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Brain, conscious experience and the observing self

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Abstract

Conscious perception, like the sight of a coffee cup, seems to involve the brain identifying a stimulus. But conscious input activates more brain regions than are needed to identify coffee cups and faces. It spreads beyond sensory cortex to frontoparietal association areas, which do not serve stimulus identification as such. What is the role of those regions? Parietal cortex support the ‘first person perspective’ on the visual world, unconsciously framing the visual object stream. Some prefrontal areas select and interpret conscious events for executive control. Such functions can be viewed as properties of the subject, rather than the object, of experience – the ‘observing self’ that appears to be needed to maintain the conscious state.

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