

**Murray Smith.** *Film, Art, and the Third Culture: A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film.* Oxford University Press 2017. 288 pp. \$45.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780198790648).

Antagonism between scientific and humanistic approaches to truth and knowledge has been with us at least since Plato famously hinted at the ‘ancient quarrel’ between philosophy and poetry. In more recent times, this antagonism is often framed in terms of the ‘two cultures,’ with scholars from both camps praising and criticizing their opponents’ approach. However, after years of sharp divisions, optimists on both sides are now claiming that the long anticipated ‘third culture’ is on the horizon. Murray Smith’s latest book just might be the shiniest example of what C.P. Snow hoped for when he first urged scientists and humanists to work together. Taking inspiration from Snow himself, Smith not only testifies to the advantages that such cooperation might bring, but provides pointers on how to build it.

Divided in two parts, the book comprises eight chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. As Murray explains it, his goal is to articulate and defend some principles and strategies underlying a naturalized aesthetics by depicting and explaining various ways in which knowledge and methods from the humanities and the sciences fruitfully interact. His kind of cooperative naturalism does not advocate the autonomy of either domain, nor does it make human or natural sciences redundant. Rather, it aims to actively integrate them, by incorporating research from philosophical aesthetics and art, philosophy of mind, psychology, neuroscience, cognitive sciences, anthropology, and evolutionary theories. Murray’s book thus sets the basis for a naturalized approach to art generally and film in particular, one which, ‘while fully acknowledging the diversity of artistic forms and their cultural contexts, sees film art as manifestation of a cluster of deeply entrenched, basic human capacities’ (3).

Approaches to aesthetics such as Murray’s have been under fire, given that, as the argument goes, it is not immediately obvious what empirical knowledge about the cognitive, emotional, and imaginative mechanism of art creation and reception might add to our experience and appreciation of art. Murray takes this challenge very seriously, repeatedly going back to it. His credo is that by consulting neuroscience and other empirical research, we know more about the existence of certain phenomena – he is interested in those relating to our cognitive and emotional makeup which play a central role in our aesthetic and artistic endeavours – and so are better positioned to explain their various functional manifestations. Such growth of knowledge itself has epistemological value because it substantially adds to our overall body of knowledge and helps us settle many of our most pressing questions regarding human experience. Chapter six is particularly dedicated to showing how neuroscience can help us understand the interconnection of our evolved biology and culture for the way we experience, express and recognize emotions, in ourselves, in others, and in relation to fictional characters. As emphasized in chapter three, one of the benefits of neuroaesthetics is in showing how researches in neuroscience, up till now mostly concerned with visual art and perception, shed light on narrative art, primarily by contributing to our understanding of memory and empathy. Murray’s account of the connection between our consciousness and the aesthetic experience of films, developed in the fourth chapter, exemplifies the depths to which our understanding of ourselves and our practices is deepened once scientific research is integrated with philosophical analyses. Division of labour, focus, and methods between natural scientists and humanists will not get us far, Smith argues, as the world we live in is, ultimately, ‘one world’ (152), and as such, can only be fully understood if we integrate our investigative efforts. This argument is particularly addressed at three groups of humanists who, Smith argues, resolutely ignore scientific research: creationists, traditional humanists, and political leftists.

Naturalized aesthetics centres around the coherentist explanatory procedure that Murray refers to as triangulation of aesthetic experience. It integrates three levels: phenomenological (what it feels like when we undertake some mental act), psychological (what sorts of capacities and functions our minds possess), and neurophysiological (what happens in the brain when we exercise these capacities and have these experiences). While each level is in itself too impoverished to have significant explanatory power, the three of them, together, deliver substantial explanations of our experiences of art. Such an explanation is not meant to take over our critical practices and interpretative engagements with films, or to substitute our individual experiences with artworks. Instead, such explanation should considerably contribute to our understanding of our artistic behaviours, including emotional complexities involved in art and in our response to art, our empathic responses to real life events and their fictional depiction, the role of mirror neurons, the way our mind interprets what goes on in films and the connections it makes with respect to the real world, the way meaning arises in and gets communicated via an artwork, the role that narratives have for our cognitive growth and the like.

Integration of the three levels provides Murray with the ammunition needed to explain the workings of the human mind from the ‘biocultural’ (10) perspective. The individual mind, insists Murray, is dependent not only on its evolutionarily determined foundations, but also on the social, cultural world. Consequently, human cognition is embodied as well as extended, and it includes personal and subpersonal levels. One of the most outstanding capacities of our mind is its capacity for empathy, i.e., other-focused personal imagining, which is one of the central focus of the book. In chapter seven in particular Murray explains how empathy helps us connect with others, emphasizing that, just like emotions, its basic role is in mapping out the world in terms of its potential harms and benefits.

On Murray’s view, the fact that human cognition is not brainbound but dependent on biology and culture urges us to turn to both, natural sciences and humanities, when we seek to understand how the mind works. The explanatory benefits of such an integrated approach are particularly evident in Murray’s handling of phenomena that usually fall under philosophy of mind – cognition, rationality, intentionality, attention, sensory experience, emotions, and above all, empathy and consciousness. Murray’s ability to provide a naturalistic explanation of these capacities, all the while keeping his discussion in line with philosophically interesting issues is outstanding, but what marks this book as a breakthrough is its author’s success in unveiling the relevance of these capacities in one’s aesthetic experience of art. Considering the extent to which cognitive aesthetics is often criticized for its failure to (and disinterest in) explain(ing) the aesthetic relevance of artists’ manipulation of the audience’s cognitive and emotional capacities, Murray shows the way in which aestheticians and cognitive scientists fruitfully work together. To all those philosophers and humanists who fear their theories are too abstract and generalized, and to all the natural scientists who feel that beauties of art are beyond the reach of their insights, this book gives a much-needed pat on the shoulder.

Given Murray’s insistence on the need for disciplinary integration, it is not surprising that his book, while nominally dedicated to art, offers more to those interested in human psychology than to those who turn to it expecting it to scrutinize films as art objects. This isn’t to diminish his critical discussions of films he uses as examples for the phenomena he explains, and one of the most rewarding aspects of the book is Murray’s analyses of the way film directors explore humans’ cognitive and emotional states and put them on screen via the film-specific means and techniques as these developed throughout the course of film history. On Murray’s list are directors as diverse as Shyamalan, Spielberg, von Trier, Gehr, Wiseman, Ackerman, Brakhage, Sharits, Wenders, Tarr,

Cameron, and others. While a reader might feel that Murray overestimates the extent to which filmmakers are aware of the convoluted ways of human cognition and emotions, his analyses occasionally give the impression that filmmakers and actors are not only in full possession of knowledge of human psychology, i.e., those insights that the book offers to the rest of us, but also that they make art for the sole purpose of pushing their viewers' cognitive and emotional buttons. Murray exemplifies how scientific approaches to art can go hand in hand with art criticism, thereby refuting stands according to which naturalized approaches to art might put art critics out of business. Against the background of the growing discipline of cognitive aesthetics, this only testifies to the relevance that the book is bound to have in future discussions of art, aesthetics, human cognition, and overall human aesthetic and artistic engagements. Murray is to be congratulated for the massive amount of information he put together, and for the clear, engaging way of presenting them and explaining them. All things considered, Murray's book is an enjoyable read, intellectually stimulating, (meta)philosophically intriguing, aesthetically rewarding, and scientifically exemplary.

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