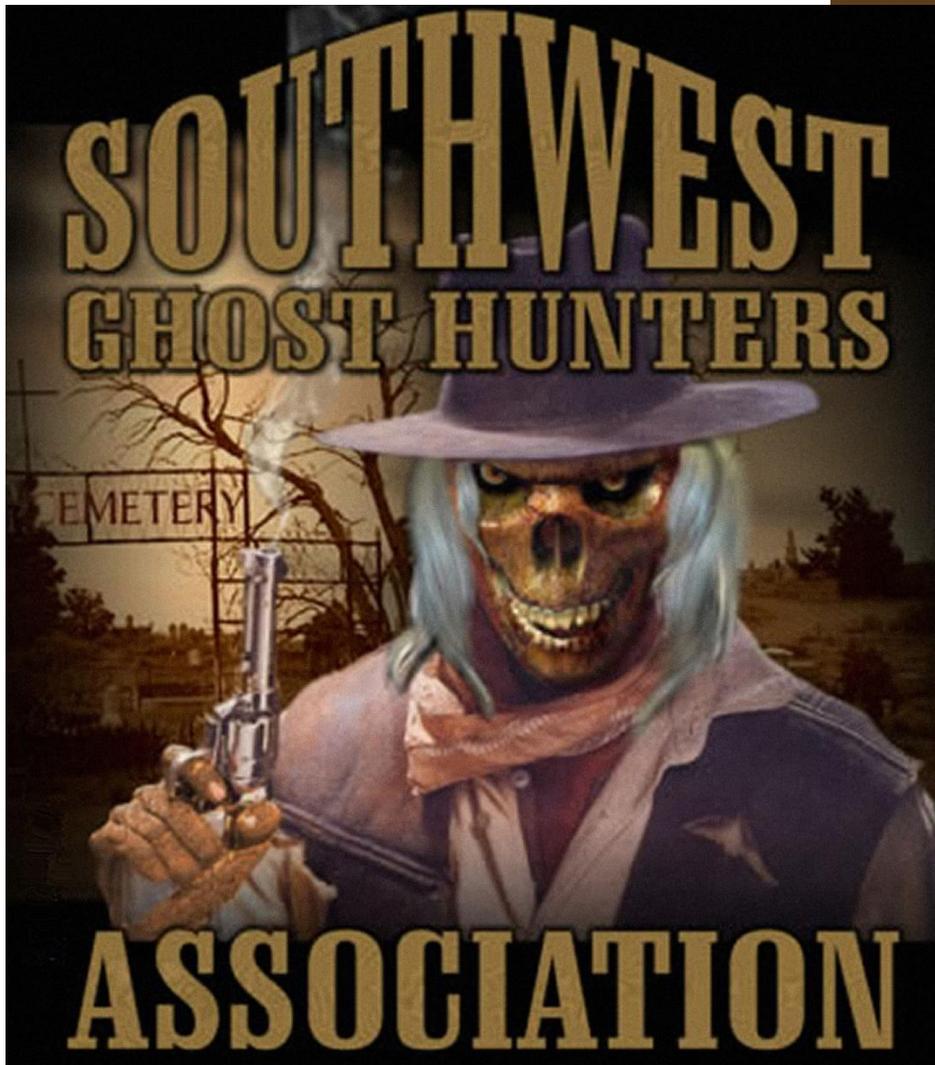


A basic guide to Apparitional Phenomena



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Introduction, what do we know about Apparitions?

Apparition is a general term for a visual experience in which there appears to be present a person or animal (deceased or living) that is in fact out of sensory range of the witness. By contrast, a haunting is a popular term for apparitions and other associated phenomena (raps, cold spots, sensed presence, etc.) at a particular location. Reports come from all cultures and ages.

The first major study was the 1894 "Census of Hallucinations", containing 830 first-hand accounts. In the 1940s, Louisa E. Rhine conducted her own study involving the collection and collation of 8000 case reports.¹ Only 10-20% of reports involve apparitions of dead people.

In the 1890's the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) was a mixture of believers and skeptics. However some of the researchers who worked on the theories of apparitions were strongly opposed to the "spiritualist" explanations of the phenomena. Myers and Gurney, in particular, believed that they had found evidence of telepathy. As a result, their opinion was that apparitions were all hallucinations that were "seeded" by an ESP message and their findings seemed to support this hypothesis. However, the SPR theorists did not ask about objects moving, or ghosts physically effecting objects because they had decided they were telepathically induced hallucinations. As such, these associated phenomena were incompatible with their hypothesis.

Observations and reports since their study have shown, that in a huge number of cases, apparitions appear to correspond with actual physical effects. Objects move, doors open and close and details of the apparitions were observed and recorded by multiple witnesses.

Parapsychologists usually differentiate between "haunts" (where an apparition is seen in a building many times by different witnesses) and "poltergeists" (where physical effects occur), but analysis of the collected studies shows that there is an apparent overlap. Now it could be that these physical effects are in fact hallucinations or misperception in themselves but the evidence is hardly overwhelming.

¹ Rhine, L. (1981). *The invisible picture*. Jefferson, NC; McFarland.

If the apparition appears while the witness is going to sleep, it occurs during the hypnagogic state², while waking up, it occurs during the hypnopompic state, and when fully awake it appears in the eidetic state.³ While many of these 'sighting' have logical explanations, many remain as mysteries.

Veridical Hallucinations

The main types of Apparition Encounters that are tangible have Verifiable Details associated with them. In psychology this phenomenon is called a Veridical Hallucination.

In this mundane sense, the term veridical hallucination expresses the recognition that the hallucination in question is genuine, and not a "dream or a product of fantasy". Second, the term veridical hallucination is used in parapsychology to denote a class of telepathic hallucinations. The German hallucinations researcher Edmund Parish (1861-1916) divided the class of telepathic hallucinations into veridical hallucinations and coincidental hallucinations.

While coincidental hallucinations are assumed to merely coincide with actual events in the external world, veridical hallucinations are thought to also reflect the content of such events. Or, in the words of the British physicist and founder of the Society for Psychical Research, William Fletcher Barrett (1844-1925), "Some hallucinations correspond with an appropriate real event occurring to another person; some accident, illness, emotion or death happening at that time to a distant friend".

Such hallucinations are termed *veridical* or truth-telling; their study is a branch of Psychology, and is an important part of psychical research. There may be no more substantiality about such visual hallucinations than there is about the reflection of oneself in a looking-glass. The image in the mirror is veridical and caused by a neighboring objective reality; in like manner, is a mental image coinciding with some distant unseen real occurrence; but the mental image is not derived through the organ of sense, as is the reflection seen in the mirror."

² Schacter, D. (1976). *The hypnagogic state*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 83, 452-481.

³ Haber, R (1979). *Twenty years of haunting eidetic imagery*. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 2, 583-629.

As used in the parapsychological tradition, the term veridical hallucination commonly appears in opposition to falsidical hallucination.

The guiding principle behind this latter classification (veridical-falsidical) is the alleged relationship with actual events in the external world. In spite of the use of the adjective veridical, in the view of some authors the term veridical hallucination still has a certain connotation of subjectivity or morbidity connected with the word hallucination.⁴ However, since it contains a perception in lieu of a stimulant, the encounter is categorized as a hallucination.

Categories

Apparitions typically fall into three distinct categories.

1. **Crisis Apparitions:** A crisis apparition is where the witness supposedly sees a figure of another person (often a relative or friend) at another locality. It is seen within 12 hours of the actual time of the traumatic event.
2. **Death Bed Apparitions:** An apparition seen by a dying person that is unknown by them to be Dead, and likewise unknown to the Family to be Dead. (Such as a relative who unexpectedly died hours or days before, but news had not yet reached the family of their demise, and the entire family assumed them to be alive, yet the dying person sees the deceased family member, which is later confirmed.) In some cases the family may be aware of the death but have decided not to tell the witness about in fear it would make them more ill, and just before they die they see the familiar figure.
3. **Residual Apparitions:** Apparitions of the dead (ghosts) are usually associated with a particular building (haunting). Visitations can continue sporadically, over several years. "Something" remains at the locality after the death of the material body. The witness is seeing an agent that exists independently of, and generally out of awareness of, the mind of the witness. This model of Myers (1903) has recently been promoted by

⁴ http://hallucinations.enacademic.com/1956/veridical_hallucination

Gauld⁵. A variant is the "survival of fragments" model; apparitions are "lifeless fragments" (i.e., "static images void of consciousness").

Classification of Cases and Observations

Historically the basic data for both hauntings and poltergeists has always had very different levels of quality. The high quality cases typically have multiple independent reliable witnesses who report reasonably unambiguous events over extended periods of careful observation. For hauntings, cases like the Cheltenham Ghost fall into this class. Such high caliber cases are very rare.⁶

Far more common are what we might call "low grade" cases, in which one or more individuals may report strange sounds, unusual smells, perhaps fleeting observations of amorphous forms (or even more realistic images).

These might include unusual body sensations and even feelings of paralysis. Some might include a few unusual object movements or, at least, unexplained placements of objects. These become "cases" when the person or persons who are noticing them decide that the event or collection of events cannot be explained by normal causes.⁷

Low Grade:

Apparitions are most often reported by "fantasy-prone" persons, the 4% of the population who are good hypnotic subjects, have vivid imagery skills, and who report a wide range of other psychic and or paranormal experiences.⁸

Low Grade cases/observations are often explainable by one or more of the following factors.

a) Misperceptions

The report has little merit, being based on distortions of perception (e.g., because of poor light, short duration, pareidolia), and on emotional exaggerations. Hoaxes can be common, especially for ghost photographs. Misperception is misinterpreting something seen, heard, felt or otherwise

⁵ Gauld, A. (1982). *Mediumship and survival*. London; Heinemann

⁶ http://www.scientificexploration.org/journal/reviews/reviews_16_2_broughton.pdf

⁷ http://www.scientificexploration.org/journal/reviews/reviews_16_2_broughton.pdf

⁸ Wilson, S C & Barber, TFX (1982). The fantasy-prone personality. In: Imagery (A. Sheikh, ed). New York; Wiley.

sensed. Misperception alone accounts for most of the reported paranormal experiences.

b) Imagery or Hallucination

The witness, often psychic or a suggestible person unconsciously generates an apparition as a response to suppressed needs or beliefs. The source of the impressions would be the conscious or unconscious mind of the witness, or more speculatively, archetypal images from the "collective unconscious".⁹ An old variant is the model of Gurney (1886) and Tyrrell (1953), now called the super-ESP hypothesis; the apparition is at least partly composed of telepathic data that is then projected out from the mind of the witness. Louisa Rhine found that input of data from outside was unnecessary in all but one of 8000 reports; apparitions were hallucinations created totally within the mind¹⁰ (Falsidical Hallucination). The most typical examples of Falsidical Hallucinations are moving shadows (Shadow people) and fleeting images typically lasting less than two seconds. It is important to understand that the witness did actually have an experience and will strongly believe so, however the experience is explainable. A measurement of the witness' bias (belief) towards the paranormal can often correlate directly to the potential of experiencing a Falsidical Hallucination. The hallucination may also trigger the fight or flight response in the witness.

c) Myth Building

The account of the phenomenon is comprised of second and third hand accounts. There are no direct witnesses to the reported paranormal activity. Myth building is the elaboration of elements in a story. These elements may have some degree of truth while others may be completely false. It is the essential building blocks used in the construction of myths and urban legends. The designation suggests nothing about the story's veracity, but merely that it is in circulation, exhibits variation over time, and carries some significance that motivates the community in preserving and propagating it. Essentially, it is nothing more than a ghost story.

⁹ Evans, H (1984). Visions, apparitions, alien visitors. Wellingborough; Aquarian.

¹⁰ Rhine, L. (1981). The invisible picture. Jefferson, NC; McFarland.

High Grade

High Grade observations include veridical information that is revealed to the witness/witnesses about the apparition's appearance. Details such as specific clothing, facial/body features, injuries, movements (having a distinct walk or limp) and smells (such as the distinct smell of specific lady's perfume that the deceased person wore in life) that can be confirmed or compared with the reports of other witnesses is vital. Other elements which can make an observation High Grade include;

- They reappear in the same place over time to different witnesses. The phenomenon repeats behavior.
- The apparition is seen in a specific location (the place of death or a great tragedy) and if veridical information from that sighting is later verified as factual about the deceased, such as matching their description with an old photograph, being told who killed them, the location of valuables, or specific phrases known being uttered which matches their personality that known only to living relatives/friends.
- Observations where multiple people, either together or independently, describe the exact same details of the phenomenon they have witnessed. This is especially important if they had no prior knowledge of the location or its history. If the apparition is unknown to the witness at the time of the sighting but was identified by other means that identifies it as a factual person. This may have been obtained through historical research or when the witness or witnesses speaks to other people like relatives and friends, or sees them in a photograph.
- The apparition either directly tells them or shows them something important (a family secret, a lost will, how they died, who killed them, etc) that is later independently verified to be true.
- The duration of the sighting is over three seconds and the witness can make out enough visual details to provide a good description.

The above types of Veridical Encounters highly suggest that when you examine them, many contain strong veridical elements aside from merely "seeing a ghost". However they are very rare and the burden of proof is harder to obtain, as these are subjective experiences.

“Grading” cases and observations and understanding the results of prior research is a vital part in examination of paranormal claims as it dictates the direction and methodology an investigator should use to examine the available testimony and evidence to reach a conclusion. Low Grade cases are often explainable by properly identifying the reported phenomenon as natural or manmade in origin. High Grade cases are much more difficult to tackle and will present more of a challenge.

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