



# Integrating Novelty

It's not simple.

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*“The objective world is a sort of Rorschach ink blot, into which each culture, each system of science and each religion, each type of personality reads a meaning.”*  
— Lewis Mumford, historian & literary critic

This post is about how new experiences change us.

## Novelty

The less you retain of yourself in a new experience, the more new ideas you'll bring back. But a paradox exists in bringing back things that are not part of yourself: If an idea is not part of yourself, then how did you bring it back? And if it is part of yourself, then what further work needs to be done?

The mysteries of change, creation, and learning are related. Random mutation and selection of the fittest were suggested as explanations, but these lack scale and mechanism. Because living systems learn quickly and intentionally, Darwinian evolution does not explain learning.

I can't describe what you should retain from an unusual experience. I can't say what you should learn, and I don't know how you learn. I'll give you some ideas about how you can enhance learning, how to retain and enrich new ideas.



## Integration

We make sense of the world by inference. We connect similar things and expect similar outcomes. If you're analytic, you might think you deduce things, but we never really deduce anything in practice. Deduction only works in theory. In the real world, we're always approximating. By inferring the equality of things we turn our metaphors into deductions.

That two things can be identical is a fundamental concept. From it comes the possibility that many things could be equal, and from that comes a meaning of oneness. Much of our fundamental physics explores this idea in the form of symmetry, superposition, and subatomic structures. The notion of equality is fundamental to logic, reason, and science of any kind.

There are no identities in our human world, even the way things were a second ago is different from how they are now. On the scales at which we see things there are no perfect equalities, only approximate ones. All measurements, values, perceptions, relations, commitments, and understandings are approximate.

Our chemistry is always changing. The chemistry of some things, like rocks, effectively isn't. Water changes all the time, as do all liquids and gases, but we ignore these changes as long as it's just a matter of unstructured motion. The ideas of stasis and equivalence are only true in theory. They have no precise meaning in practice.

Everything that affects humans is a matter of averages, but averages change too. There is a constant flux of thresholds, phases, and transitions. We must know more than just the average of things, but also how things deviate from their averages. It's these deviations that signal coming change. Understand statistics.

Personalities are constantly subject to change but not all aspects are in flux. The one thing that we know is static and unchanging is nonexistence, although even that is a theory. You can't measure what doesn't exist, you just don't see it.

Our personalities don't exist until they act. They only exist when they make an appearance, before that they are just libraries of unstructured ideas. Our personalities respond when engaged; when not engaged they're absent. When you're not thinking or acting, you're like the reference desk, unconsciously organizing yourself in preparation for the next request. Something exists in you, some latent potential, but not your full-formed personality. This is important.



## Personality

Our personalities are built of parts that break down into thought, emotion, perception, and reflex. We might add spirit as a separate part. Spirit seems to reside in a separate place. It is not the same as intellect or emotion. Spirit feels more conclusive.

Each of these areas breaks down further. Intellect breaks down into the areas of creative, rational, and social. Emotion maps onto the familiar feelings of joy, anger, fear, curiosity, and so forth. Perception relates to our senses, and reflex relates to our innate responses of being attracted or repelled. No areas are separate though some seem to precede others. Spirit seems to represent a kind of summation of them all.

Emotions seem to precede thoughts, and thoughts seem to precede actions. But by watching the brain it's been found that actions usually precede emotions and thoughts. Our mind responds more slowly than our body.

There are systems within us that start our actions, and our conscious awareness is triggered by these systems. It's not that we don't think about what we do, it's rather that the decisions are often made by

the mechanisms that underlie our consciousness. Their messages are piped up to consciousness a fraction of a second after our body receives the instructions.

We do a kind of thinking before acting, but not conscious thinking. We process information, reach conclusions, and initiate responses both consciously and unconsciously, but it's the unconscious processing that happens first. The conscious processing, which we think of as our process of coming to a conclusion, is not active thinking, it's proactive thinking. Our conscious decisions drive our actions when we "second guess" ourselves and we change our minds. The initial setting of our minds happens before we think about it.

This should be no surprise. The feelings you have that drive your decisions precede those decisions. Your thoughts are decisions too, and something is driving those. Your mind has already come to a conclusion, or almost, before you've opened your mouth or thought the idea.

We see this in other people and they see it in us. We're aware of the direction that a conversation is going before it gets there. We can see thoughts forming on other people's faces before they're aware of them. This is due to the slowness of thought and habitual patterns of behavior.

Thoughts have momentum and associations are sticky. If you're having a good day, then your usual irritations are not consequential, but if you're having a bad day they are. Who, in their right mind, would offend someone before asking them for a favor? Decisions and ideas share this contagious property. The creation of ideas is subject to mental momentum just as is the formation of decisions.

Like bubbles ascending from a lake bottom, the consequences of our associations take seconds to come to the surface of consciousness. It's important to understand this when approaching the question of how to integrate new ideas. It's not our conscious mind into which we want to integrate new ideas, but our subconscious mind. We're looking to change what precedes our thoughts.

We have art therapy, music therapy, movement therapy, energy, cognitive, rational, emotional, and existential therapy. They're all doing the same thing: attempting to change our memories and associations and, to only a minor extent, our reasoning.

If you feel a certain way then you'll have a reason for it, and if you don't, and if you're challenged, then you'll invent a reason for it. If someone shows you definitive proof that's they're right and you're wrong, they won't change how you feel.

Mathematicians are unusual because their beliefs can be changed by formal proof. They live in a world that separates logic from emotion. That's not the case for most of us. Most of us will believe in "proof" only if it's proof of what we believe. And when we don't like the conclusion of a new proof, we move to another belief system.

Facts change our opinions only when facts change our feelings. Even mathematicians have feelings although there are some people who don't have feelings. I hope you're not one of them because in order to expand what you know, you have to expand what you feel.



## Feelings

Feelings are said to follow from emotions but I'm not sure they can be separated in any way other than their order of appearance. I cannot imagine having one without the other. They seem to be two slightly different languages for similar circumstances. We might say that neurologists should talk about emotions in the brain while psychologists should talk about feelings in the person.

You might be able to distinguish your emotions of love from your feelings love, or fearful emotions from fearful feelings. Take a step back and see both emotions and feelings as things that simply flow through you without your having to think too much about them.

Since reason doesn't govern our motivation and we'd like to know how to change what motivates us, we should look to what influences our emotions which is to say what and how we feel. How can we change how or what we feel?

Feelings are emotional but they're also sensory. Sensations are not only perceptual they're also apperceptual. Perceptions are the signals that you are aware of while apperceptions are the signals that you recognize as having meaning. You have infinitely more perceptions than apperceptions because most of our perceptions are ignored, sinking into the noise of the background.

## Change

You can change your reasoning; it's easy but not compelling. Cognitive therapy is popular but doesn't do much. Behavioral therapy trains you on what to think and how to behave. It's what they did to us in grade school.

If you can quench your feelings, kill your curiosity, and drown your emotions, then cognitive retraining might just be the ticket. It's a change in reasoning that might correct twisted logic but it doesn't change the feelings that underline your understanding.

To change understanding is to change what you feel and associate. If you associate a person, a culture, or a gender with a bad experience, then reasonable arguments may give you a new strategy. This change in action might be rewarding, like changing your profession, but is unlikely that it will change how you feel.

Your feeling will only change with new experiences, the building of new memories, and the formation of new associations. Think of this as a law, like the law of attraction: as long as you retain dominant associations from the past, those associations will dominate the future.



## Associations

As a valley channels a river, channeling your associations is a gathering of many tributaries of thoughts and feelings. To shift this geologic structure a new experience needs to influence many trains of thought as a reference, note, gateway, or meme.

As long as the waters of your thinking continue to flow down the same channels the rivers of your conclusions will continue in their paths. For an experience to change how you think that experience must become a sounding board with resonances for many mental instruments and at many cerebral frequencies. It must change the landscape.

If a new experience adds a new twist to many stories, then it may change those stories. If it's a good experience and you want to make that happen, then the experience must connect to your whole mental geography. You can lean into the changing of your stories by recounting those stories in the new light of your experience. To make this happen, make the experience bigger. Big enough to infiltrate your memories.

Make the experience visual by creating detailed, emotion-laden visions. Make it auditory by experiencing its sounds, in the context of sounds, or through the use of sounds, music, poetry, or song. Make the memory tactile by recalling it with motion and sensation, in or as motion and sensation. Make it theoretical, immediate, and consequential involving not only your thoughts but your senses. A memory becomes deeper as it broadens into many senses, situations, and ways of knowing.

The sensations you imagine have the potential to generate memories as strong as actual experiences. A real experience engages many senses, but your imagination can create senses just as strong. This is why our dreams affect our minds in the same way as real experiences.

We call these immersive experiences. This is what self-hypnosis can achieve if you're able to envelop yourself in it. This is not equally easy for everyone, and this is what hypnotherapists help you achieve.

This is the primary purpose of temples, rituals, and mind-expanding chemicals. It's why we're attracted to extreme experiences whether they're real or virtual. But the experience must be engaged, ingrained, recalled, and applied, or its effect will fade. If our experience is motivated by our conscious intent, then we must consciously hold the experience until it is absorbed by our subconscious.

Intentional experiences are the inverse of dreams. The dreams are arranged by and for our subconscious and sometimes become conscious. With conscious recollection, we can message the dream into the associations of which we're consciously aware. By thinking about the dream we can build new associations.

In intentional experiences that we consciously arrange our subconscious mind is listening at a distance, idling in the background. Integration involves bringing the foreground experience into the digestive apparatus of our minds. Like the foods we eat, the nutrition from the experience requires the experience to be broken down into its associations after which it can be incorporated into our thoughts and senses.



## Incorporation

This integration cannot be done in a prescribed setting or a fixed period of time. To think that you can integrate an experience with a short conversation is almost crazy. Deep learning never happens quickly. Both small or large experiences, especially large traumatic experiences, can take generations to digest.

The objective of integration is not to get it done quickly. To compare it to physical digestion, there are stages. Some of these stages are quickly done by formula. But the incorporation of the elements into one's psyche or one's soul can be geologic in time and genetic in scope.

It happens in your mind and body. The experience is incorporated into many associated memories as well as the structure, posture, and movement of your body, and in the energy distributed among your organs and your tissues. It's stored in the field you create aesthetically, socially, culturally, financially, and politically.

Sometimes, after a strong experience, we're struck by an idea, image, or emotion. You can make the process deeper and broader by letting it ferment. This is how we integrate. This is both a process of breaking down and building up.

Facilitate this process by bringing the experience and the memory of it into your life. We do rituals in special places to enrich the experience. We add music to connect overtones and octaves, harmonies, and rhythms. When a song gets stuck in our heads it grows into our neural circuitry. This is where you want to stick the experience that you want to integrate, lodged in your mind like a slowly dissolving lozenge.

Music is something we all do; music is not just performance, it's the body's rhythms. We all have rhythms and harmonies and you can take an experience and score it to yourself.

Your rhythms are in your body's many clock cycles and your harmonies are in the associations of your thoughts. Bringing an experience into yourself, integrating it, and digesting it involves writing it into the screenplay of your soul. We are drama and we are all playwrights. Integration is the process of personal myth-making.

You have to decide what novelty you want to integrate. Everyone has the right to make their own decisions.

The mechanism of how we integrate is the same for all of us. It involves bringing the experience into resonance with our important associations. This involves recalling and re-experiencing our important memories and associations in the presence of the novelty we'd like to include. It's the metaphorical bringing of a new acquaintance home to meet the family.

Our family, in this case, is all of our important feelings and memories. Integration involves the growing together and the formation of connections. We don't know what this learning or growth consists of, we don't know how the structured system of our mind rearranges itself. The most we can say is that if we put a nutritious experience in the petri dish of our structured selves, then the network of ourselves will digest it. We make new experiences part of ourselves through mechanisms we don't understand.

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