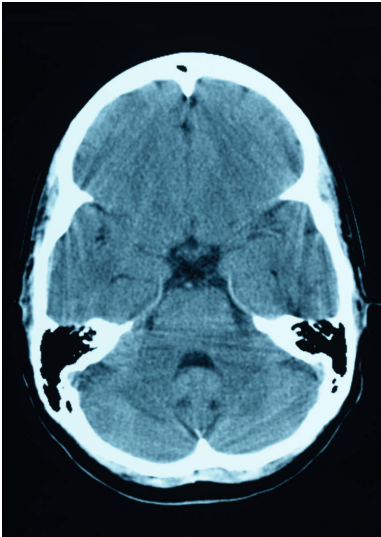


Bumps in the Night!!!!

Tools of the Trade

Human Mind

By Angela Sangster, Talk Paranormal



One of the most important tools a paranormal researcher needs going into an investigation is an understanding of the human mind and the 'tricks' it can play. It is incorrect to assume that our brains function as a computer does. A computer receives and stores what it is given whereas the human brain filters information, is subject to the power of suggestion, and finishes incomplete data so it makes sense to us. The following is some information about how our minds work and the ways it can affect our perception.

Apophenia- This refers to the brain's tendency to find patterns with information that in reality is random and useless. We are naturally geared to look for ways to make sense of what is seen and heard and in doing this, we may think we see patterns emerging out of irrelevant data. We see this often in conspiracy theories and religious dogma where people are looking for 'signs' or reaching for connections to validate what they believe--which can also be said of some paranormal phenomena.

Pareidolia: This is where the mind finds familiar patterns in random images and noises. We look at a cloud or listen to 'white' noise and our brains are confused by the non-descript shapes and sounds. In seeking to

make the image or noise recognizable, our minds 'fill in' what is missing. In visual pareidolia, the most common thing to see in a random images is a face while our ears will strain to find voices in jumbled noise. Patterns in wood grain, furniture, shadows, light refractions on mirrored surfaces, etc. can easily appear as a face or familiar shape. Sitting in a dark room, our brains will attempt to find an image to focus on which can create an optical illusion. White noise will start to sound like voices after a while. None of these things are paranormal, however they can seem that way unless we understand this.

Brain misfires- These are more common in cases of temporal lobe epilepsy, however they can occur in other instances as well. Extreme stress or fatigue can trigger a 'misfire' in the brain, causing hallucinations and feeling as though there has been an alteration in time and space. This can also be a side effect of certain medications, especially if there are ones being taken that should not interact. Hypnogogic and hypnopompic hallucinations (which can occur before going to sleep or upon waking up respectively) are examples of a brain misfire. Even over-use of caffeine or other stimulants can cause us to see, hear, and feel things that are not there. .

It is essential to study these and other facts about the human mind as a paranormal researcher. There are of course going to be times when a paranormal claim is the result of a delusional or personality disorder where facts and explanations are ignored in favor of a fantasy. All of that aside, the natural ways our brains finish images, seek patterns, and are subject to logical fallacies and pre-conceived beliefs has to be acknowledged for true critical thinking to begin. While our minds may play tricks on us, we are all also capable of utilizing common sense. In doing this, we have a better chance of separating what is paranormal from what isn't.

For further reading:

http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/13/health/psychology/13face.html?_r=1

<http://skepdic.com/apophenia.html>

<http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Hallucinations>