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The Neurology of the Modeled World

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in voce a.Sacks

Abstract

Oliver Sacks's clinical portraits as windows on how brains construct and lose stable models of body and world—and what that fragility teaches educators.

I. Clinical portraits as epistemology

Oliver Sacks's case histories show nervous systems **constructing** worlds: color, body schema, musical memory, the sense of self. When stroke or tumor disrupts a module, what fails is not only a function but a **model** the person lived inside—sometimes without knowing they relied on it until it vanished.

II. Agnosia and neglect as model failure

Patients who ignore half of space, or who cannot recognize faces though vision is intact, demonstrate that perception is not a transparent window. It is an **inference pipeline** with hidden layers. Sacks narrates these failures with compassion, refusing to reduce persons to diagrams—yet the cases illuminate diagrams nonetheless.

III. Ethics of description

Clinical language risks objectifying pain. Sacks's prose attempts the opposite: thick description that honors first-person experience while enabling third-person learning. For educators, the lesson is double: models must be **checkable**, yet persons exceed any model we make of them.

IV. Teaching medicine and modeling

Training clinicians is training world-model maintenance: updating when evidence conflicts with prior, naming uncertainty, avoiding premature closure. The same habits transfer to data science classrooms.

V. Conclusion

Neurology reveals how fragile and creative our modeled worlds are. Volume 3's celebration of representation must include this sobering mirror: every map is implemented in tissue that can break.

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