**Beyond words: Aesthetics which are un-collapsed by linguistic classification**

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It seems that human cognitive potential is increasingly being projected into the linguistic domain. We are drowning in words: unrelenting 24-hour news cycles, an unceasing stream of social media, never-ending emails, and multiple new academic research papers being published every minute. Recent advances in large-language artificial intelligence (AI) models highlight our increasing slavery to a linguistic reality: the power of such technology is limited to what can be represented words. Even those AIs capable of generating image and video rely on detailed text-based classification. For this brave new world in which linguistic representation is master, it is no longer “I think therefore, I am”, but rather “I speak in order to create.”

Despite its power, language is relatively low-dimensional format for representing multisensory experience: the rich and varied phenomenology which characterizes nuanced forms of experience and expression cannot be easily collapsed into words. Indeed, recent neuroscience research has highlighted the value of experiences which are ‘ineffable’ – i.e., which defy straightforward linguistic classification. Cognition beyond the linguistic, which cannot be easily catalogued, organized, or stored, in some sense plays a role similar to that of ‘dark matter’ or ‘quantum superposition’ in physics: essences which are nearly impossible to observe or represent, but which are crucial for describing nature.

In this talk, I will weave together ideas from a range of disciplines, including predictive coding and entropy-based models of cognition, matter-energy concepts in physics, along with psychedelic & near-death phenomenology. I will elaborate a theoretical framework for ‘un-collapsed’ forms of representation which aim to go beyond day-to-day phenomenology and transcend detailed linguistic classification. I will outline some practical examples of ‘un-collapsed’ approaches to representation, and describe some recent empirical studies using virtual reality to investigate the impacts which such aesthetic approaches appear to have on experimental participants.

**References**

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