Schopenhauer.⁵ It is a hypothesis that has special bearing on phenomena connected with archetypal psychic processes.

As a psychologist, I am not qualified to contribute anything useful to the question of the physical reality of UFOs. I can concern myself only with their undoubted psychic aspect, and in what follows shall deal almost exclusively with their psychic concomitants.

⁵ Cf. my paper “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle”, Jung and Pauli, *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*, London and New York, 1955.

1

UFOS AS RUMOURS

Since the things reported of UFOs not only sound incredible but seem to fly in the face of all our basic assumptions about the physical world, it is very natural that one's first reaction should be the negative one of outright rejection. Surely, we say, it's nothing but illusions, fantasies, and lies. People who report such stuff—chiefly airline pilots and ground staff—cannot be quite right in the head! What is worse, most of these stories come from America, the land of superlatives and of science fiction.

In order to meet this natural reaction, we shall begin by considering the UFO reports simply as rumours, i.e., as psychic products, and shall draw from this all the conclusions that are warranted by an analytical method of procedure.

Regarded in this light, the UFO reports may seem to the sceptical mind to be rather like a story that is told all over the world, but differs from an ordinary rumour in that it is expressed in the form of visions,¹ or perhaps owed its existence to them in the

¹ I prefer the term "vision" to "hallucination", because the latter bears the stamp of a pathological concept, whereas a vision is a phenomenon that is by no means peculiar to pathological states.

first place and is now kept alive by them. I would call this comparatively rare variation a *visionary rumour*. It is closely akin to the collective visions of, say, the crusaders during the siege of Jerusalem, the troops at Mons in the first World War, the faithful followers of the Pope at Fatima, Portugal, etc. Apart from collective visions, there are on record cases where one or more persons see something that physically is not there. For instance, I was once at a spiritualistic séance where four of the five people present saw a object like a moon floating above the abdomen of the medium. They showed me, the fifth person present, exactly where it was, and it was absolutely incomprehensible to them that I could see nothing of the sort. I know of three more cases where certain objects were seen in the clearest detail (in two of them by two persons, and in the third by one person) and could afterwards be proved to be non-existent. Two of these cases happened under my direct observation. Even people who are entirely *compos mentis* and in full possession of their senses can sometimes see things that do not exist. I do not know what the explanation is of such happenings. It is very possible that they are less rare than I am inclined to suppose. For as a rule we do not verify things we have “seen with our own eyes”, and so we never get to know that actually they did not exist. I mention these somewhat remote possibilities because, in such an unusual matter as the UFOs, one has to take every aspect into account.

The first requisite for a visionary rumour, as distinct from an ordinary rumour, for whose dissemination nothing more is needed than popular curiosity and sensation-mongering, is always an *unusual emotion*. Its intensification into a vision and delusion of the senses, however, springs from a stronger excitation and therefore from a deeper source.

The signal for the UFO stories was given by the mysterious projectiles seen over Sweden during the last two years of the war—attributed of course to the Russians—and by the reports

about "Foo fighters", i.e. lights that accompanied the Allied bombers over Germany (Foo=feu). These were followed by the strange sightings of "Flying Saucers" in America. The impossibility of finding an earthly base for the UFOs and of explaining their physical peculiarities soon led to the conjecture of an extra-terrestrial origin. With this development the rumour got linked up with the psychology of the great panic that broke out in New Jersey just before the second World War, when a radio play, based on a novel by H. G. Wells, about Martians invading New York, caused a regular stampede with numerous car accidents. The play evidently hit the latent emotion connected with the imminence of war.

The motif of an extra-terrestrial invasion was seized upon by the rumour and the UFOs were interpreted as machines controlled by intelligent beings from outer space. The apparently weightless behaviour of space-ships and their intelligent, purposeful movements were attributed to the superior technical knowledge and ability of the cosmic intruders. As they did no harm and refrained from all hostile acts it was assumed that their appearance over the earth was due to curiosity or to the need for aerial reconnaissance. It also seemed that airfields and atomic installations in particular held a special attraction for them, from which it was concluded that the dangerous development of atomic physics and nuclear fission had caused a certain disquiet on our neighbouring planets and necessitated a more accurate survey from the air. As a result, people felt they were being observed and spied upon from space.

The rumour actually gained so much official recognition that Service Chiefs in America set up a special bureau for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating all relevant observations. This seems to have been done also in France, Italy, Sweden, Great Britain, and other countries. After the publication of Ruppelt's report the Saucer stories seem to have more or less vanished from the press for about a year. They were evidently no longer "news".