

Awe: Aesthetic Arrest.

'Beauty is an altered state of consciousness, an extraordinary moment.'

The conversation of awe is a spectacle in itself and it's an idea which I find to be of great interest. Especially since I came across this idea recently;

The term is 'Aesthetic Arrest' and was first coined by James Joyce in his book 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.' and this idea was then thrust into the main stream by Joseph Campbell, who borrowed a line from Camus when he said "When we are transfixed by beauty, we are beheld in an aesthetic arrest. We are so transfixed that we stop breathing. We well up inside and experience *life lived to the point of tears*¹."

When we look at a beautiful landscape or become engrossed in a enrapturing sunset, the mind almost stops and you are left staring in the face of the nature of reality, this interconnected web of miracles that have been spiralling since the dawn of time, our conscious is wrapped up in that, it becomes at one.

By allowing ourselves to be awed by the magnificent wonders that the universe has given us. To be open to the miraculousness that is nature, to have what I like to call 'Henry Miller moments' these moments of complete immersion in something that it then becomes as Henry Miller says 'a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself.' These moments, these wonders, these ecstasy filled instances, they're are inspiring, they allow us to appreciate the here and now, it allows us to forget the transient nature of everyone and everything in that moment, in fact I think it allows to you accept the transient nature of everyone and everything and be at peace with that fact and understand how important the present day is, how important each and every day is, because when we are the present moment, we are taking notice of everything that surrounds us, we are living in the moment, not thinking of yesterday or looking to tomorrow, but living in the 'now', which is ultimately all we have as Alan Watts says. These moments of pure aesthetic appreciation allow us to escape from the routine of everyday practices, to escape the ongoing familiarity of life and awaken our minds to the wonders that surround us.

But you're not just awed by what wonders that you see or by what you watch in the movie theatre, but by the books that provide you with new ways of thinking, by the poems that empower you, by the Broadway shows that tap into your emotional subconscious.

In fact Keltner and Haidt² explain the arousal of awe, when and where these 'epiphanic experiences' as they call them, will take place. They talk about how art can produce awe by rendering exceptional moments in time that are signs of vast, powerful forces, as when seemingly trivial events foreshadow larger development in the narrative. They say that Monet's 'Water Lillies' can engage the spectator in a novel way of viewing things.

I think that when we are immersed in awe, it makes us believe that anything is possible. You believe that it's possible that we can transcend the limitations that our predecessors once had, you believe that you can transcend your own limitations. By allowing our senses to be constantly exhausted by the wonders of life, you begin to appreciate life for what it is, your mind gets opened and opened it will stay the more you accept and the more you are willing to be awed.

As Christopher Poindexter says in his 'Naked Human' the most beautiful people to be around are the ones with open minds.

Look up and gaze at the intergalactic arena that is the cosmos, not down at your hand held devices. Ignite your sense of wonder with these awe inspiring moments which can in turn script your subjective thoughts that can then 'boost your creativity' as Professor Nira Liberman wrote in her 'Expansive Thinking' study. I think that these cognitive ecstasy's as Jason Silva calls them, can subconsciously write the algorithms of the creative mind.

These experiences, these events and these moments that you participate in, allure you step to off of that 'Hedonic Treadmill' that Brickman and Campbell talk about in their essay 'Hedonic Relativism and Planning the Good Society' and take a breath, they get you stepping outside of 'the box' and get you thinking in such a way that stuns the mind and inspires you.

The Dung beetle uses the stars to map its path, I say use the stars to inspire your path.

Awe can expand time, it enhances your well-being, it scripts your creative mind, it allows you to understand the greatness that comes of living each day as it is, it lets you appreciate the beauty in the smallest of things. Which I think can have a significantly positively effect on your life.

Alex Green.

¹ Camus famous quote was "Live to the point of tears."

² 'Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual and aesthetic emotion' by Dacher Keltner and Johnathan Haidt, 2001.