

Hallucinations

By Oliver Sacks

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To many people, hallucinations imply madness, but in fact they are a common part of the human experience. These sensory distortions range from the shimmering zigzags of a visual migraine to powerful visions brought on by fever, injuries, drugs, sensory deprivation, exhaustion, or even grief. Hallucinations doubtless lie behind many mythological traditions, literary inventions, and religious epiphanies. Drawing on his own experiences, a wealth of clinical cases from among his patients, and famous historical examples ranging from Dostoevsky to Lewis Carroll, the legendary neurologist Oliver Sacks investigates the mystery of these sensory deceptions: what they say about the working of our brains, how they have influenced our folklore and culture, and why the potential for hallucination is present in us all.

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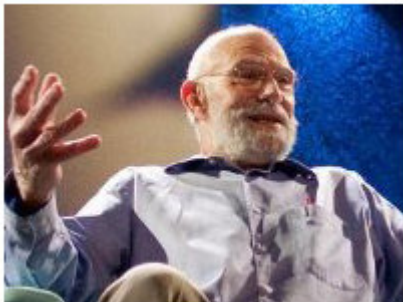
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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, November 2012: A familiar song on mental repeat, a shadowy movement in an empty house--many of us experience minor visual and auditory hallucinations and think nothing of it. Neurologist and professor Oliver Sacks concerns himself with those for whom such breaks with reality are acute and life altering. Dr. Sacks' latest book--one of the most compelling in his fascinating oeuvre--centers on Charles Bonnet syndrome, a condition characterized by intricate visual hallucinations. Weaving together case studies with anecdotes from his own past and accessible medical explanations, Dr. Sacks introduces us to Sharon, whose vision is invaded by Kermit the Frog; Gertie, whose phantasmal gentleman caller visits each evening, bearing gifts; and a host of other patients whose experiences elicit both sympathy and self-reflection. (The good doctor also shares his own experiments with hallucinogenic drugs, to comic and insightful effect.) *Hallucinations* is Oliver Sacks at his best: as learned, introspective, and approachable as we could possibly imagine. --*Mia Lipman*

The Neurological and the Divine: An Interview with Oliver Sacks



The following is an excerpt from a Q&A with Dr. Sacks published on Omnivoracious, the Amazon Books blog. [Click here to read the full interview.](#)

Mia Lipman: In Hallucinations, you mention that your childhood migraines are one of the reasons you became a neurologist. How did they help shape your path?

Dr. Sacks: My experiences go back to my first memories of when I was three or four, suddenly seeing a brilliant zigzag which seemed to be vibrating, then enlarged and covered everything to one side. This has happened innumerable times since, but that first time was very terrifying...I know I was in the garden, and part of the garden wall seemed to disappear, and I asked my mother about it. She too had classical migraines, so she explained what it was about and said that it was benign and it would only last a few minutes, and I'd be none the worse. So though I'm not in love with the attacks, it's nice to know that one can live with this quite well.

So that early experience made you curious about why this was happening to you?

Indeed, and there were other experiences. Sometimes it was just color, perhaps in one half of the visual field, or things would be frozen and I couldn't see any movement. So I think this gave me a very early feeling that it's only the privilege of a normal brain which allows us to see the way we do—and that what seems to be a simple vision in fact must have dozens of different components, and any one of these can go down. So it was a learning experience for me as well.

Speaking of learning experiences, you talk in the book about a period in your 30s when you did a lot of hallucinogenic drugs—

Ah, I thought that would come up. [Laughing.]

Of course, it's the best part! I especially liked your description of the results as "a mix of the neurological and the divine." What did this self-experimentation teach you about your field, as well as personally?

I can't conceal that my motives were sort of mixed, but these were learning experiences as well as recreational ones, and occasionally terrifying ones. The gain, I think, [is that] it's a way of revealing various capacities and incapacities in the brain, including, perhaps, mystical ones...I quote William James, who, after taking nitrous oxide, said that it showed him there were many forms of consciousness other than rational consciousness, and that these seem to be uncovered one by one. And that's quite an experience. I do not recommend it to anybody, and I hope my writing about these things is not seen as a recommendation. I think I'm very lucky to have survived them, which several of my friends and contemporaries didn't.

> Continue reading "The Neurological and the Divine: An Interview with Oliver Sacks"

From Bookforum

Many of the observations in Sacks's book are couched so modestly and gently that they seem not reductive but transcendent, the dependence of belief on biology representing one more example of the remarkable grace to be found in the operations of the human mind. —Jenny Davidson

Review

“Dr. Sacks conjures apparitions in language that has an easy, tactile magic. . . . He illuminate[s] the complexities of the human brain and the mysteries of the human mind.” —Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

“Beguiling. . . . Sacks presents a field guide to our quirky operating system’s powers of deception with storytelling that makes readers feel like medical insiders.” —*Chicago Tribune*

“Elegant. . . . An absorbing plunge into a mystery of the mind.” —*Entertainment Weekly*

“Humane, compassionate. . . . These tales are at turns delightful, entertaining, bizarre and sometimes downright terrifying.” —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“This doctor cares deeply about his patients' experiences—about their lives, not just about their diseases. Through his accounts we can imagine what it is like to find that our perceptions don't hook on to reality—that our brains are constructing a world that nobody else can see, hear or touch. . . . Sacks has turned hallucinations from something bizarre and frightening into something that seems part of what it means to be a person. His book, too, is a medical and human triumph.” —*The Washington Post*

“[Sacks] covers a broad range of sensory disturbances. . . . One of the pleasures of reading *Hallucinations* is understanding how complex human reality often trumps attempts to categorize it.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

“Sacks’ science writing is always revelatory, and there are moments in *Hallucinations* when seeing things

can feel downright life-affirming.” —*Time*

“The greatest living ethnographer of those fascinating tribes who live on the outer and still largely uncharted shores of the land of Mind-and-Brain.” —*The Guardian* (London)

“Fascinating and engaging. . . . Sacks uses the unique mixture of patient anecdote, memoir, scientific information, and broad reference to literature, art, music, history, and philosophy that has characterized all his work.” —*The Boston Globe*

“It is rare, indeed, when such an expert is also a talented writer. . . . It is remarkable to see the consistency of this literate, inquiring mind.” —*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

“[A] mesmerizing casebook of neurological marvels.” —*New York Magazine*

“Sacks writes, as usual, with a sharp mix of clinical precision, curiosity, and compassion.” —*The Daily Beast*

“Fascinating. . . . With his special mix of patient case studies, historical accounts, reader correspondence and personal experience, Oliver Sacks has again found a way to unlock one of the mysteries of our brains.” —*The Miami Herald*

“Escorts the reader through case studies and literary excursions into the fantastical land of our perceptions. . . . His vignettes are short, pungent and self-contained. They join his earlier books, starting with *Awakenings* in 1973—all building blocks that snap our increasing knowledge of the brain into focus.” —*The Plain Dealer*

“A brisk but characteristically absorbing survey of the many ways human beings perceive things that are not there. . . . [Sacks] gives us the exceptional and the idiosyncratic.” —*Salon*

“Should be required reading for anyone in a caregiver position. . . . Blends centuries-old medical wisdom, current research, and observation of his own patients into an engaging summary of every way our brains seek to depart from reality.” —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“A thoughtful and compassionate look at the phantoms our brains can produce.” —NPR

“Wondrous.” —*Elle*

“A super-fascinating and accessible-to-lay-people adventure in neuroscience. . . . Sacks is crazy-smart, and it shows. But he’s also just flat-out amazed by the brain, and it’s an enthusiasm you can’t help but catch.” —Book Riot

“Amazing. . . . Sacks’s temperament . . . facilitates that extraordinary humanity, that loving curiosity about the experiences of other people, that near-magical ability to see how even the most seemingly devastating losses may be remedied by the mind’s remarkable powers of compensation.” —*Bookforum*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jill Davis:

Hallucinations can be one of your nice books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand,

bit entertaining however delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to get every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Hallucinations but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource information that maybe you can be among it. This great information can easily drawn you into fresh stage of crucial pondering.

Cara Fultz:

In this era globalization it is important to someone to find information. The information will make a professional understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information simpler to share. You can find a lot of personal references to get information example: internet, magazine, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher this print many kinds of book. Often the book that recommended to you personally is Hallucinations this publication consist a lot of the information with the condition of this world now. This kind of book was represented how do the world has grown up. The dialect styles that writer make usage of to explain it is easy to understand. The writer made some investigation when he makes this book. Here is why this book ideal all of you.

Hoyt Adkins:

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