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The Conscious Stream

Denise Ingebo-Barth



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"The Conscious Stream: Review Edition" describes a theory built on the idea that consciousness--a stream of separate conscious instants, like frames making up a reel of film--is formed as trajectories circulate around the nervous system circuitry. In this model, a trajectory is a series of neuron groups energized in turn. (Picture it as a sequence of lights flashing around a marquee or perhaps as a comet blazing through a linked series of packed neuron groups--through circuits of the nervous system.) When a trajectory passes through the thalamus--a central area of the brain--an instant of experience is inserted into our lifelong conscious stream. This instant of experience can be a sensation, thought, or feeling. The particular instant depends on the source of the trajectory. When a trajectory is initiated by sound waves to the ear, and passes through the thalamus, for example, a sensation (in this case, a sound) enters the conscious stream.

As the description of this model progresses, we see how a trajectory from the thalamus to the cortex is recorded, and becomes a part of a network of records . . . and how, when concurrent trajectories in the cortical network converge and generate a trajectory back to the thalamus, a thought enters the conscious stream. In addition, as trajectories evolve--being repeated, prolonged, released or compounded-emotional feelings enter the conscious stream. Over time, patterns of invigoration and relaxation, stagnation and relief are generated, forming our life's emotional quality. Finally, the model shows how links of activity form a cycle . . . and how a pattern of cycles forms an "activity." Patterns of activities, in turn, form a lifestyle.

In this model, then, the character of circulation in the nervous system reflects emotional fitness. Although designed primarily for students of neuroscience, this proposed model may also be evaluated by those having an interest in the physical processes underlying emotional fitness.

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