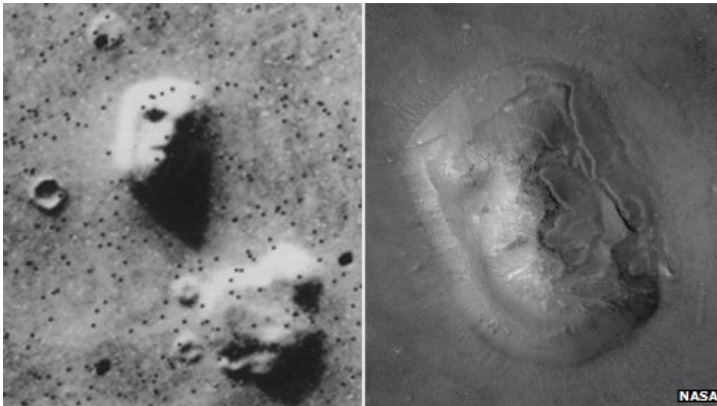


Pareidolia & the Inner Self

Most people have never heard of pareidolia. But nearly everyone has experienced it. The first time I really thought about it, I was 16 years old, and living with a wonderful German woman named Lyda. She lived in a tiny cottage; and she offered her couch to me when I was in need. Her heart was as big as the outdoors. She was very spiritual, a great teacher, expansive personality and an amazing cook. Lyda taught me many different things, including seeing differently.

Lyda speculated on her bathroom ceilings while soaking in the tub, painted randomly in crazy quilt fashion. The multicolored designs and the natural formations in the wood grain of the door offered many discussions surrounding the different animals in the patterns. We talked about this like one might talk about current news events, while sometimes only a passing comment or two. Interestingly, it has only been in the past few years that I learned that there was a word for this common phenomenon. Anyone who has looked at the Moon and spotted two eyes, a nose and a mouth has felt the pull of pareidolia, but just where is this pull coming from? What is pareidolia anyway?



From the 1976 Viking Orbiter photo, and a more recent close-up from the 2001 Mars Global Surveyor photo. This satellite photo is of a mesa in Cydonia, often called the Face on Mars. As you can see the later imagery from other angles did not contain the illusion.

When we look at this phenomena from its most basic perspective, it's "the imagined perception of a pattern or meaning where it does not actually exist," according to the World English Dictionary. It's picking a face out of a knotted tree trunk or finding zoo animals in the clouds. According to a traditional definition, the psychological phenomenon involves a vague and random stimuli, often an image or sound that is being perceived

as significant. Some common examples include seeing images of animals or face in clouds, the man in the moon or the Moon rabbit, and hearing hidden messages on records when played in reverse.

One physician, Dr. Tsao states that there are "Some patients (who) have strokes and are then able to recognize everything perfectly well except for faces....So he started questioning whether there really might be an area in the brain that is dedicated to face recognition." Dr. Tsao used functional magnetic resonance imaging to record which areas of the brain were activated when macaque monkeys were presented with stimuli

including fruits, gadgets, scrambled patterns, and faces. He discovered almost immediately that groups of cells in three regions of the brain's temporal lobe seemed to be strongly attuned to faces.

Before you start worrying about medical issues or psychiatric delusions, consider another explanation provided by American cosmologist, Carl Sagan. He suggested that our ability to notice faces in odd places was actually a survival mechanism. Seeing faces at a distance or when visibility was poor helped our ancestors determine friend from foe. However, this ability could also carry over into the phenomenon we experience today. So seeing that smiley face on your toast could be a genetic throwback to recognizing a friendly tribal member.

Accordingly, why are there so many religious figures represented and not Michael Jackson or Elvis? Some say it is because religious agents are typically less determined, (no one knows what Jesus or Mary looked like) than historical figures? Typically people will see whatever they are primed to see. Priming is a psychological term where an early stimulus influences response to a later stimulus. The man on the moon persists because we are primed on a basic level for face recognition.

Those individuals who discover this have been primed by religious upbringings and/or their current faith. For example, you won't find a Muslim claiming Jesus is staring at him from inside his toast. It will always be someone who has been primed with these images of their religion. In the Muslim's case, he would probably never see his prophet in his toast since images of Mohammed are sacrilegious and are not around to prime the population. Nevertheless, according to a study in Finland, people who consider themselves religious or believers in the supernatural are more likely to experience pareidolia. Why is that so? How does this inner dynamic seek expression and then exploration? How does our higher self (Spirit) interact with our physical bodies and our brains to deliver these messages? What if this phenomenon is a first step in a chain of spiritual awakenings?

What if spirit, our guides or higher self seek us out to speak to or through us and if so, for what purpose?

Medium Lisa Boussom has another take, "I was recently watching a show on TV where a man was reported to be able to pick up the presence of spirit in objects. The spirit wasn't actually IN the object, but their energetic imprint was upon the item. However, it was being reported that the spirit actually inhabited the item in question." Which makes us ask why? What would be the purpose of a spirit inhabiting an object? She went on to say that she could not think of one at all. True enough, "some spirits may have an affinity for certain items that they held dear while in the physical realm, however once they cross over they realize that things are just things." It's their living loved ones that are of importance to them from the Afterlife.

From a higher perspective of Spirit, how do we straddle the realms between the physical and the non-physical? One way is through the projection or manifestation of images and synchronicities. Spirit may use meaningful coincidences or synchronicities, symbols, sounds and images to reach out to us. These symbolic meanings are brought to us from our higher self, and in concert with our guides, in outward projections that allow us to open the door to a more evolving state of Self. There are many ways to reach out synchronistically, and pareidolia is only one way. What would great thinkers like Drs. Carl G. Jung and Robert J. Johnson, both Jungian Psychiatrists say about the psychology of these messages?

Their work with synchronicities and other symbolic and spiritual imageries have explored and straddled the realms of the spiritual as the inner dynamics of transformation. Perhaps they would say that our need to "own our shadow" the term Jung used to describe the hidden aspect of the ego or persona that may project outward to make manifest all that might be hidden from us. Dr. Johnson shows us that as we examine a life torn apart by accumulation of experiences, through our own inner work, we are restored to wholeness and as transformation takes place, the ecstatic, visionary, enlightened consciousness of which we are all capable emerges.

Included within the shadow elements are the collective unconsciousness' of humanity. The vast and diverse storehouse of archetypal energies, teeming with stories that play out in our histories. Puncture a hole in the canopy of this realm and we open the door to rise above dualism, the trademark of the collective. Thus the universe opens its expansive pathways to allow other imagery in that might be imprinted from a more otherworldly source.

Those pathways within the universe offer snapshots of the stream of consciousness. Who knows what is offered, because it is totally up to us. Once we are past projection from the archetypal canopy of the collective, we are more open to experience encounters from an extraterrestrial intelligence that may elude us during our waking hours. Or perhaps better said, awaken us during our daily unconscious meanderings.

Consequently, when we see bats, butterflies and devilish masks in those images, it speaks to us about an inner realm, our emotions, personalities and thought processes. So the next time a religious icon, symbol or something alien or otherworldly appears to you in a cloud above you or anywhere, it most likely means that you're creatively expressing, manifesting, exploring Self, and not at all crazy. There is a message coming to you from the Divine Spiritual Internet from which you are tethered, imprinting for all to see, and you to explore!

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