

Peer Review

Review of: "Collective Pareidolia"

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The paper by Robert Bednarik is an interesting experiment concerning pareidolia and rock art. The students, who had the task of making paper impressions of the stones, produced numerous petroglyphs (although the experts could not detect any on the stones).

This is a good example of how instructions and expectations can influence the production of pareidolia. In psychology, we use analogue random-noise images and influence pareidolia production through instructions. If we tell the subjects to find faces, they will find and describe them. If we ask them to find animals, they will find animals in these noise images.

What makes the experiment extraordinary is the haptic component: the students fabricated the pareidolia with papier-mâché and ink! The phenomenon therefore consists of more than just the perceptual components.

The discussion could be improved if they would go beyond the visual system and also focus more on the cognitive aspects. In my opinion, the semantic knowledge of the students plays a major role, as they are familiar with these petroglyphs. The results of the experiment with dental students would certainly be very different. The discussion could also benefit from discussing the possible reasons why the experts did not recognise any pareidolia in the stones. It can be postulated that expert knowledge protects the brain from ambiguous visual information.

Just one small point at the end: I don't think facial peidolias are the most common in humans, but animals, if you leave the instruction neutral.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.