Is There a Unifying Paradigm for the Paranormal?

Forteanism: A Pre-Paradigmatic Science?

One of the common accusations that scientific researchers make toward a number of disciplines that they consider to be of less than scientific nature is that these fields are "preparadigmatic." In essence, this term means that the science is completely empirically driven, without any sort of unifying model to use in sorting, locating, or predicting observations. Parapsychology is considered preparadigmatic because while it collects examples of a phenomenon it identifies as "psi," it basically has no unifying model to explain what psi is or how it works.

Many Forteans would argue that Forteanism is the collection of anomalies from all the sciences, and also the foil of the blind sides of the scientific method, and thus should be preparadigmatic by nature. Since Fort argued that every model leads to exclusions ('damnings') of data, he never held any model as being more than provisional. Still, Forteans should accept the valid criticism from scientists that paradigms don't just merely exclude data; they provide maps where to look for it. Paradigms help generate new data and help scientists know where to look.

I believe it is time for Forteans to do more than just merely be collectors of data. Naive empiricism is fine, but when it degenerates into some kind of quasi-mystical refusal to look for organizing principles for Fortean phenomena, it devolves into absurdity. Clearly, there are researchers like Michael Persinger and others who are already looking for patterns (spatial, temporal, noetic, etc.) and even if their overarching theories for these phenomena (such as Persinger's Tectonic Stress Theory or TST) don't seem to fit all the data, at least they represent good launching points. Maybe all paranormal phenomena don't occur at fault zones; but at least it's one place to start looking!

It's fine to sit back and mock the scientists, but at least they have a means to predict when the phenomena they talk about may make a reappearance. Some Forteans may feel the ultimate unifying agency behind all the different classes of Fortean phenomena is a crazed Zen-like universal cosmic trickster-mind, in which case any attempts at paradigms will fail. Personally, I see this philosophical attitude as akin to solipsism: it gets you nowhere. And it doesn't seem to fit the fact that, yes, even with the paranormal there appear to be patterns, mechanisms, and organizing principles, even if they exist at the outskirts of physics.

There exist five potential paradigms out there which might help provide a basis for explaining wide categories of paranormal phenomena. I am using this term in the broadest possible sense: as when Kuhn and others refer to the Copernican paradigm, I am talking about worldviews, new ways of viewing the universe. These are revolutionary, and like the heliocentric worldview, they challenge accepted ways of thinking about the

world, but they have the outlandish chance of actually being correct, and helping us explain those anomalies we see out there.

What are we looking for?

In an earlier article (INFO Journal #63, June 1991), I sought to look for the dominant patterns in Fortean phenomena. I suggested the use of the "World Grid" theory to examine spatial patterns, such as the way some "window zones" or areas of "high strangeness" become Fortean magnets, and the use of "Gaian" theory (specifically, considering geomagnetic fields as part of the "pulse" of the planet) to examine "flaps" and other temporal patterns. To me, this is sort of the 'rock bottom' to any form of knowledge, 'scientific' or not - to understand phenomena, we need to see where and when they recur in space and time, and why. Researchers like Michael Persinger began doing this back in the 1980s with books like his Geo-Bibliography of Anomalies. However, the question becomes: if we're looking for patterns of 'somethings,' what somethings are we in fact collecting?

Some Forteans muse that our job is to collect everything strange and unusual, even if it doesn't seem outside what we know of science, such as odd human or animal behavior (which often gets printed up in Chuck Shepherd's "News of the Weird.") Others like John Michell see Forteans as also being collectors of eccentricities, including stories of eccentric individuals. I myself have argued that even looking at pre-Columbian contacts with the New World is "Fortean," because while it doesn't seem to violate any known laws of nature, it seems to contradict what 'established' historical scholarship has claimed. Still, what I'm arguing here is for a basic equivalence of "Fortean" with "paranormal." By paranormal, I mean anomalistic events that seem to contradict our current scientific understanding of the universe.

In my earlier article, I offered nine rough categories of events that Forteans seem to be engaged in collecting. Now, as many Forteans have argued, these categories all overlap, and are not necessarily exclusive of each other. Some may quibble about what I put in these categories, and many of them invariably fall into multiple. Like Fort said, shutting one door makes another one down the hall fly open. But we cannot form paradigms without some effort of categorizing what we're collecting. I suggested those categories were as follows:

1. Apparitions -- appearances of beings of unknown nature (phantom strangers, UFOs and aliens, angels, fairies, monsters, 'farfrotskies,' 'cryptozoo' critters, and 'ghosts')
2. Manifestations -- things that appear in places where they should not normally be found, either because they are extrinsic, anachronistic, or come from seemingly impossible origins ('OOPARTs', 'apports,' falling substances or animals, crop circles, mutilated cattle, etc.)
3. Phantasmagoria -- occurences that impact upon the senses but do not appear to be "things," such as spook lights, singing sands, skyquakes, mysterious noises, earthquake lights, etc.
4. Wild Talents -- human display of parapsychological or otherwise extraordinary

abilities (psi, 'electric girls,' lightning calculators, idiot savants, saints' miracles, etc, etc.)
5. Disappearances -- paranormal vanishings (ghost ships, lost planes, disappearing people, vanishing hitchhikers, etc.) Interest usually focuses on areas (such as the so-called 'Bermuda Triangle') where such things occur.
6. Transformations -- natural objects that display seemingly impossible or unnatural properties, such as blood that won't coagulate, grass that won't grow back, rocks that seem to move on their own, etc.
7. Synchronicities -- otherwise 'normal' events or 'coincidences' that seem to mysteriously happen either at exactly the same time or in close sequence, such as the death of people with the same name on the same day.
8. Mass Delusions -- Spontaneous outbreaks of mass consensual hallucinations (common examples in the Middle Ages were St. Anthony's Fire, and the mass delusion that led to the Tarantelle dance in Italy; also the mass 'sightings' created by the "War of the Worlds" broadcast in 1938.) (As I've suggested elsewhere, "mass delusion" is in itself an anomaly since there's no accepted psychological theory as to how two or more persons could share the same hallucination.)
9. Other Scientific Anomalies -- The catch-all for all other astronomical, geophysical, biological, meteorological, or other anomalies that don't really seem to fit in the other eight.

I would suggest that it's the occurence of these nine categories of paranormal events (who I've come far, far from exhausting with my few meager examples) which these paradigms may help to explain. While so-called skeptics seem to be using category #8 as a catch-all for all the others, or explaining away events as "folklore," or blaming spatial and temporal patterns on waves of mass media attention, they at least are on the right track. They're looking for paradigms, even if they're erroneous ones.

The Holographic Paradigm

The holographic paradigm, as exposited by Ken Wilber, Michael Talbot, and David Bohm (among others), is actually a constellation of two related conceptions. One of the unique features of laser holograms is that every part somehow contains an image of the whole. If you break up a holographic image into several pieces, and shine a laser through those pieces, you will see a smaller version of the whole image. The first part of the "holographic paradigm" is the idea that the brain may function holographically. As Karl Pribram discovered, memories do not appear to be stored in specific locations (engrams), but instead appear to be stored everywhere at once throughout the brain as neural patterns of organization. Other neuroscientists note that specific mental and physical functions are also not so easily localized, because other parts of the brain are often able to take on the functions of neighboring parts that fail or are injured or destroyed.

The second part of the "holographic paradigm" is the idea that the universe also may be, itself, a hologram. Following physicist David Bohm, the holographic paradigm suggests that the visible universe (explicate order) may only be a small part of the entire universe (the implicate or enfolded order.) To demonstrate his idea of the implicate order, Bohm often shows physics students a series of drops in a cylinder filled with glycerine solution.

As he rotates the cylinder in one direction, the drops "fold" into the solution; but amazingly, a counter-rotation suddenly "unfolds" the drops again! Another property of holograms is that they can appear differently based on what angle you view the image from, but no one perspective of "motion" holograms ever captures the entire image.

So, if the universe is a hologram, the apparent visible and manifest aspects of it may be merely the explicate order, whereas there is an entire range of "enfolded" or implicate properties which may manifest only at certain points in time or space. If the brain is a hologram, we must also reconsider our ideas about the notion of perception: it may assemble "external reality" by a process of frequency assemblage and "interference analysis," which is what Gestalt psychologists have suggested all along... and some of the cognitive study of human perception is beginning to reinforce. The notion of "hallucination" becomes more problematic, as it appears imaginal reality is assembled out of the same components as "the real world."

Talbot sees the holographic paradigm as potentially explaining all kinds of paranormal phenomena. Seemingly unrelated objects in the explicate world may have connections in the implicate order, facilitating what appears (from the explicate view) as action at a distance (thus explaining psychokinesis and, for Talbot, poltergeist phenomena.) The mind might be seen as the implicate property of the brain (rather than an epiphenomenon), and this might explain psi, nonlocality of consciousness, PK, and other parapsychological mysteries. From a holographic viewpoint, the strange interconnectedness of quantum particles makes sense. Talbot suggests imagining that two cameras are focused on a fish swimming in a fish tank, each from two different angles.

A person viewing two different monitors might see two different fishes, in effect, and might conclude they are separate objects. However, he would also notice that any change in the behavior of fish 1 would be matched by a complementary (but different) behavior of fish 2, and eventually conclude some sort of strange acausal interconnectedness was taking place. Basically, the holographic paradigm suggests nonlocality is not a paradox: the assumption of locality is based on erroneous assumptions (that one is not viewing different angles of the same hologram.) It's a viewpoint that Charles Fort also seemingly reached about the interconnected nature of our cosmos. And many modern Forteans have noted as well.

Multi-Dimensional Reality

When mystics talk about "higher planes" of reality, it makes for some nice New Agey talk, but they are often merely spinning castles in the clouds. The fact is, current physics suggests that there are other dimensions of reality, but what precisely this means depends on several different theories, any of which may be correct. First, relativity physics and superstring theories suggest "higher dimensions" from a mathematical and geometrical perspective. That is to say, though we can only perceive three dimensions of space (and perhaps one of time, leading to relativity's four-dimensional spacetime), some physical theories suggest there may be other dimensions at right angles to the existing three, only we can't describe them other than mathematically. (It would be like a circular inhabitant

of Flatland trying to describe a sphere, or you as a 3-dimensional being pointing your finger inside out.) In a sense, these "dimensions" would all exist in one universe, however. For various reasons, we can only perceive three of them, although there may be as many as five, eleven, or twenty-three.

One interpretation of quantum mechanics (the Many-Worlds Interpretation) also predicts the existence of parallel universes. These other universes are also sometimes called "other dimensions," but this leads to a confusion of terminology, as I've suggested above. Basically, these parallel universes are all basically almost totally alike, except that every time some quantum wave function is collapsed by an act of perception, our "world line" moves from one universe to another. This is the "Sliders" concept, made somewhat melodramatically on the TV show: maybe there are parallel universes where Lincoln didn't die in office, or you were never born. Some physicists feel these parallel universes also help resolve the mysteries of time travel, which seems to be possible (at least using black holes), yet also threatens causality. However, the theory seems to suggest that even though these parallel universes coexist with our own, by definition we can never experience them or be aware of them. Our choices have foreclosed them to us.

Lastly, one type of cosmology ('bubble universe' theory) suggests that the Big Bang did not just create our own universe, but rather several universes at once, sort of like soap bubbles out of a larger soapy film. Each might be a four or more-dimensional universe, seemingly finite and unbounded (as Einstein suggested), yet in actuality 'floating' in a higher dimensional space along with other universe. Each of these universes is distinct, but may be linked through 'wormholes' of some kind. This theory does not suggest that these other universes are necessarily parallel to our own, however. They could be completely different, and might even have different physical laws, or be made of antimatter, or something even more bizarre. This is apart from the view some physicists have that our own universe may have had one or more predecessors (a previous universe which had its own Big Stop or collapse which then led to our Big Bang.)

Some science fiction writers talk about a "multiverse" concept, mainly as a plot device. However, the idea of a "multiverse" is simply a rejoinder to the sort of myopia expressed by the term "universe." Just as before Giordano Bruno people somehow foolishly thought there was only one "world" (i.e. one Earth or planet), we still use the term "universe" as if now all the known parts of the cosmos were all that there was. Our universe may be incredibly vast, and populated with countless worlds, but perhaps someday we will have the breadth of vision to realize it also is not a singular entity. Does the multiverse concept help explain paranormal phenomena, however? Jacques Vallee and John Keel already use it (the "ultraterrestrial hypothesis") to explain the UFO phenomenon.

Already in the 19th century, psychical researchers like Zoellner were invoking the "fourth dimension" as an explanation for the phenomena of seances and spiritualism. As suggested earlier, New Agers often invoke "higher planes of being" as the source of phenomena, without explaining what precisely they mean. But other Forteans, following F.W. Holiday, see it as the explanation for our "Goblin Universe," where phantom black cats, sea serpents, and other beings can fade in and out of our reality. Also, the existence

of "window zones" or areas of "high strangeness" where the barriers between dimensions might be thinner. Paranormal disappearances might involve the movement of objects into other dimensions.

Nonlinear/Multi-Continual Time

Long before the advent of science, Western culture developed a basically linear theory of time. The idea of past, present, and future is so ingrained in our way of thinking that Westerners are hard-pressed to understand the often cyclical and multilinear ways of understanding time shown by non-Western peoples. In physics, there are many interesting arguments about the "arrow of time." Basically, most physical laws are time-reversible: the interactions look the same whether the "action" moves from past to future or vice versa. Yet, the linear flow of time seems to enter through causality (in our universe, causes seem to always precede effects), and through entropy (the fact that the loss of order or energy available for useful work in systems appears to be irreversible.) Still, despite the apparent linearity of time, some physicists are beginning to realize that their experiments show a different possibility.

Tachyons are elementary particles which appear to move backward in time. As impossible as it seems, they appear to move from the future toward the past. Likewise, some see antimatter as basically time-reversed particles; the positron is an electron moving backwards in time. Though it seems shocking, some physicists are now starting to suggest that in fact there may be no "arrow of time" and that its linearity may be an illusion. Causality, which appears to be a cornerstone of Newtonian physics, becomes routed by relativity (which suggests causes and effects may be simultaneous in different frames of reference - time doesn't always "flow" at the same rate), quantum physics (which suggests a deep acausal nature to events at the quantum level), and chaos theory (which suggests that through feedback, causes become effects, and vice versa, making them impossible to isolate.)

Hume and other philosophers have seen causality as a fundamental aspect of the cosmos, and today scientists seem hard-pressed to conceive of how physical laws might exist without it. Still, their own models suggest that it breaks down at the point of the singularity (the center of a black hole) and thus is not operative everywhere... anyway! The philosopher J. Dunne began to work out a theory of multilinear time back in the 40s, and called his conception Serialism; he proposed the existence of multiple time continnua. Basically, he felt serialism explained the fact of how in dreams people often dreamt of either events in the past or in the future. The perception people had in dreams and altered states of consciousness of time flowing in a nonordinary way might be the result of switching "time tracks."

The idea of a nonlinear time might help explain phenomena such as "precognition" (multiple futures coexist with multiple pasts), "synchronicity" (simultaneity of events depends on your frame of reference), and of course time 'slippage', which then becomes not only possible but probable. It makes teleological observations (such as the Cosmological Anthropic Principle) sensible, because then the future can exert influences

on the past, as well as vice versa. These phenomena are only "impossible" if we exist in linear time; and some physicists now agree we might not. Further, this view of time makes the phenomenon of time travel feasible, because in such a time/space framework, causality would not be violated by travelling back and, say, murdering one's father, because that would simply create a different continuum in which the person was never born.

Considering that time travel seems to be involved in various Fortean occurences (such as "time slips" and OOPARTs or artefacts out of place from a particular time period), it might be a relief to know that there are physicists with this viewpoint who don't view it as an impossibility. Some UFOlogists have begun adopting the view that UFOs may be time travellers from our own future, and such a theory becomes more sensible if we postulate the existence of nonlinear time. The parapsychological questions of survival take on a different kind of perspective, if we realize that the "end" of a person may only be the end of that person in one time continuum, and not in others. The idea that a human life is a linear progression from birth to death is a long-held one. But what if this linear progression we appear to see is just one "fractal" part of a larger nonlinear geometry?

Cyberverse/Infoverse

For some time, I've been pointing out that, beyond spatial and temporal patterns in Fortean phenomena, there appear to be informational or relational/analogical patterns as well. The spatial patterns ('window' or 'flap' zones, World Grid, Persinger's tectonic stress zones, etc.) and temporal patterns (paranormal 'peaks' at various times of day, days of the week, or months of the year) have been often discussed by Fortean investigators. But the informational patterns - what some Forteans call the "Name Game" or the tendency for the phenomena to associate around certain repeating names of people and places - have often been treated as simply an inexplicable curiosity, perhaps the whimsy of some Cosmic Trickster or the revival of the pagan god Pan's influence.

Why are certain "names" acting as "strange attractors" for phenomena? I would argue that to understand this situation, Forteans might consider the emerging view among scientists such as Ed Fredkin, John Wheeler, and Jacques Vallee, that the universe is computational in nature. Basically, the argument is that the fundamental particles of the cosmos may be "digital" in nature (the "It from Bit" hypothesis), consisting of "cellular automata" or trillions of interdependent on/off vectors that determine the properties we call mass, charm, spin, etc. Among artificial life researchers, a growing perspective has emerged that life, consciousness, and energy may represent methods of conserving and transferring information between the elements of the universe. The "extropian" viewpoint is that increasing information helps combat entropy or the tendency of the universe to "wind down."

If there is a "physics of information," and I suspect there is, it might help to explain the long-held belief that naming something helps attract or repel certain forces. Most physicists now realize there is a deep interrelationship between probability, entropy, information, and reflexivity (or self-organization.) Information is not a passive property,

it plays an extensive role in the evolution of the universe. Communication alters the probability of events. If we can take Fredkin's viewpoint to heart about the idea of what we experience of the universe as basically being a giant cosmic computer program (although Fredkin never identifies the programmer), we might consider that in such a program, changing the name of "variables" might affect other parts of the program.

Certainly, the informational nature of biology is getting increased attention by scientists. The existence of "cosmic clocks" and "bio-rhythms" in organisms, the way the development and behavior of organisms seems to be influenced by electromagnetic fields (which are essentially carriers of information, just as they are in computers), the use of pheromones by organisms to "synchronize" activity, the use of nonaudial communication channels by organisms to coordinate behavior, the effect of biofeedback on organic processes, the "Gaia hypothesis" of the biosphere's control over planetary climate, etc. have all become topics of interest. From the perspective of "autopoesis," organisms use reflexive information to self-organize, maintain homeostasis, and perhaps even direct their evolution. The links between geomagnetic activity, its influence on electronic signals, and its influence on human perceptions and psi activity and so forth, fit together from this perspective. As I've argued elsewhere, if computers can communicate through invisible transmissions (radio signals), why not human minds?

Some parapsychologists discuss the phenomena of how strong emotions and experiences might leave "imprints" in particular places, "tape recordings" of a sort which might actually represent "storage" of some happening or event. Psychometry or "object reading" might work because people "imprint" their feelings or experiences unto objects that are close to their person. Again, in an information universe, it might not be altogether inconceivable to conceive of how information might be transferred in this way. Like energy or matter, we might be expected to see it be conserved, even if it changes forms. The vector for information transmission might be, as in electronic devices, electromagnetic fields. The fact that so many Fortean phenomena seem to involve electromagnetic effects or disruptions of electronic devices seems to require some more attention.

Percipient-based Study of the Paranormal

Many Fortean researchers have slowly come around to the realization that even if unifying laws cannot be found for the phenomena themselves, we might gain by focusing less on the phenomena and more on who experiences them and why. The general assumption is that the people who experience these phenomena seem to basically be whoever is in the right place at the right time. However, this belies some basic observations of paranormal researchers, namely, that people who experience one type of phenomenon seem likely to experience other kinds. It's often assumed that one experience (say a UFO sighting) "triggers" the other occurences (poltergeist phenomena, etc.) But it might be better to think of some people as being "prone" to having these experiences by nature. Fortean researchers would do well to develop a "paranormal proneness profile." Then we can answer "why?"

Of course, we are often reluctant to do this, because we often assume that if a person reports a large number of disparate paranormal occurences, they are either a) suffering from some sort of disorder, say 'fantasy proneness,' and can't distinguish between fantasy and reality or b) acting as pathological attention-seekers desperate for validation. People seem credible if they have their one and only unusual event experience; otherwise they tend to be disdained. However, focusing on percipients is not necessarily indicative that one doubts the reality of their experiences or assumes they are simply "subjective"; rather, it's the search for patterns, which I believe are there if the Fortean investigator is at all interested in uncovering them. We should entertain the hypothesis that these events are not entirely independent of who's around to witness them; some even argue the phenomena are "reflexive" in responding to the expectations of percipients.

Kenneth Ring looked at a large sample of people who reported Near-Death (NDE) encounters, and discovered several interesting things. One, people who had had NDEs were likely to have had prior strange experiences (UFO sightings and ghost sightings were common). Two, after their NDE, they often had a remarkable change in their attitudes or sometimes even reported new "wild" talents such as psi. Three, all registered fairly high on the dissociative personality scale (one fact about such people is that they can more easily enter trance or be hypnotized, and that they report more often what are called 'dissociative experiences'). Fourth, almost all reported some history of some form of child abuse. It was the last fact that had the skeptics basically pouncing on this revelation. "False memory syndrome" and false allegations of child abuse or "Satanic ritual abuse" are another thing some "skeptics" often make a big deal about. So they leapt unto the idea that Ring's experiences were all simply inveterate fantasizers, or if they had in fact been abused, this "traumatization" led to a "need for attention and self-esteem" which led them to fantasize these experiences.

Ring suggested another framework for looking at these data. He pointed out that childhood dissociation might be a technique that an abused person might develop to adapt to a difficult situation. Because these people become strong dissociaters from an early age on, they find it easier to enter altered states of consciousness. Since people in such altered states might have a wider range of perception than ordinary people, Ring pointed out, this group might be more "prone" to experience paranormal events than a control group who might not be able to perceive them. While Ring's hypothesis might be wrong or right, he at least was on the right track: he was looking for common variables that might be found among experiencers of the paranormal, and he focused on how their range of perceptions might differ from ordinary people. That might be the basis of what I call a "percipient-based paradigm."

The percipient-based paradigm doesn't suggest that paranormal experiencers are necessarily genetically or otherwise essentially different from other people. It doesn't necessarily mean that some people just have "bad luck" and are "magnets" for weird occurences. It doesn't imply that they're mentally "sick" or somehow special or superior as compared to other people. Rather, as a framework, it tries to look at what might be different about the environment and histories of such people. As John Keel once said, "Ask the abductee what they had for breakfast." Again, as a paradigm, it only suggests

questions for research, not answers. But I think that this paradigm offers places to begin. Whether it's something they ate, something experienced as a child, the onset of an illness, or some other sociological, cultural, or psychological factor, we should be looking at how life changes in percipients connect to increased paranormal experiences. I think there are connections. Where I would focus first is on changes that alter neurochemistry and the person's bioelectromagnetic field, but that's just my own bias.

Abandon the "Supernatural"

These paradigms - the holographic paradigm, the multiverse paradigm, the nonlinear or multi-continuum time paradigm, the cyberverse paradigm, and the percipient paradigm - are in some ways strangely intercompatible, even if they all make predictions which seem to be at odds with what we presently know about the universe within the predominant Newtonian/mechanistic paradigm. That is, it doesn't seem to me the case that if any of these five worldviews are correct, they preclude the possibility of the others. In fact, in some ways, each of them almost seem to suggest the others. One might argue all five are part of an emerging viewpoint in physics which might be called "multiple vision," as opposed to Newtonian "single vision." Our existence might be one of multilinearity (chaos theory), multiple realities (quantum mechanics), multiply valid perspectives (relativity), multiple dimensions/universes/'planes of being,' multiple time continnua, multiple interrelated causes for each effect (multicausality.)

This contrasts again the "monovision" so predominant in Newtonian physics, with its simple linear chains of cause and effect, universal unchanging laws of mechanics, and belief in uniform, continuous time and space. As many have argued, this "single vision" that has emerged in Enlightenment European thought since the industrial and scientific revolutions, is in fact at odds with the way most other cultures of the world (and perhaps even pre-Enlightenment Europeans) have viewed it throughout "history." Many non-Western cultures do not view paranormal phenomena as somehow violating or transgressing their worldview; rather they take such events in stride. It is because, unlike mechanistically minded physicists, they don't have a view of the universe that precludes such things.

Fortean writers like Patrick Harpur have suggested that much of these phenomena have a "daimonic" quality. In the ancient context, daimones were beings in between gods and men - not quite either, having a little of the qualities of each. Harpur basically is suggesting that Bigfoot, your seemingly dead cousin Earl, spook lights, and so on, have a certain quality of liminality or betweenness. They're neither purely "psychic" or "in the mind" nor purely "physical" or "in the external world"; they're neither purely "subjective" nor "objective"; they might be what Jung called "psychoid" or having a little of the properties of each. As I've often put it, Fortean phenomena are not as real as your desk or your fist, but they're not as unreal as Santa Claus or Don Quixote. They're somewhere in between. I think it's dualistic thinking that prevents us from grasping what the 'excluded middle' or 'border zone' these phenomena inhabit might be.

Such "tweenitude" gets at the heart of these paradigms. All of them suggest that the main problem is that our understanding of reality is too limited. For one thing, it's socially constructed, and for another thing, it's the product of hominid brains that may not have evolved far enough to grasp the subtler, paradoxical parts. We've spent the last 5000 years looking for the order of things, but the things we've ordered (stars, elements, species, particles, etc.) have only been the easy stuff. Now comes the hard stuff, and like a lazy fox tired of jumping after grapes, we just want to pretend it's not there. We Forteans can go on in our own narrow, separate fields (Ufologists collecting UFO reports, parapsychologists studying psi and hauntings, cryptozoologists chasing 'alien animals,' 'earth mysteries' people running after crop formations, etc, etc.) or we can grasp that all the different fields of Fortean endeavor may be looking at small parts of a much bigger elephant. Even these paradigms are just slightly broader ways of looking at that elephant, which remains out of focus. Many fingers are pointing at a metaphorical Moon, but in this case, no one has gotten there yet.

Ultimately, in suggesting these paradigms, I am suggesting that as Forteans we can stop calling these bizarre events we catalogue as "supernatural." They are as much a part of the natural world as anything else that scientists are interested in, it's just that coming to a theory to explain their occurence may require an extension of how we describe and understand the "laws of nature." These emerging paradigms are not agreed upon by all physicists, mainly because they consider most of them to be unproved or unprovable. However, unlike psi or UFOs, they seem to be accepted as being within the bounds of 'rational' discussion... and they are being discussed by "mainstream" scientists. While these theories cannot yet predict Fortean events, they do seem able to explain them, which puts Forteanism on par with Darwinian evolution. (No scientist can point to a species and say exactly when it's going to evolve.) And thus flies out the window the skeptics' argument that Fortean events are impossible because they "defy physical law." When skeptics say that, I always ask them, "whose physics?" Not the physics that seems to be emerging to replace the old, worn-out clockwork physics of the mechanistic, Newtonian vision.