



## Aesthetic experience: Marcel Proust and the neo-Jamesian structure of awareness<sup>☆</sup>

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Caveats regarding aesthetics in general

Russell Epstein's essay (2004) is original, ambitious, and usefully speculative; he brings neurocognitive psychology together with the usually remote disciplines of aesthetics and literature. The aestheticians will probably welcome the help, because "aesthetics" covers a very broad domain, and for millennia there has been no consensus on any aspect of it, not even on the most basic points. These issues are so numerous and contentious that Epstein could not have been expected to explicitly address many of them. Nevertheless, since he hopes for a "... complete, scientific, theory of Art" (Epstein, 2004), in due time someone will have to respond to them. Although some of these points may seem too basic to need mentioning, I believe that much dispute in aesthetics is due to the disputants' unspoken conflicting premises. There certainly has not been much agreement about definitions. Here is how I use some of these terms.

I use the word "object" as including things, events, and conceptual structures. I use the term "aesthetic object" for an object that is the center of a person's aesthetic experience. An aesthetic object is said to have "aesthetic value" for its audience. "Aesthetic value" is often equated with "beauty," but it is not necessarily "pretty" or "nice" (e.g., Kafka's *The Hunger Artist*, and *Metamorphosis*; Picasso's *Guernica*, Munch's *The Scream*). In this commentary I try to avoid the much-disputed word "Art" because defacto it includes whatever a culture happens to designate as art. In our culture it includes artifacts such as paintings, sculpture, or costumes; events, such as drama, dance, and music; and conceptual structures in written form such as books of poetry and narrative. Although certain conceptual structures such as scientific theories and mathematical theorems may be said to be "beautiful," in our culture they are not considered art, and neither are natural entities (e.g., sunsets), no matter how beautiful they are. I use the term "Art object" (with a capital 'A') for objects that are intended or expected to elicit an aesthetic experience in an audience.

<sup>☆</sup> Commentary on Epstein, R. (2004). Consciousness, art and the brain: Lessons from Marcel Proust. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 13, 213–243.

I will also skip over the important differences between the motivations and experiences of artists making Art, and of audiences seeking out aesthetic value. The common view is that artists want to communicate their experience or mental state to an audience. In contrast, the philosopher Susan K. Langer asserts that the artist creates the object to communicate *with himself*, not with an audience. For an extensive and insightful presentation of Langer's compelling and unorthodox ideas, see Dryden, 2004. In brief, Langer agrees with Proust and James that experience flows by so fast that it is difficult for anyone to examine and reflect on it *as it happens*.<sup>1</sup> Langer's hypothesis was that in order to stabilize experience enough for contemplation, the artist encodes his full experience including both fringe and features, *in his art object*, thus freezing it in time. Once he has externalized his inner experience in a coded or symbolized form, he can examine it again and again in different ways. Whether an audience finds the compacted encoded message interpretable or obscure is not his problem; the artist is telling *himself* his own story, in his own code. I will focus on the experiences of audiences only, and leave the artist to Dryden and Langer, Epstein, and Proust.

Just what constitutes an aesthetic experience? It will help enormously if we remember to distinguish the aesthetic *object* itself from an audience's *experience of it*. Is aesthetic value a property inherent in a special kind of object, or in a special kind of experience? Is aesthetic experience singular, or are there several functionally distinct kinds? In any case, whether there is one type or many, aesthetic feelings<sup>2</sup> almost always occur mixed with several other sorts, which makes it difficult to analytically separate the aesthetically necessary properties from the accidentally competing ones. These competitors may distract from, muffle, or mask the aesthetic experiences, and they may themselves be misidentified as part of the aesthetic.

Characterizing aesthetic experiences is difficult for several other reasons. They are not entirely reliable; they vary in intensity from one encounter to another with *exactly the same object with the same content*, and may be totally absent on a later encounter. Further, aesthetic feelings do not depend heavily on the object's specific content; people seem able to find aesthetic value in *any* type of content, whether it is totally abstract, or full of semantic, scenic, or social information drawn from daily life or from well-known historical, mythical, or religious narratives. Emotionally evocative Art objects are also co-opted for entertainment, commerce, education, or persuasion, and may evoke many types of reaction simultaneously. It seems likely that many are misidentified as aesthetic experiences.

In later sections I will venture to characterize what I call *personally detached aesthetic contemplation*, without any claim that it is the only, or the most important, type of aesthetic experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Working memory is not adequate to hold the just-past experience for examination and reflection; its capacity is too small, various contents are not equally recalled, and fade quickly. It may be large enough to hold the few most salient features, but not large enough to hold all of the information that the fringe contents imply. And to paraphrase Proust, the memory of the features alone without the explicators can only provide an impoverished "lifeless" record (referred from Epstein, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For James, the word "thought" was synonymous with "feeling," "experience," and "awareness." He used one or another, depending on grammatical context (1890, pp. 185–186).

## 1.2. James, Epstein, and Proust

In 1890, William James proposed that all of the contents of awareness are based on two qualitatively different forms that cannot be interchanged, just as a tape player cannot read a CD (James, 1890). These forms have very different functions and very different qualia. One hundred years later Mangan recognized that what James had described were actually two complementary types of abbreviation, made necessary by the limited information capacity of consciousness (Mangan, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 2001). I have critiqued, revised, and extended their views in previous papers (1994, 2000, 2003a, 2003b); here I give only a brief sketch to introduce my terms and working hypotheses.

The first type of abbreviation used in awareness displays only those *features* of an object or event that maximally discriminate among items or choices relevant to our current goal. I call it *feature awareness* (James called it “the nucleus” and other metaphoric names). For example, on one shopping errand, color may be the feature that most determines choice, and other features, such as price, may not enter into awareness at that moment at all, although they are perceived and processed nonconsciously. Note that this is not just the selectivity of “attention” in general, which applies to both conscious and nonconscious processes. Feature awareness is *the form* in which we are aware of this kind of information.

The second type of abbreviation used in awareness consists of a large group that *explicate* the selected bare features in different ways, condensing and summarizing contextual and relational information. I call the group *explicating awarenesses* (James called them “the Fringe,” and other metaphoric names). One kind of explicator is a feeling of *relations among the features* (e.g., greater than; pair of; rhymes with). Another explicator presents *value judgments*. A third kind serves as *a summarizing substitute for nonconscious networks of knowledge* relevant to the bare features but too extensive to fit in consciousness explicitly. For example, the *feeling of the meaning* of a word on the tip-of-your-tongue is a condensed substitute for the extended semantic network related to the word’s bare phonemic features. The feeling *IS NOT* the semantic network itself, but it acts as a signal that relevant semantic information is available in non-conscious form. These “explicating” awarenesses are felt contents of consciousness, specific, often vivid, worthy to be called qualia as much as any sensory content. Both features and explicators are usually present at the same time, may be brief or persistent, and either one may be the primary object of attention. For a full account see my taxonomy of awarenesses (Galín, 1994, 2003a).

Mangan translated James’s ideas into the concepts of modern cognitive psychology, hypothesizing that the two forms were adaptive abbreviations that avoided overloading awareness’s limited information capacity. He developed James’s idea that fringe experiences also play a role in selecting the next thought to come into consciousness (Mangan, 1991, 2001).<sup>3</sup> Specific neurological mechanisms that might support such psychological processes were first proposed by

<sup>3</sup> My thinking about James’s idea that there are several forms for conscious contents was initiated by Mangan’s fecund thesis (Mangan, 1991). It is a rich, wide-ranging cognitive and philosophical analysis of subjective experience, taking aesthetics as the central test application, and also touching on mystical experience. The thesis is available from University Microfilms. Although Mangan and I disagree on certain points, I have reframed and built upon some of his ideas. See Galín (1993, 1994, 2003a, 2003b) for more details, my critiques, and extensions.

Epstein (Epstein, 2000a, 2000b; Galin, 2000). Epstein saw an analogy between mentally “finding the next thought” and “navigating” in a complex conceptual structure such as associative memory. He hypothesized that “navigating in the mind” is done with the same neural structures that are used for spatial navigation in rats and for memory in humans.

In the present paper, Epstein extends his previous work on “navigating in memory-space” or “concept space” by examining the ideas put forth by Marcel Proust in his elongated and highly acclaimed novel *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913–1929). Proust discoursed on time, memory, and Art, and on their existential meaning. He reported a rare sort of involuntary recall in which a memory appears unbidden, seeming as life-like as if it were occurring in the present. He contrasted this vividness to the usual flatness of voluntary recall, and suggested that the flatness arises because the voluntarily remembered event is abstracted into concepts related to a main topic, and topic-irrelevant contents are filtered out. What is left is efficient but feels removed from present life. Proust also noted that the involuntary recall experience contains even more information than the original experience; it presents, as in a collage, simultaneous awareness of elements from different but associated episodes (“as if seeing the whole city at one time”). Thus, the involuntary memory is condensed, richer, and therefore more emotionally engaging than ordinary memory, and Proust sought to achieve these qualities in his writing. This led Proust to a theory on the making and appreciation of Art.

According to Epstein’s reading, “Proust’s division of awareness into two components roughly corresponds to James’s division of the stream of thought . . .” (2004). Thus, he asserts, Proust’s aesthetic theory and artistic method can be understood in terms of the neurological mechanisms that Epstein himself has already sketched for James’s theory (Epstein, 2000a, 2000b). Furthermore, Epstein generalizes from Proust’s literary aesthetics to a theory of all art, and suggests that neurologizing such as his may contribute to a “scientific theory of art.”

## 2. Some disagreements

### 2.1. *Terms and metaphors*

Since Epstein has drawn parallels between James’s concepts and Proust’s, I must mention that we differ on some interpretations of what James said or meant. Although I greatly admire the general direction and scope of Epstein’s ideas, some of his uses of James’s terms leave me uncomfortable: fringe, nucleus, substantive thoughts, single thought, ineffability, attention, and vague. Terms are tools, and it is worth the trouble to sharpen them. I have previously argued some of these points in full (apparently without complete effect), and I need mention them only briefly here (Galín, 1993, 1994, 2000, 2003a).

James used many metaphors in his struggle to describe the different phenomenology and functions of each form of awareness. The metaphors are helpful, but they also can have seriously misleading connotations. A good example is the moving spotlight metaphor which is still popular as a model for attention and/or awareness (Crick, 1984). James drew on it at times, poetically describing his two forms of awareness as being a bright clear center (nucleus) surrounded by a dim vague periphery or penumbra (fringe). But the fringe need not be vague or dim, and the nucleus and fringe have no center/periphery relation. I have described other ways in which this metaphor

is not apt,<sup>4</sup> and how James switched metaphors freely as needed (see Galin, 1994, pp. 388–392 for an extended discussion).

Metaphor, as I understand it, is not simply the analogizing of two things that have similar features (Epstein, 2004). Rather, it is the mapping of the logical structure of one well-known domain onto another in order to extend the inferences one can make in the first domain to the second. Metaphor asserts that the logical structures among elements are the same, and therefore all of the entailments of the first apply to the second (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). When the metaphor is stretched too far the entailments will no longer hold.<sup>5</sup>

Three of James's metaphors for the structure and dynamics of the contents of awareness are most important here: a stream flowing over rocks, a bird's flight from perch to perch, and the moving spotlight. Epstein tries to merge them, but their incompatibilities vex his applications (Galín, 2000). The one which seems to me to work most generally is the rocky stream metaphor: it implies constant change; the flow of water is continuous, not discrete; the flow is parallel rather than serial; and both rocks and water are present simultaneously and are interacting. Nevertheless, it is just a metaphor.

Therefore, with due respect for James, I renamed his two forms to avoid metaphor, and to make the name explicitly describe the sort of information each one is suited to carry: *feature awareness* instead of James's nucleus, and *explicating awareness* or *explicators* instead of James's fringe (Galín, 1993, 1994, 2000, 2003a). Mangan used "nucleus" and "fringe" in his early papers, but in a recent well-argued update he adopted a new terminology and clarified some of these issues (Mangan, 2001). However, since Epstein continues to use "nucleus" and "fringe," I will stick to his terms in this commentary as much as possible.

## 2.2. *What constitutes a "single thought"?*

Epstein uses the phrase "one thought" frequently and in several ways in different contexts (Epstein, 2004). Further definition becomes urgent when he claims explicitly that we can think

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<sup>4</sup> Equating awareness metaphorically to a spotlight implies that one part of awareness has high resolution of its contents, and that it is primary ("central," "nuclear"), and that the other part is undifferentiated (vague) and of minor importance (peripheral). It also implies that consciousness and attention have the adjustable properties of a spotlight (e.g., Crick, 1984; Crick & Koch, 1990; Kahneman & Treisman, 1984). Attention or consciousness are analogized to either the beam's present locus, its stability, intensity, breadth, degree of focus, or the control mechanisms that change these parameters.

Whereas the information dimly lighted by the edge of the spotlight can be brightened (brought into awareness) by recentering the beam on it, in James's model the fringe contents *as such* cannot be brought into the nucleus. They are "attended" in their own form as fringe experiences, not converted to the form of nucleus experiences. For James, that which is attended typically includes both nucleus and fringe components, and either one can have the foreground quality. His most fundamental point was that fringe presents a separate class of information than the nucleus, not just the same kind of information at a lower resolution, or unattended. Unfortunately, in the spirit of this metaphor, James, Mangan, Epstein, and others have explicitly or implicitly characterized the fringe as intrinsically vague, corresponding to the Spotlight's degraded (vague) penumbra, and characterized the nucleus as intrinsically definite, corresponding to its bright clear center.

<sup>5</sup> Taking James's metaphors literally obscures the really important functional and phenomenal characteristics of his two types of awareness. The wag might caution James's modern interpreters, "Riding his metaphors too hard will lame James's insights, rein in their development, and hobble their application."

only one thought at a time. It is not clear how he decides that only one discrete thought has occurred and not two.

Ordinarily we use the concept of “a one” or “an entity” rather loosely. Although in natural systems everything has some relation to everything else (Bohm, 1980; Kauffman, 1995; Waldrop, 1992; Wheeler, 1990), when we refer to one segment of a system, as a short-cut we temporarily treat it as if it were a discrete entity. According to the analyses of Simon, 1996, p. 209 ff., and of Wimsatt (1974; 1976a, pp. 242–261), a collection of parts is truly an entity if there is sufficient inter-relatedness among them.<sup>6</sup> The perceiver decides nonconsciously how much will be considered “sufficient” by choosing some criterion that suits his program. In effect, he assigns a virtual border that will include those elements whose interrelations seem strong enough to matter for his purposes (see Galin, 1994, 2003a; Simon, 1996; Wimsatt, 1976a, 1976b).<sup>7</sup>

Epstein has not made clear how he would assign the borders of a thought. Sometimes he seems to mean that discrete thoughts occur in series, as in the Bird’s Flight metaphor with its alternate flying and perching, each cycle a separate thought. Sometimes he seems to say that all of a coherent linked sequence of contents is included in a single thought. This is a problem, because James particularly insisted on the continuity of thought. James stated explicitly that thought was not like a train of discrete boxcars, or discrete beads on a string. That is why he called his chapter 9 “The Stream of Thought,” not the “Train of Thought,” or the “Sequence of Thought.”

Sometimes Epstein seems to mean that a thought is the mental content in both nucleus and fringe forms (a.k.a. features and explicators), and sometimes just the nucleus form, i.e., the “perching.”

Are there any nonconscious thoughts? If so, can they too occur only one at a time? Would the activated part of an associative network be a nonconscious thought? Can the two hemispheres have concurrent thoughts? And, what about after callosotomy (see Bogen, 1986, 1989 on mental duality in the intact brain).

Sometimes Epstein uses “thought” when referring to the nonconscious information structure guiding the process (Epstein, 2004); I think James would have called this “the topic.”

### 2.3. *Is there only one “topic” and one “goal of directed thought” at a time?*

Epstein speaks of the topic as if it were singular, too. In my view, however, while there may be one topic that mostly dominates the content and flow of thought, other competing topics may intrude into awareness, in nucleus form, e.g., as unbidden images or names, or in the fringe

<sup>6</sup> For a penetrating analysis of the differences between entities and aggregates see Wimsatt, 1997, and for an account of parts and wholes, levels of analysis and their components and contexts, see Wimsatt (1976a, p. 237 ff; 1994) and Simon (1996). For a delightful excursion into the complexities of entiticity, see “Holes and Other Superficialities” (Casati & Varzi, 1995), a curiously concrete study of whether holes really exist, and if so, what sort of entities they are.

<sup>7</sup> For a more extensive discussion of entiticity in relation to the concept *self* and to split-brain studies, see Galin, 2003a, 2003b, pp. 120–125. For entiticity, in relation to consciousness and first-personness, see Galin, 1999. Since there are no sets in nature that have absolutely no relations with their surround, we should more properly use the term “quasi-entity.” It seems clear that a thought is a quasi-entity.

form (explicators) signaling the availability of nonconscious knowledge that is related to a quite different topic. For example, if you have forgotten an important meeting, and instead are enjoying an outing, a feeling of urgency inappropriate for the current activity may develop. It may briefly dominate the current experience, and be attended, and if it is ignored it may persist as the current activity flows on. It is an explicator (fringe awareness), but that which it is explicating is still nonconscious. To my knowledge the extensive psychiatric literature on intrusive thoughts has not differentiated between intruding feature awareness contents and intruding explicators. It is a promising direction for research. Epstein's discussion of the symptoms of Obsessive–Compulsive Disorder in these terms (2004) is a good example of research possibilities.

### 3. How well do Proust's ideas map onto James's two part model?

James's insight was that all phenomenal contents appear in one or another of the two qualitatively different *forms*, and all thoughts are made up of both of them. In contrast, as I read Epstein's synopsis, Proust was contrasting two varieties of thoughts (voluntary and involuntary recall) that differ in their content, but do not differ in the forms of the contents.

Epstein says "Proust's division of awareness into two components roughly corresponds to James's division of the stream of thought into a 'nucleus' and 'fringe'" (2004). Certainly, Proust presented and celebrated the sort of phenomenology that James urged psychologists to take seriously. Epstein does demonstrate convincingly that James's concepts can be useful in understanding Proust's lush phenomenology, and possibly his technique. However, it might be going too far to say that Proust articulated anything like James's insight, even roughly. I have not been able to find in Epstein's exegesis any Proustian version of James's two forms that carry qualitative different *kinds* of information.

What Proust does say is that in ordinary recall, after the experienced episode has gone through interpretation, filtering of irrelevancies, abstracting, and conceptualizing, it has lost some compelling "presence" found in both current experience and in the quasi-eidetic involuntary memory. But in Epstein's quotations, Proust does not appear to say that what is lost is a separate qualitatively different form of awareness, or what different kind of information it carries. Furthermore, except for his metaphor of the Japanese paper flower unfolding progressively in his teacup, he does not speak of the role of the "something missing" in normally guiding the sequence of thoughts. As far as I can tell he only speaks of experiences that differ in content but not in kind.

Although Proust may not have reported a difference in kind, perhaps he did recognize a difference in degree. If so, with further study, Epstein might be able to demonstrate that fringe content is more abundant, or is more prominent, in involuntary recollections than in voluntary recalls, or in episodic memory than in semantic memory, or that the ambiguity, deliberately introduced by Proust and many other artists, elicits more fringe content in the audience's awareness than is usual. In any case, although voluntary memory may be more sparse after it is filtered and abstracted, it does contain *both* nucleus and fringe components. In James's "stream of thought" metaphor, there is always water (fringe, explicators) flowing over and around the protruding rocks (nucleus, feature content).

## 4. The aesthetic attitude

### 4.1. *Aesthetic attitude vs. goal-directed search*

In this section, I will present a different perspective on memory search and aesthetics to contrast with Epstein's, Proust's, and Mangan's accounts. Mangan advanced several ideas that seem particularly germane to Epstein's neurocognitive hypotheses and their application to Proust (1991) (Mangan, 1991, 2001). It would be good to have Epstein's explicit analysis and discussion of them. Mangan enlarged upon James's claim that the feeling of harmony (or rightness, on-trackness) was the most important of all fringe feelings because it guided the progression of thought. He proposed that rightness (and its inverse wrongness) also plays a role in sustaining or aborting searches, including searches of memory. He hypothesized that as one's search progresses, the feeling of rightness<sup>8</sup> appears each time one's latest percept is closer to one's inner goal image, and thus, in some manner, validates and encourages (or aborts) searching in that direction. Mangan also proposed that aesthetic feelings are just very intense versions of this same feeling of rightness (1991).<sup>9</sup>

Goal-directed searching, however, is not the only stance people take in life. Some philosophers of aesthetics have described a mental state called the "aesthetic attitude," which is said to be a precondition for having an aesthetic experience. One aesthete has described it this way:

The aesthetic attitude is supposedly a particular way of experiencing or attending to objects. It is said to be an attitude independent of any motivations to do with utility, economic value, moral judgment, or peculiarly personal emotion, and concerned with experiencing the object 'for its own sake.' At the limit, the observer's state would be one of pure detachment. . . the term 'disinterested' is often applied to such an attitude. Commonly, proponents of the aesthetic attitude think that it can be directed as much to Nature as to works of art. . . (Janway, 1995, p. 8 in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*).

However, setting aside personal reactions completely, or even partially, is not so easy for humans. The requirement for "personal remoteness" might seem obviously mistaken, since the majority of Art, such as songs, narrative paintings, and literature, almost always make reference to love, sex, violence, money, or power. Most people have a strong personal interest in at least one of these. Nevertheless, these personally hot topics do not in themselves induce feelings of aesthetic value; my claim is that *if* aesthetic value *was* perceived, it was found in the internal *organization* of contents, not in the hot topics themselves. I will argue below that aesthetic value was experienced *as a signal* that extraordinary integration of the internal elements had been perceived at some level of the object, each element with each other and with the whole, with nothing extraneous included and nothing left out.

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<sup>8</sup> Mangan interpreted the conscious fringe experience of rightness as central to normal perception and problem solving. It signals degree of fit (in the mathematical sense given by Smolensky (1986)) between (1) the few explicit features currently in awareness ("nucleus"), and (2) the enormous nonconscious knowledge structure that gives the features meaning. This hypothesized computation also can signal how topic-relevant the current perception is, and that more topic-relevant knowledge is potentially accessible in nonconscious structures (Mangan, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Mangan argued that when the feeling of rightness (degree of fit) becomes especially intense it is the basis of aesthetic experience, and in the most extreme cases, it becomes mystical or spiritual experience. Unfortunately he never developed his ideas on mystical or other religious experience, focussing almost entirely on aesthetics. I have presented a different cognitive neo-Jamesian analysis of spiritual experiences (Galín, 2004).

It might seem much easier to achieve personal detachment with totally abstract art, such as instrumental music (a sonata or a string quartet); abstract expressionist painting (such as Rothko, Pollock, Fritz Klein); and important segments of modern dance. Works like these minimize explicit cues to story, persona, recognisable objects, or social relations: there are no easy hot topics to attach to. Sophisticated audiences may find great beauty in the artist's presentations of complex relations among the object's elements at the level of sense perception (e.g., sounds; colored shapes; and body movements). Unfortunately, audiences who are unfamiliar with these genre and their conventions are likely to find no meanings in them at all.

#### 4.2. *Deikman's receptive mode*

The philosopher's contrasting of the aesthetic attitude with the every-day goal-seeking attitude seem remarkably similar to two ways of engaging the world that Deikman studied experimentally (Deikman, 1963, 1971, 1996, 1997). Deikman observed that people shift between an *instrumental mode* of acting purposefully to change things (in which goal-directed search is important), and a *receptive mode* of contemplative openness to perceiving whatever comes. A shift into the receptive mode often occurs in relaxed situations such as home, hot tub, museum, or concert hall, where there is no threat and no urgent goal image to serve. Rather than being guided by internal goals, a person in the receptive mode may allow *the environment* to guide moment-to-moment perceptual and motor activity. As I understand it, this "allowing" is the key factor in Deikman's receptive mode, and it may be central to what goes on in some encounters with Art.

Consider a person in this receptive mode exploring a painting or a piece of music, or any complex entity in Nature. Because the object is too information-rich to be comprehended at a single pass, she must sample it serially. The sequence of her perceptions will be guided largely by *the internal structure of the entity itself*, not by a personal goal-image. Under these circumstances an important kind of aesthetic experience may occur; she may find a perspective that focuses on one or several of the object's levels of organization at which internal patterns of relations are exceptionally strong, and its external relations are particularly weak. She may perceive the successively sampled parts of the object as so integrated, with each other and with the whole, that it appears completed, perfected, with nothing extra, and nothing missing. (Note that here I am describing the subject's perception, not whether it is veridical). This aesthetic experience is an explicatory feeling or perhaps a cluster of them, signaling three things: that a great orderly system of relations has been discovered *entirely within* the contemplated object; that the information so far implies that there is still more order (organization) to be grasped; and that the hidden "more" is to be found, in this case, by deeper engagement with the object itself, rather than by a search of the perceiver's own nonconscious knowledge structures.

I call this fringe-cluster "the feeling of '*there is more here*.'" I propose that "more here" plays important but different roles in aesthetic feelings, spiritual feelings, and problem solving. The differences among them are not just a matter of degree or intensity of the feeling of match, as Mangan would have it<sup>9</sup> (see Galin, 2004). These types of "more here" differ in just what is still implicit or hidden:

- *Problem solving*. The feeling of rightness signals that the solution to a problem lies in such-and-such direction (as in adopting a chess strategy that you cannot visualize all the way through). In this case the hidden "more" is the "intuited" but still-implicit series of moves toward your goal image.

- *Spiritual experience.* In the feeling of spirit, “more here” lies in the newly perceived unexplored range of one’s existential dimensions,<sup>10</sup> extended beyond the range usually spanned in one’s daily activities (e.g., expanded from the narrow perspective of quotidian affairs to encompass the full range from Good to Evil, from Macrocosm to Microcosm, Male to Female, from Life to Death, etc.).
- *Aesthetic experience.* In the experience of the type of aesthetic value discussed above, the hidden “more” is the inferred but still implicit perfected internal integration.

The problem solving and spiritual experience cases are clearly not in the disinterested, non-attached receptive mode; problem solving is about achieving a personal goal; in spiritual experience there is a major change in the perception of basic dimensions of one’s life space. It is only in the aesthetic experience that there is no personal involvement. The job of guiding the flow of thought has been turned over to the structure of the object. The sought-after “more” is contained within the contemplated object which refers only to itself (in the sense that a string quartet refers only to itself), and therefore does not invite or permit any personal participation.

The shift in Self from the instrumental to the receptive mode is necessary to allow one to set aside personal agendas and let experience be guided by the strong internal structure of the object. In contrast, the instrumental mode would direct perception to the system in which you and the object are embedded, and to those of the object’s external relations which significantly involve you. I suggest that the receptive mode actually is a condition for experiencing this particular kind of aesthetic value.

At first glance, aesthetic experiences in themselves do not seem to have enough direct survival value to have persisted through our evolution, and to have been worth making them intrinsically rewarding. However, I speculate that the evolution of the ability to shift into the receptive mode would greatly promote social group formation. To function in a group one must set aside one’s personal agendas and submit to the agendas of the group. Once the capacity had developed, it would facilitate perception of dense patterns of interrelations that were not centered around one’s self. Deikman has described the receptive mode’s multiple roles in the human situation (Deikman, 1996, 1997).

To briefly summarize the forgoing perspective: I have reframed and narrowed the question that opened this essay, “Just what is an aesthetic experience?” Instead, I emphasized the experience of the subject rather than the putative objective properties of the aesthetic object; “What must the audience perceive in an object for it to seem breath-stoppingly beautiful?”

Here is the idealized case. . . The audience must have put aside their personal agenda and shifted from the instrumental mode into the receptive, contemplative, aesthetic attitude. In addition, the object must seem to be so rich in content that the observer cannot take it all in at one glance, but must explore it serially. It must seem highly integrated internally, repeatedly confirmed as the exploration proceeds. The integration must be perceived as wholly within the object, without reference to

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<sup>10</sup> For a point in ordinary 3-dimensional space, there are only three possibilities; up and down, left and right, forward and back. The dimensions delimit the totality of possibilities. A person’s *existential space* or “life-space” is the mental frame of reference in which their life goes on. It consists of all that they can apprehend or conceive. In the metaphor, “life is a play upon the stage,” the stage is the existential space; it contains all that can exist. The dimensions of this space for humans are marked by the “great polarities” such as life/death, being/nothingness, love/isolation, matter/energy, moment/eternity, good/evil, man/woman, macrocosm/microcosm, etc. The activities of our daily lives do not take up much of the full range of these polarities.

anything out side of it. Further, it must seem that the intricacy and completeness of the integration cannot be exhausted by repeated sampling. It is quite common that an admirer of some work of art will say that they revisit it without getting bored because they “see more in it” each time (e.g., Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*). Of course, the amount of information and complexity that will be just challenging enough will depend on the particular audience’s capacities and sophistication with such objects. According to the poet William Blake it also depends on the observer’s intent—any object can be found sufficiently complex if it is suitably viewed; “. . .to see the world in a grain of sand, heaven in a wild flower” (Blake, Erdman, & Bloom, 1982).

## 5. Epstein’s neurological hypotheses

It seems to me that Epstein has made an imaginative valuable synthesis by joining aesthetics with neo-Jamsian cognitive psychology and his neurological “navigation of inner space” model. Having any neurological hypotheses at all in this area opens up a number of opportunities for further research and theory development.

One interesting property of involuntary memories that Proust reported is that they felt particularly life-like, as if occurring in the present. Wilder Penfield found very similar qualities in memories he elicited by direct stimulation of the temporal lobe in epileptic patients (Penfield, 1952, 1975), but methodological issues cloud the interpretations. I hope Epstein will discuss Penfield’s observations in the future. Another interesting property of involuntary recall is that more is included than in the original experience, as if in a collage. Epstein does not discuss how this might be covered by his proposed neurological mechanisms.

Epstein’s initial emphasis has been on the hippocampal and neocortical structures, because of the hippocampus’s strong involvement with both metaphorically locating items in memory and with literally locating positions in space. He has not yet extended his theorizing to other major brain subsystems involved in movement through space, such as the basal ganglia and the cerebellum. This seems like a necessary and very fruitful direction for future research and theorizing.

Another important set of opportunities that remain to be developed are the implications of cerebral duality for Epstein’s model. We have two cerebral hemispheres, and there are multiple paths connecting them to each other. Each has all the parts required for consciousness, but two somewhat different memory systems. Can they search each other’s memories? Bogen has written extensively on the duality of the brain in normal people with intact commissures, and its importance for understanding the duality of consciousness (e.g., Bogen, 1986, 1989, 1997; see also Galin, 1974; Galin, Diamond, & Braff, 1977; Galin, Johnstone, Nakell, & Herron, 1979; and Hilgard, 1977).

## 6. CODA

Aesthetics has been hotly debated for thousands of years with conspicuously little progress towards consensus. The sheer persistence of this failure must be accounted for. Perhaps it is because aesthetic experiences are almost always mixed with several other sorts of experience, and that interferes with separating the aesthetically relevant properties from other competing ones. I have suggested several other sources of confounding and confusion.

There is no reason to think that there is (or should be) only one type of aesthetic experience. It would be useful to have a typology of aesthetic experiences such as Rudolf Otto provided for spiritual experiences (Otto 1917/1958).

Epstein has not attempted a fully developed theory of aesthetic experience here; however, even a sketch of alternative perspectives may help to reanimate deadlocked discussions. Having any neurological hypotheses at all is a great step forward. We will have greatly advanced when we can give either a psychological or neurological account for even one type of aesthetic experience.

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