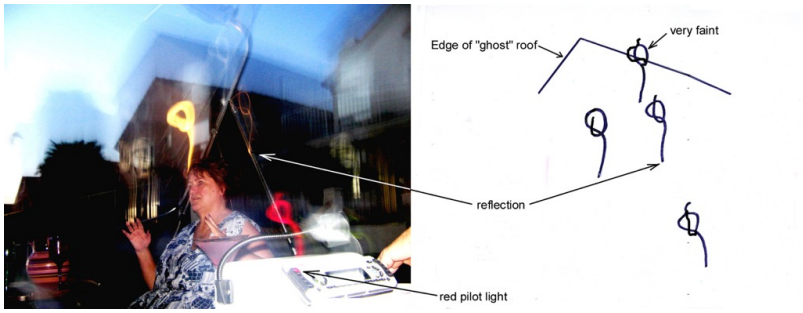

Pareidolia takes many different forms. It's the tendency of certain individuals to see images of animals or faces in clouds, to
perceive shapes where there are none, or to hear hidden messages in recordings when they're played in reverse. Another currently popular variety of this delusion is the "orbs" craze that we handled several places here on SWIFT. To refresh your data-base on such matters, see
www.randi.org/jr/051002.html
and do a search on the word "conditioner" to bring up the item. Then go to
www.randi.org/jr/051702.html
and search for "opinion" for the specific item. There are many more – 70+ – "orb" references in SWIFT archives.

Running through a mass of CDs that I have at the JREF, I came upon two examples of the visual sort of pareidolia which I'll share with you here. The first is the result of a camera using a flash, but being jerked just as the exposure was made. The photo shown (click to enlarge) was taken of what is perhaps a printer in the right foreground, with a woman seated beside the camera – her reflection shows in the window. You can see that the camera went through a tight twist that resulted in a sort of spiral being scanned onto the film by lights, while the shutter was open, but before the flash fired. The indicator light on the machine provided the red spiral, starting in the light itself, then continuing to trace its image after the flash went off. The same thing happened with the faint spiral that was traced by a light reflecting off the chrome-plated rod that goes out of the back of the machine. And, if you look very carefully, you'll see *my face*

just to the left of the yellow spiral, and down a bit!

Hey, I'm just as good at this game as any other woo-woo!

The other photo shows a woman – mercifully disguised here – in her home, which she told us was being attacked by a huge "spirit bird," and she submitted the photo as proof. Looking at the basic photo, you'll see nothing, but in the enlargement you just might make out the avian monster she was able to see immediately when she saw the print. I outlined it for you in the third photo. Now, you see how easy this sport is?

But seriously, these folks really believe they've found significance where there is none, and they

can get themselves worked up into a frenzy very easily. They often genuinely fear that something is “after” them, and resort to charms and incantations for protection. Ever since the art of photography was invented, it has been so, and now digital photography has taken on its own set of spooky attributes.

Will this never end…?