AESTHETIC EFFECTS OF LITERARY READING AND IMPACTFUL DREAMS

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OVERVIEW

- Spell out an expressivist conception of aesthetic genesis
- Present evidence that sublime feeling is a lingering effect of the aesthetic genesis that occurs
  - Through impactful dreams
  - Through absorbed literary reading
- Suggest directions for subsequent research
Aesthetic response minimally involves epistemic interest, which can be distinguished from:

- Satiating pleasure, e.g., the pleasure of slaking one’s post-basketball thirst (Silvia, 2010; Panksepp & Biven, 2012)
- Non-satiating pleasure, e.g., the joy of holding one’s grandson (Koelsch, Jacobs, Menninghaus, et al., 2015)
- The pleasure of processing fluency, e.g., the satisfaction of passively disambiguating a multistable figure (Winkielman et al., 2006)
AESTHETIC RESPONSE: EPISTEMIC INTEREST

- Interested “elaboration” during sustained balance between fluency and disfluency (Graf & Landwehr, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)
  - But not “elaboration” understood as judgments-with-closure (Leder et al., 2004), e.g., explicit intra-textual assertions, explicit contextualizing assertions
A NEW REFUTATION OF TIME

Time is a river that carries me along, and I am the river;  
It is a tiger that devours me and I am the tiger;  
It is a fire that consumes me and I am the fire.

*Borges (1946)*
AESTHETIC RESPONSE: INTEREST

- Interested “elaboration” during a sustained balance between fluency and disfluency (Graf & Landwehr, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)
  - But not “elaboration” understood as judgments-with-closure (Leder et al., 2004), e.g., explicit intra-textual assertions, explicit contextualizing assertions
  - Rather, “elaboration” as explicating judgments supportive of category development (categorial intuition; Husserl, 1983; Natanson, 1998)
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OUTCOMES OF AESTHETIC GENESIS: SUBLIME FEELING

- Not sublime feeling as a particular kind of emotion (e.g., melancholy, elevation)
- Not sublime feeling as response to particular stimulus properties (e.g., natural spectacle)
- But rather, sublime feeling as the combination of
  - An inexpressible recognition/realization
  - An “absence,” either within disquietude or enthrallment
  - A “shift” toward self-perceptual depth
Empirical Indices of Sublime Feeling

- The Experiencing Questionnaire (EQ; Kuiken, Campbell, & Sopčák, 2012)
  - Sublime Disquietude: The interactive combination of Inexpressible Realizations, Self-perceptual Depth, Perceived Discord
  - Sublime Enthrallment: The interactive combination of Inexpressible Realizations, Self-perceptual Depth, Wonder
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aesthetic Outcomes</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sublime Disquietude</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-perceptual Depth</td>
<td>I felt sensitive to aspects of my life that I usually ignore</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inexpressible Realizations</td>
<td>What seemed clear to me also seemed beyond words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Discord</td>
<td>I felt profoundly ill-at-ease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sublime Enthrallment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Inexpressible Realizations</td>
<td>What seemed clear to me also seemed beyond words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wonder</td>
<td>I felt deeply astonished</td>
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THE AESTHETIC BACKGROUND:  
STUDIES OF IMPACTFUL DREAMS

Two previous studies of literary reading (Kuiken, Campbell, & Sopčák, 2012) found that:

- Sublime disquietude was greater following reading of Celan’s *Death Fugue*, Owen’s *Exposure*, Blanchot’s *The Instant of My Death*, and Levi’s *The Black Stars*.
- Sublime enthrallment was greater following reading of Shelley’s *Mont Blanc*, Coleridge’s *Frost at Midnight*, Rilke’s First *Duino Elegy*, and Eliot’s *Little Gidding*.

Are the carry-over effects of some dreams comparable to reading *Death Fugue*, etc.?

Are the carry-over effects of some dreams comparable to reading *Mont Blanc*, etc.?
Impactful Dream Types (Kuiken & Sikora, 1993; Busink & Kuiken, 1996)

- Transcendent dreams involve:
  - Vivid tactile-kinesthetic imagery, spreading warmth, unusual forms or sources of light, felt vitality, flying and floating, magical accomplishment, perspective shifts, and awe and ecstasy during dream endings

- Existential dreams involve:
  - Vivid tactile-kinesthetic imagery, light/dark contrasts, ineffectual movement (fatigue), separation and loss, spontaneous affective shifts, and agonizingly sad dream endings

- Nightmares involve:
  - Vivid tactile-kinesthetic imagery, vivid or unusual sounds, metamorphoses, energetic activity, harm avoidance, and intensely frightening dream endings
RESEARCH DESIGN (LEE & KUIKEN, 2015)

- 158 participants who remembered at least one dream/month (including at least one impactful dream)
- Participants recorded a dream that was as impactful as their most impactful dream within the preceding month
  - By completing the 26-item Impactful Dreams Questionnaire (IDQ; Kuiken, 2009), which enabled classification of nightmares (n=38), existential dreams (n=47), transcendent dreams (n=35), and mundane dreams (n=38)
  - And by completing a dream-specific version of the Experiencing Questionnaire (EQ)
DREAM TYPE DIFFERENCES: EFFECTS ON SUBLIME FEELING (STUDY 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mundane dreams (n = 38)</th>
<th>Transcendent dreams (n = 35)</th>
<th>Nightmares (n = 38)</th>
<th>Existential dreams (n = 47)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sublime Enthrallment</td>
<td>1.37&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.23&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.53&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.77&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sublime Disquietude</td>
<td>1.46&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.38&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.02&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.46&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<sup>abc</sup> Means with different superscripts (within rows) differ significantly from each other (<sup>p</sup> < .05; LSD)
215 participants who remembered at least one dream/month (including at least one impactful dream)

Participants recorded a dream that was as impactful as their most impactful dream within the preceding month

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- And by completing a dream-specific version of the Experiencing Questionnaire (EQ)
### Dream Type Differences: Effects on Sublime Feeling (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mundane dreams (n = 63)</th>
<th>Transcendent dreams (n = 31)</th>
<th>Nightmares (n = 50)</th>
<th>Existential dreams (n = 64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sublime Enthrallment</strong></td>
<td>1.23&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.39&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.23&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.31&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sublime Disquietude</strong></td>
<td>1.25&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.34&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1.39&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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Two previous studies of literary reading (Kuiken, Campbell, & Sopčák, 2012) found that:

- Sublime disquietude was greater following reading of Celan’s *Death Fugue*, etc.
- Sublime enthrallment was greater following reading of Shelley’s *Mont Blanc*, etc.

Are the aftereffects of some forms of absorbed reading comparable to reading *Death Fugue*, etc.?

Are the aftereffects of some forms of absorbed reading comparable to reading *Mont Blanc*, etc.?
Types of Absorbed Reading (Sikora, Kuiken & Miall, 2011; Kuiken & Douglas, in press); Fialho & Kuiken, in preparation

- Expressive Enactment involves:
  - Pre-enactive Empathy, Peripersonal Space, Self-implicating Givenness

- Integrative Comprehension involves:
  - Cognitive Perspective-taking, Extrapersonal Space, Narrative Realism

- Reactive Engagement involves:
  - Alternative Perspectives, Side Participation, Explanatory Revision
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Latent Variables (with Miniscales)</th>
<th>Sample Item</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Expressive Enactment</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-implicating Givenness</td>
<td>Remembering experiences in my own life helped me to sense what the character was going through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peri-personal Space</td>
<td>I could almost feel what it would be like to move or change position in relation to the things (objects, characters) in the story world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-enactive Empathy</td>
<td>For a moment I felt like I “was” the character described there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrative Comprehension</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Realistic Conduct</td>
<td>This character's actions seemed similar to what I observe people doing in “real” life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Realism</td>
<td>The character’s feelings, attitudes, and concerns seemed life-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Perspective-taking</td>
<td>I could understand events in the story from the perspective of each different character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-personal Space</td>
<td>I could see (in my mind’s eye) the same setting (or environment) that was “there” for a character to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reactive Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Perspective</td>
<td>I identified with someone other than the character described in that part of the story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side Participation</td>
<td>I felt close enough to the situation to think I understood it better than a character did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanatory Revision</td>
<td>I thought about how this part of the story might have unfolded differently</td>
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365 participants were asked to read an excerpt from the novella *On Chesil Beach* (McEwan, 2008).

After reading, participants were asked to

- Write recursively and expressively about their experience of a pivotal (preselected) passage
- Describe their reflections using (1) a preliminary version of the Absorption-like States Questionnaire (ASQ; Kuiken & Douglas, in press) and (2) selected items from the EQ (Kuiken, Campbell, & Sopčák, 2012)
KUIKEN & DOUGLAS (IN PREPARATION)

- Differential prediction of aesthetic (“expressive” and narrative (“story-driven”) outcomes (Study 1):
  - Besides Sublime Disquietude, Being Moved
  - Explanatory Coherence and Causal Explanation
- A replication of the preceding pattern (Study 2)
- A critique of story-driven “situation models” in cognitive studies of literary reading (e.g., Zwaan, 2014; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998)
- Affirmation of the distinctively aesthetic outcomes of expressive enactment during literary reading
RESEARCH/SCHOLARLY PROSPECTS

- Differential prediction of Sublime Disquietude and Sublime Enthrallment, perhaps depending on text selection (e.g., *Death Fugue*, *Mont Blanc*)
- Differential prediction of aesthetic (sublime feeling) and pragmatic (attitude change) effects of literary reading
- Differential prediction of response to metaphoric constructions during and after absorbed literary reading and after impactful dreaming