

CULTURE DESK

COULD THEY BE GHOSTS?

The world exists because we are observing it. Reality is constructed in our heads.

By Julia Rothman
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This is transcribed from a conversation I recently had with one of my mother's cousins, Ronald Markowitz, who has Charles Bonnet syndrome.



*When I first saw them, they were
in the lobby of my building.*



These people were moving generally in my direction but not reaching me. There didn't appear to be any conversation between anybody. There was no noise or sound. They were on the ground, but there was no walking. They were just gliding.



They were in brown tones and dressed in costume from the late nineteenth century. I didn't see any of their body parts. There were no hands or arms. I could see they had faces but I couldn't see their features.

They could have been ghosts. For a moment, that's what I thought. People might believe that.





But not me. I don't believe in ghosts. I thought, if I close my eyes and shake my head, they will go away.

I didn't want them to go away.

The second time I saw them, I thought they were restaurant staff.



One day, I was going to lunch with my friend. I wanted to go wash my hands after lunch. It's dark back there in the hallway. I was getting lost. Then I found the right door and, when I opened it up, two people came in with me. It was so dark, I didn't know if it was the kitchen staff coming in with me or the hallucinations. When I got inside, the first thing I did was ask: "Is anyone else in the bathroom?"

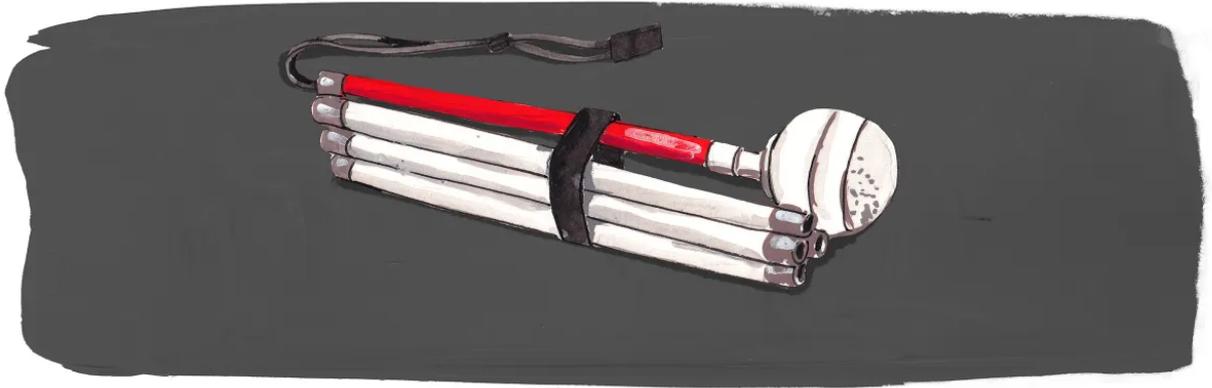
Nobody answered, so I washed my hands and I left.

My retinas are dying.



"THE RETINA IS THE LAYER OF CELLS LINING THE BACK WALL INSIDE THE EYE. THIS LAYER SENSES LIGHT AND SENDS SIGNALS TO THE BRAIN SO YOU CAN SEE." —AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY

They told me this years ago, maybe in 1995. Cells in our bodies usually die and are replaced. It's natural. But, once retinal cells are damaged, they don't grow back. So, I've been very slowly losing my eyesight for some time.



I'm legally blind. I can't drive anymore. I walk everywhere, and I use a cane now. I wouldn't use my cane in some places, when people were around. I was embarrassed that I'm impaired.

I started taking mobility training. After about three weeks, I mentioned my hallucinations to my trainer. She came back with it right away:

CHARLES BONNET SYNDROME

She explained that my brain was trying to compensate for what my eyes weren't seeing. It's trying to help me fill in the blanks.

"CHARLES BONNET SYNDROME (CBS) IS A CONDITION THAT SOME PEOPLE GET WHEN THEY LOSE SOME OR ALL OF THEIR VISION. IT CAUSES THEM TO HAVE VISUAL HALUCINATIONS (SEEING THINGS THAT AREN'T REALLY THERE). A NEW STUDY SUGGESTS THIS CONDITION IS SURPRISINGLY COMMON AMONG PEOPLE WITH CERTAIN TYPES OF VISION LOSS."

*The best days
for me are the
days that are
overcast.*



When there are shadows, they are like
a black hole. I don't know what's in

*I'm seeing something special
that nobody else can see.*



My friend recommended a book to me
called "Biocentrism." It's by a scientist,
Robert Lanza, and he attempts to
explain reality as we understand it.

The idea is that the world only
exists because we are observing it.
That reality is constructed in our heads,
our consciousness. And, without human



So imagine you're in your kitchen and you have a really nice new refrigerator, but you go upstairs to your bedroom. And you don't see your refrigerator. Then you don't really have one.



*It only exists because
you see it.*

