Hallucination everywhere

Description

Perception of the world is a â??controlled hallucination.â?• Thatâ??s one of the main propositions of the recent book by neuroscientist Anil Seth, *Being You: A New Science of Consciousness*.

For me the idea that the things we perceive in the world are conditioned by what we imagine, or project into it, accords with the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger. Hereâ??s something we wrote as a summary footnote in *Interpretation in Architecture*, initially penned by my co-author Adrian Snodgrass.

> â??*Heidegger, Being and Time*, Â¶31â??33 (pp. 182â??203). Heidegger terms these three forestructures â??fore-havingâ?? (*Vorhabe*), â??fore-sightâ?? or â??fore-seeingâ?? (*Vorsicht*), and â??foreconceptionâ?? or â??fore-hypothesisâ?? (*Vorgriff*). *Vorhabe* includes all the culturally acquired skills and practices we employ in acts of interpretation; these cultural practices are constitutive of our being, and thus determine what we find intelligible. *Vorsicht* includes all the resources of a common descriptive language, the vocabulary or conceptual scheme we bring to the act of interpretation, and which determines what we count as real and what are relevant aspects of what we interpret. *Vorgriff* is a hypothesis we have concerning the thing being interpreted; it is the â??conceptual reservoirâ?? that we hold in advance and bring to the interpretive actâ?• (267).

The term â??hallucinationâ?• is more provocative than â??forestructure.â?• It implies a distance from reality, being in a state of diminished cognition, dreaming, under the influence, as if deceived by our senses. It is transgressive and altogether something out of the ordinary.

In fact the point Seth makes is that this â??hallucinatoryâ?• state is the normal human condition. Perception of the world works because we are able to imagine and anticipate.

In an interesting TED talk Seth plays an audio of a human voice reciting a particular phrase. It is distorted in such a way that it is impossible to interpret. He then plays the audio undistorted. The words are clear. He plays the distorted version again. The audience gasps. The distorted audio is as before, but now the words comes through loud and clear. We have been primed for what we are to hear. Expectation affects perception.

For all its complexity, perception is a standard cognitive facility. So is imagination. This prompted me to recall a proposition colleagues and I made early on, that creativity is cognitively standard.

Though some would seek to position creativity as an extraordinary cognitive facility exercised by the few, we took arguments about neural network models (connectionism) to suggest that to imagine a new scenario (i.e invent or create a building or a poem) is as ordinary as remembering something from past experience. Creativity is a kind of misremembering, a synthesis of prior recollections projected into a new situation. See post: Brain scans and creativity.

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Note

- I was prompted to read Sethâ??s book after reading the article: Leach, Neil. â??Do Robots Dream of Digital Buildings?â?• In *Architectural Intelligence: Selected Papers from the 1st International Conference on Computational Design and Robotic Fabrication (CDRF 2019)*, edited by Philip F. Yuan, Mike Xie, Neil Leach, Jiawei Yao, and Xiang Wang, 59-74. Berlin: Springer, 2020.

Category

1. Creativity

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1. brain
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