



CLEARING

A Mind Made of Silk

Many living beings interact with the world in complicated ways, with little reliance on their brains. A big cerebellum or central nervous system doesn't always equate to being the best performer when it comes to nonhuman lifeforms. Spiders use their webs as silky extensions of their minds, places to not only catch bugs but to solve problems and store memories. And in reverse, the state of a spider's nervous system has been proved to intensely affect its web-building capacities: dosed by scientists in the 1940s arachnids on amphetamines, LSD, and caffeine spun of wozy, strung-out webs.

Octopuses are famously smart yet their neurons are mostly found in their arms, independent of a main processing unit; their physical makeup of tentacles and thousands of suckers being far too complex for central coordination. Some creatures offload what us humans see as part of the mental apparatus and processes to outside of their neural system entirely: take grasshoppers who have ears on their knees which pre-parse information of where the nearest mate is screaming from. Take it a step further to the hypothesis that certain information in a being's genes is expressed outside, in the world, like the case of birds nests as objects encoded into their genome, their expression varying from species to species.

If cognitive tasks escape the above brains and sprawl into bodies—and in some cases into the environment—what about us? Could it be conceivable that our ways of thinking and ways of seeing extend beyond our corporeal limits to incorporate nonbiological components? Cave drawings, hard drives, tapestries, buildings, coffee tables, paintings, the constructed world, the natural world, the whole world. Where does the mind end and the world begin? No less than a sea change perspective is required to even begin to see the invisible threads that sew this neural tapestry together.

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*Spiderwebs woven at dinnertime
Are not just for the pleasure of fangs
That eiffel tower of amino acids
Is a cerebellum
Spun outside the body
A thinking tapestry and
A mind made of silk*

*Neurons in arms scattered,
ripened in the flesh
Eight legs grappling with the swell
Pulpo meat is two-thirds thought
Who would have known minds were so tasty*

*Not all problems are solved
In the head
What about those two-legged know-it-alls
Could it be
That human cognition already*

*extends outside their frame?
Dancing, drawing, thinking beyond body and brain*

-

Ailsa Cavers