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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

From: jan@cyberzone.net (Jan Aldrich)
Date: Sat, 04 Jan 1997 19:56:33 -0800
Fwd Date: Sun, 05 Jan 1997 04:36:04 -0500
Subject: Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

> Date: Mon, 30 Dec 1996 08:59:16 -0500
> From: "Steven J. Powell" <sjpowell@access.digex.net>
> To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
> Subject: Re: UFO Update: Re: Philosophy of Science and UFOs
> References: <2.2.32.19961230000443.006ea454@mail.globalserve.net>

> > From: jan@cyberzone.net (Jan Aldrich)
> > Subject: Philosophy of Science and UFOs

> > However, I would like to throw out some more half-baked ideas.
> > 1. LARGE NUMBER OF REPORTS:
> > The actual number of ufo reports is unbelievably huge. Few, I think,
> > realize the sheer number of reports. Vallee, Don Johnson, Barry
> > Greenwood, and some of our French colleagues probably have an idea.
> > Something like 10,000 a year worldwide.

Indications are twice that from our press studies!

> But this is just the rawest data, no investigation whatsoever, and is
> therefore a wholly meaningless number.

> Obviously if the sightings have passed even basic investigation then
> they should not be included in a database upon which statistical
> analysis is to be performed.

Aime Michel and Ruppelt (and I) had the same idea. Collect huge amounts of data then look for patterns. Michel connected the dots. Orthoneny always seemed strange to me, but it was a systemic, if wrong, approach. So when connecting the dots didn't work Michel just walked away. Sigh. One fellow's night light might be another's CE. We only do this type of thing on an ad hoc basis. If there is an interesting encounter around, then we look for other reports in the area as confirmation.

I was interested to talk to a fellow who had a ufo organization in the 1960. He told me he sent his "good" reports to another organization. Sold his newspaper clippings to a sociologist who was doing a study of ufo beliefs and threw his NL away. I think maybe we have missed something here.

(We use to call NLs, Damn Lights and for good reason until Isabel Davis got after us. She said we could call them Damnable Lights because the British parliament had determined that that damn was objectionable while damnable was allowed in debates. If you read Dr. James McDonald's papers, you will find him referring to "Dammable Lights." While doing research in some 1930's London DAILY TELEGRAPH, I found the parliamentary prescription.)

Anyway, I feel, like Michel and Ruppelt, we should start with

everything. DL are generally low strangeness and low creditability but should be kept.

> There's a catch-22 here. Obviously everything starts with collecting
> data, then at some point moves to analyzing that data. The purpose of
> analysis is to find significant patterns and significant lack of
> patterning in the data. The third basic step can go two ways. One way
> is to take the general population patterns back to specific cases and
> confirm matching. The other angle is to begin to make predictions,
> collect additional data to test those predictions.

Collecting data has not really been address. We have made large statements based on small samples. Predictions are dangerous you start finding what you want to be there.

> The catch-22 is that we should technically be collecting all the data
> so as not to risk jeopardising the database and therefore the results.

> I think the safe way out of this catch-22 is to create selection
> criteria that don't affect the observation, just the
> observing/observer.

> For example, remove from the database all single person observations.

I violently disagree. Most reported data is from a single observer. He may list other witnesses by it is seldom that they are investigated for collaboration. Also, if you have a group of witnesses at the same spot, you start to get social dynamics. There is always a group leader who determines what is acceptable and what is not. Jeff Lindell has done some investigations along this line. If the group leader is skeptical the group is conservative. If the group leader is credulous "Katy bar the door." McDonald has a great illustrative letter about this in his file from one of the witnesses out at White Sands in the late 1940's.

> > However, the surprising thing is that Battelle did not use this data
> > as a check against the Air Force files. The USAF data was bias
> > because many of the reports were from official sources around military
> > and official installations which were forced to report ufos by
> > regulation while public reports were voluntary. If the same analysis
> > were done using clipping service reports, what patterns would appear?

> Actually, Battelle should have performed two in-parallel series of
> analysis on both sets of data to confirm/disprove the assumption of
> bias. I don't think (personal opinion) that the assumption is valid or
> meaningful.

> A personnel opinion is not the matter here. The sample was not randomized. There is a selection effect at work here. Perhaps the selection effect is indeed meaningless. However, the data should be view with caution. The parallel study is indeed a good idea.

> > 2. RELIABILITY AND CREDITABILITY

> > Vallee, Berliner, Hynek and others have addressed this in different
> > ways. The posting from Tom Rice discussed the military intelligence
> > system. In any database, this necessarily subjective determination,
> > should be taken into account. Don Berliner told me that when the UFO
> > EVIDENCE was written about 6000 reports were screened first for
> > reliable witnesses. The reports selected were then checked for
> > patterns.

> I don't know of an objective way for determining a reliable witness. I
> don't think its safe to cull the data based on observer-related
> criteria.

You don't need an objective way; you need a consistently applied criteria. It also does not need to be observer based. With 1947 data I am of necessity dealing mostly with items printed in the press. I think the factors I wish to take into account are the witness (his reliability), the reporter (where is the account? in a book, a newspaper, etc...how reliable is this), and the investigation. So if you had a database, you could start restricting the data based on the different gradations in each or averages of all. Also, I feel it is necessary to try to come up with an plausible explanation for each case with a confidence factor. Another words how confident are you that the explanation is correct. Then you might want to screen for case in which the confidence factor were low. Subjective criteria to be sure, but similar technics are used in many scientific applications.

> I think it is safe to separate the data based on
> observation-related criteria. If we're looking for a pattern, and if
> there are patterns, then those patterns should be present or at least
> not removed from the data simple by selecting data based on

> observation-related criteria. If a patten-type happens to be Silver
> Discoid then that should be reflected in both the multi-observer
> sightings _and_ the single-observer sightings -OR- there's a major
> problem with all the data.

Weather balloons or pibals also appear disklike in some cases. There are problems no matter what is tried.

> > 3. USAF, MOD, DND, ETC., STATISTICS
> > Just about everyone is impressed by statistic. In the CIA analysis
> > of the 1952 wave, they saw the AF claim of "only" 20% unexplained as
> > evidence that the AF was on the right track. The CIA thought however,
> > that the AF did not pay enough attention to possible patterns in the
> > ufo data. The small percent of unidentifieds is always a reason to
> > reject any further study.
>
> That was silly then and it is silly now.

You and I recognize this. The media, the public, and scientists with casual knowledge of the subject don't. It seems to make perfect sense despites Mark Twain's low opinion the use of statistics.

> Given the amount of complexity
> that is inherent in eyewitness observations of non-identified aerial
> objects we _should_ expect to have unidentifieds that remain that way
> _after_ investigation. The purpose of performing statistical analysis
> on that dataset is to _further_ the stalled investigation of those
> observations.

Exactly. See above.

> After all, do we need to collect data on how many times eyewitnesses
> observe the full moon and then perform statistical analysis on that data
> to determine that the Moon does indeed exist <grin>?
> Double <g>.

> My personal opinion is that earlier gov't-based and military-based data
> analysis was designed to explain as many cases as possible and use that
> dataset of explained cases as a statistical basis for ignoring the
> unexplained remainder. I think they properly assumed that the opposite
> approach, to collect and analyze the unexplained cases, was likely to
> yeild data patterning too closely consistent with existing classified
> aerial projects, or worse, too closely consistent with the media-based
> definition of "alien spaceships." (They were probably equally worried
> about both potential outcomes.)

Once again I agree.

> Well, we already know that the bulk of the unexplained cases 'seem' like
> "alien spaceships" because says so <grin>. It might be worthwhile to
> compare the isolated single observer sightings with the multi-observer
> sightings to see which and how many patterns exist in both datasets.
> Okay.

Thanks for the input, John. More food for thought. In Condon committee meetings half the time they spent calling each other names.

Best regards,

Jan

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