

VERIDICAL HALLUCINATION

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1. Core Definition and Typology

The term **veridical hallucination** refers to a highly specific, often controversial, psychological and parapsychological concept describing a perceptual experience that lacks an external physical stimulus but is nevertheless shared or corroborated by multiple observers. A standard hallucination is traditionally defined as a perception occurring in the absence of an objective external reality, meaning the experience is purely subjective and unique to the individual. The introduction of the modifier **veridical**--meaning truthful, coincident with fact, or accurate--fundamentally challenges this definition by implying that the subjectively generated perception aligns with the experiences of others, or in some contexts, aligns with a hidden objective reality that subsequently manifests. This concept places the experience outside the common psychiatric classification of hallucinations, which are typically defined by their solitary and illusory nature.

The defining characteristic of **veridical hallucination** lies precisely in its mutual acceptance or observation across independent witnesses. In the context of **parapsychology**, which frequently deals with phenomena such as apparitions, ghosts, or inexplicable sensory perceptions, a shared sighting of a non-existent entity is often cited as evidence for the genuine, non-illusory nature of the perception. If a single individual claims to see an apparition, it is easily dismissed as a subjective aberration, possibly symptomatic of psychological distress or misinterpretation. However, when two or more unrelated individuals, without prior collusion or suggestion, report experiencing the identical alleged fantasy or impossible occurrence simultaneously, the phenomenon gains the designation of veridicality, suggesting a shared access to a phenomenon that defies conventional sensory input mechanisms.

Crucially, the concept necessitates a rigorous distinction between shared experience and true objective reality. While the experience is mutual, it still technically lacks a conventional sensory stimulant (e.g., light waves reflecting off a physical object). Therefore, it maintains its categorization as a **hallucination** (perception without stimulus) rather than a perception (perception with stimulus). The veridical quality does not necessarily confirm the metaphysical reality of the perceived object, but rather the reality of the shared subjective state, leading to complex philosophical discussions regarding the nature of collective consciousness and shared cognitive bias when physical explanations are exhausted or ignored.

2. The Role of Veridicality in Parapsychology

Within the discipline of Parapsychology, the study of veridical phenomena--experiences that align

with future, distant, or hidden reality--is central to arguments for extrasensory perception (ESP) or survival of consciousness after death. The concept of **veridical hallucination** specifically supports the hypothesis that certain anomalous perceptions are not simply random neurological errors but are instead glimpses into realms or events inaccessible to normal sensory awareness. For proponents of the paranormal, a shared hallucination implies a collective psychic event or telepathic link, allowing multiple minds to access the same anomalous information source, such as a localized energy imprint or an entity.

The evidential value placed upon these shared experiences stems from the principle of convergent testimony. In legal or empirical settings, multiple independent accounts confirming the same unlikely observation significantly increase the statistical probability that the event, or at least the collective perception of the event, occurred. Parapsychologists leverage this logic, arguing that if two people hallucinate seeing a specific, detailed spectral figure simultaneously, the event moves beyond individual psychopathology and into the domain of shared anomalous experience. This methodology attempts to transform anecdotal, subjective data into something resembling empirical evidence by multiplying the points of observation.

Historically, the interest in veridical apparitions grew significantly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly within organizations like the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Early SPR studies, such as the census of hallucinations, aimed to collect and categorize thousands of personal reports, searching specifically for instances where the content of a hallucination (e.g., seeing a specific relative dying far away) later proved to be factually accurate (veridical) or, more relevantly, was shared by another witness. These efforts were foundational in attempting to treat anecdotal evidence with systematic, albeit often flawed, statistical rigor.

3. Distinguishing Veridical Hallucinations from Illusions and Shared Delusions

It is essential to differentiate **veridical hallucinations** from related concepts in clinical psychology and perception studies. An **illusion** is a misinterpretation of an actual external stimulus (e.g., mistaking a shadow for a person), whereas a classic hallucination involves perception without any external stimulus. A veridical hallucination, while lacking an objective stimulus, is uniquely characterized by its corroboration across individuals, setting it apart from the solitary nature of typical hallucinations recognized in psychiatric diagnostics.

More subtle is the distinction between a shared veridical hallucination and a **shared delusional disorder**, historically known as *folie à deux*. Shared delusions are rooted in psychopathology, where a dominant individual induces a delusional belief system in a closely associated person or group. In contrast, the concept of veridical hallucination is used to describe an immediate, spontaneous perceptual event that is synchronous and identical across observers who may not

necessarily share a close pathological relationship or a prior established system of belief regarding the specific event. Furthermore, while delusions involve fixed, false beliefs, hallucinations involve sensory perceptions.

Critics argue that what is labelled a **veridical hallucination** is often a combination of phenomena rooted in known cognitive biases and environmental factors rather than anomalous perception. These include suggestibility, where one person's description biases the perception of another; expectancy effects, where observers see what they anticipate seeing; or collective sensory misinterpretation of ambiguous stimuli (which would technically make the experience a shared illusion, not a hallucination). The key challenge for parapsychology is proving that the perception truly lacked an external trigger and was not merely a shared cognitive error built upon an initial, misinterpreted observation.

4. Historical Accounts and Case Studies

Case studies involving shared apparitions constitute the primary body of evidence used to support the existence of **veridical hallucinations**. One common historical category involves the collective sighting of a ghost or spectral figure localized to a specific place or associated with a known historical tragedy. If multiple unconnected individuals report seeing the same detailed figure, perhaps wearing period clothing or performing a repetitive action, the narrative power suggests a consistency that seems difficult to attribute to random chance.

The most famous studies documenting such phenomena often originate from early psychical research. These narratives frequently involve witnesses who were initially skeptical or unaware of the others' experiences, adding weight to the claim of independent verification. However, rigorous methodological scrutiny usually reveals limitations, such as the potential for post-event communication influencing later reports, or confirmation bias leading researchers to prioritize matching details while dismissing inconsistencies. The difficulty in replicating such spontaneous, subjective events in a laboratory setting means that the evidence remains largely anecdotal and dependent on retrospective witness testimony.

An important, though controversial, subset of these cases involves apparitions witnessed just prior to or immediately following the death of the person represented. When multiple witnesses in separate locations report seeing the deceased individual simultaneously, the event is claimed to transcend mere psychological projection. Such cases are often presented as definitive proof of **veridicality**, suggesting that the event is linked to an objective energetic or psychic phenomenon occurring at the moment of death, accessible to more than one sensitive observer.

5. Psychological and Cognitive Explanations for Shared Experiences

Mainstream psychology and neuroscience offer several compelling explanations for phenomena

categorized as **veridical hallucinations** that do not require invoking paranormal mechanisms. These explanations focus on shared environmental context, social dynamics, and the brain's highly reconstructive nature of perception. The power of **social influence** is paramount; once one individual voices a perception, others, especially in ambiguous or high-stress environments, are prone to adjusting their own sensory experience to conform.

One major mechanism is the psychological process known as **expectancy effect** or set induction. If a group visits a location known to be "haunted," their predisposition to experience something anomalous significantly lowers the threshold for interpreting ordinary visual or auditory data (e.g., creaking noises, peripheral shadows) as extraordinary. This shared state of heightened arousal and expectation can lead to synchronized misinterpretations that are subjectively experienced as true perceptions, effectively creating a collectively agreed-upon hallucination that is veridical only in its shared subjective nature, not in its objective reality.

Furthermore, phenomena like **mass psychogenic illness** (MPI) offer a clinical analogue where shared physiological and subjective symptoms spread rapidly through a group without an identified physical cause. While MPI usually involves physical symptoms rather than visual apparitions, the underlying principle--the rapid, non-pathological spread of a subjective experience driven by social suggestion, anxiety, and collective focus--provides a robust non-paranormal model for understanding shared anomalous perceptions. The fact that the perception is shared does not necessitate a paranormal cause, only a shared cognitive mechanism reacting to similar internal or social cues.

6. Philosophical Implications Regarding Objective Reality

The existence, or at least the theoretical possibility, of the **veridical hallucination** presents profound challenges to epistemology and the philosophy of mind. If multiple consciousnesses can simultaneously generate an identical perception that lacks a physical correlate, does this shared experience elevate the perception to a form of objective reality? This question strikes at the heart of the relationship between consciousness and the external world. If objectivity is defined purely by consensus, then a veridical hallucination is, by definition, an objective truth for the group experiencing it, regardless of the lack of a physical stimulus.

Conversely, proponents of physical realism maintain that any perception unsupported by measurable physical phenomena must remain subjective, even if collectively experienced. They argue that **veridical hallucinations** highlight the limitations of collective human observation, demonstrating how easily consciousness can be manipulated or synchronized through non-sensory inputs (such as suggestion or shared environmental noise). The debate pivots on whether "veridical" refers to a match with external reality or merely a match between multiple internal, subjective realities.

The core philosophical tension involves the distinction between perception and knowledge. We typically rely on consensus (multiple observers) to validate knowledge claims about the world. When that consensus validates something physically impossible or absent, the foundational reliability of sensory testimony is questioned. The veridical hallucination serves as a potent thought experiment, demonstrating that even strong consensus among witnesses cannot fully guarantee external **objective reality**, especially when dealing with anomalous or highly improbable events.

7. Methodology Challenges in Empirical Study

Empirically investigating **veridical hallucinations** faces nearly insurmountable methodological hurdles, leading to perpetual skepticism within the conventional scientific community. Since the alleged phenomena are spontaneous, unpredictable, and non-physical, researchers cannot utilize standard laboratory controls, manipulation of variables, or reliable replication protocols. The reliance on retrospective accounts introduces critical issues related to memory distortion, embellishment, and the difficulty of verifying the witnesses' states of mind and physical environments at the moment of the alleged event.

A primary challenge is isolating the experience. To qualify as a true hallucination, the researcher must rule out all potential external stimuli, including subtle sounds, lights, or even infrasound, which can cause physiological and psychological effects misinterpreted as paranormal presence. Furthermore, documenting that the witnesses truly experienced the event simultaneously and independently--without cues from body language, facial expressions, or verbal suggestions--is often impossible after the fact, compromising the claim of **independent verification**.

Modern scientific approaches to anomalous experiences generally focus on correlational studies, linking reported sightings to measurable environmental factors (e.g., electromagnetic fields, carbon monoxide levels) or psychological profiles (e.g., levels of suggestibility, fantasy proneness). While these studies often fail to definitively prove a conventional cause for every reported case, they provide robust models showing that many alleged **veridical hallucinations** can be adequately explained through known physical or psychological mechanisms, shifting the burden of proof heavily onto proponents of the paranormal explanation.

8. Debates and Scientific Consensus

The concept of **veridical hallucination** remains highly debated, existing primarily at the fringe of accepted psychological science within the domain of parapsychology. The scientific consensus, rooted in neurobiology and cognitive psychology, overwhelmingly rejects the necessity of such a concept. Most mainstream researchers argue that the term attempts to cloak phenomena readily explained by **shared misperception**, cognitive synchronicity, or social suggestibility with a veneer of objective truth ("veridicality").

Critics emphasize that the term relies on a fundamental contradiction: a hallucination, by definition, is internally generated and lacks external reality, while "veridical" implies a correspondence with reality. Combining these terms creates an oxymoron that requires a radical rewriting of perceptual theory--a rewriting that must be supported by replicable, non-anecdotal evidence, which has historically been absent. Until such evidence emerges, the scientific community treats these reported occurrences as compelling examples of collective cognitive error rather than evidence of **anomalous shared perception**.

The key debate ultimately revolves around methodological rigor. Parapsychologists view the shared nature of the experience as sufficient evidence of its unique, non-illusory status, while skeptical scientists demand experimental proof that the experience is not merely an emergent property of two or more complex, biased human brains interacting under conditions of ambiguity or suggestion. The term **veridical hallucination** thus serves less as a scientific classification and more as a philosophical marker for observations that defy straightforward singular attribution.

Further Reading

[Parapsychology \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Hallucination \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Folie ? deux \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[Epistemology \(Wikipedia\)](#)

[The Problem of Perception \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)