

You walk into a house, digital recorder in hand and begin to talk. Your questions, sometimes very personal questions, are accentuated only by a pause for answers without really listening for the response, then you walk into another room and repeat the process. Such is the standard procedure for a paranormal investigator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While this might seem to be normal procedure, you don't have to go back all that far in our evolution to find a time when this was not the case.

Fifty years ago, there were no digital recorders and while parapsychologist theorized about spirit communications, most of that study was limited to the lab. I first used a tape recorder at an active haunting in Manhattan in 1977, dragging a huge Wolensak reel to reel recorder into a haunted bar in Greenwich Village, setting it on the bar itself, in hopes of hearing ghostly voices.

Historians will tell you that the search for Electronic Voice Phenomenon (EVP) was ushered in by Friedrich Juergenson while attempting to record bird calls in 1959, although the theory of EVPs began earlier when Thomas Edison suggested such a phenomenon was possible in 1920. My personal introduction came when Ray Bayless explained his work with Attila von Szalay using wire recorders and Scott Rogo and I decided to take those experiments into the field. With the simultaneous invention of the Panasonic cassette recorder, which could be hand held or at least hung over your shoulder, the practice blossomed.

While field teams were experimenting with portable recorders, another faction was working on EVPs of another kind; this was the birth of the ITC movement which led to our own Mini-Box technology years later. The ITC'ers were working on real time communications, literally a telephone to the dead, not just experimenting with random voice signals. But they were not the first to report radio signals that included voice messages.

David Sarnoff, a young telegrapher with the Marconi Wireless Company in NYC first reported hearing voices on the ship to shore frequencies. In fact, the idea, which was ludicrous then, almost cost Sarnoff his job! He claimed that while sitting at his station in Manhattan, he heard voices over his magnetic earphones. That was deemed impossible, the signals Sarnoff was paid to monitor were immense and no voice communications existed. Sarnoff's job was saved by a turn of fate; he was the operator on duty who first heard the world telegraphy code,

S-O-S, which had only recently been added to the lexicon of radio operators at sea, replacing the old code C-Q-D, which was harder to send at high speed. That S-O-S was the first cry for help from the fatally damaged Titanic and Sarnoff became a hero, going on to found NBC and an illustrious career that included the use of Television and Radar during World War II. But Sarnoff loved to tell friends about his “voices” will on duty at the Wannamaker Building as a youth and never swerved from his accounts.

Assuming that the Sarnoff story is true, (and I was present one evening when he confirmed it) the key may not be in the giant Marconi spark gap transmitters or receivers of their day. The answer is possibly more simple. Sarnoff’s headphones, which utilized magnetic pick-ups for those spark signals. The headphone’s were possibly picking up EVPs, just like the magnetic heads of a tape recorder a half century later. This simple answer however, alluded researchers for generations. When I first suggested it to Scott Rogo he was impressed, while Bayless felt that there had to be something much more elaborate at hand, but as I put it to Bayless back then, “If so, why don’t I hear ghostly voices along the random Ham radio frequencies?” The presence of high EMF from the transmitters was a non-issue then.

But the real question is not so much how to capture the EVP, but where they comes from and is the recording of these voices enhanced by certain operators over others? Can a psychic capture these illusive signals more quickly or of better quality than anyone else? The answer to that is probably yes, not for any electronic reasoning, but rather it is argued that some spirits befriend some individuals over others, and thus may be more cooperative.

Basically, the EVP can be placed in any two of four general categories; words and phrases that can be easily understood vs. messages that have to be interpreted and EVPs that were audible to those present at the time of the recording vs. EVPs that can only be heard on the recording. Once you study an EVP under these conditions, you come to a more clear understanding of the nature of the phenomenon.

Today, there are different schools of thought on these categories, with purists claiming that the true Electronic Voice Phenomenon has to be heard only on the recording medium and “In the clear,” or understandable without the need of interpretation or manipulation. This is based on a simple concept, if the words are audible to the human ear, they are not electronic in

nature and if you can't understand the word or phrase without aids it is probably true communication. While many accept this thesis, the ASUP tends to accept all four categories as true EVPs unless proven to be otherwise. A disembodied voice is certainly as interesting to study as one that only shows up on tape and those messages that need enhancement or further clarification are no less in need of study.

It is however interesting to note that some researchers are now feeding EVPs into a Voice Recognition Software system, suggesting that if the recorded sound fits the algorithms associated with the VRS technology, it is indeed true speech, while any rejected recordings are simply artifact. This is a very interesting hypothesis except for one glitch; each year the manufacturers of these VRS packages enhance the systems nominally to allow for the recognition of dialects, regional speech and poor recording quality. I might suggest that in a few years every recording will be recognizable, even those that are obviously not paranormal! For the moment, the best judge is the well trained human researcher with a good ear for tone, not to mention a better mastery of languages and dialects.

Returning to our categories, of those that are truly electronic, we have both easily understandable and phrases open to interpretation. When we began the EVP research as part of every field investigation, we threw out unintelligible recordings; they may well be paranormal, but they are also basically useless as communications. That of course, might have been a grievous error; as I learned early on, when two trainees mentioned recording they had failed to report because they fit the unintelligible profile. Interested, I asked to hear on anyway. The recording was almost 6 seconds long, a virtual novel by EVP standards and spoken in Latin... unintelligible to the investigators, "yes" but certainly not worthless. To that end we now covet having members who are conversant in even common foreign languages. We now categorize acceptable EVPs as any recording that seems to include the tone and cadence of language. Is a 'click' language? You tell me! We certainly collect enough of them, it could be an effort at communication however, which is why we include them.

This brings us to the modern sticking point of EVP work and possibly the highest point of theoretical communications with the "other side" wherever that might be. Communications utilizing BOX technology. First, it has to be noted that the study of the Mini-Box is still an infant

undertaking, so anything we venture to say at this point is only theoretical, while others accept the phenomenon whole cloth and have moved on to more extreme considerations. The ASUP acknowledged that the Box scans, either by design or at random, frequencies in the ordinary AM radio band and plays them accordingly, giving the listener a chopped up auditory visualization of the band. For the purpose of our discussion here, we will not go so far afield as to question why AM and not ULF for instance... ULF “voices” are yet another matter.

The fact is that once “Warmed up,” the device will capture words and phrases, some with extreme clarity, others open to interpretation. For instance, when using the Box in my presence, it is not unusual for it to repeat my name, as if it were recognizing my presence in the room... if you think about it, that simple act by an electronic device is astounding enough to warrant study. The Box can do the same when Ron Ricketts, the ASUP’s Director for Research and Technology is present, which once you fall into this rabbit hole, is not all that strange... after all it was Ricketts who built the devices and Moran who fostered the project from the beginning... the Box is simply recognizing its lineage.

The Box has to date been tested in several ways, both in field work and the lab. In field work it has clearly given names of people, long dead, who were the center of our investigation as well as other names we did not recognize from prior research. That too is amazing.

We find ourselves on paranormal “thin ice” however when the witnesses begin to interpret what is being said. This is not unusual, researchers often voice opinions on EVPs captured during case field work, but when working with the Box, we are in real time in most cases and tend to say what we think we hear. Attempts to change the protocol to say that researchers simply write down what they think was said, simply does not work and suggesting that they refer to the recordings of a session is equally a problem, like the recorded EVPs, what is heard “in the open” and what shows up on tape is often two different things entirely. This too is part of the broader EVP phenomenon.

After careful consideration, at least for the moment, we will continue to “Edit on the fly” with field investigators saying what they hear, when they hear it. In some cases, with does well in others it does not, but it will continue until another suggestion is made. Some have gone so

far as to say the Box should not yet be used in field work altogether, but in reality, some of the best recordings and material has come under such conditions.

All of this being the case, we turn to the content of the messages we are getting. With the exception of the audio we have from the Catfish Plantation, the ASUP researchers have never had any negative language during testing. At the Catfish however we did hear what was reportedly the voice of a dark entity tell the Coordinator, “Shut up old man!”, with similar greetings to one of the K-2 operators, referring to her as a “Little Bitch.” This of course only proves that the Box can and sometimes does communicate with “Potty Mouths,” but I don’t accept the claims of demonic communications, any more than I accept the concept of a Ouija Board being intrinsically evil. There are many, not so nice people in our world and after death we have to accept that we will cross their paths in equal number.

The true misguidance comes from the interpretation of messages or words and phrases both from the Mini-Box, and recording equipment in general. The ASUP is attempting to alleviate some of these problems by introducing the use of the H-2 recoding system, that will capture audio in a 360 degree area with several microphones and onboard technology to pinpoint a spectrum. These have worked well in the field, although while their sensitivity is remarkable, it causes another problem, often picking up voices from several rooms away. Hopefully, better field practices can fix this problem and the H-2 is certainly more than worth the effort. The H-2 has already proven its worth in the field, drawing out sounds and voices to intelligible levels.

Returning however to basics, there is a real problem with interpretation of those marginal recordings; the problem is one of “matrixing.” The human mind routinely fills in the blanks when it can’t hear a word or phrase clearly; that same is true when listening to questionable responses in a EVP. Matrixing is an acknowledged problem to which we currently have no defense, except by using multiple reviewers, that in that case, the investigators have to be separated, so as not to lead each other in one interpretation or another.

All of this is a very brief overview of EVP research, an exciting field for study that ASUP has been active in for decades. This document only scratches the surface of the topic, so if you

have further questions or want to learn more about our research program, guidelines, etc., please do not hesitate to ask.

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