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The Artful Mind: cognitive science and the riddle of human creativity

Turner, Mark

Deskripsi Lengkap: https://library.stik-ptik.ac.id/abstrakpdfdetail.jsp?id=35648&lokasi=lokal

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Abstrak

The great riddle?of archaeology, cognitive science, neuroscience, anthropology, sociology, political science, linguistics, religious studies, and the humanities from literature and music to dance and art?is how we became human, how we acquired modern minds. Human beings with mental architecture like ours came into existence only yesterday, evolutionarily speaking?perhaps fifty thousand years ago. At least, the archaeological record as we have it shows no robust evidence of cognitively modern behavior before that epoch. The staggering behavioral singularities that come with cognitively modern minds?advanced tool use, decorative dress, language, culture, religion, science, mathematics, art?present us with the greatest scientific embarrassment, for they appear to indicate a mysterious and unexplained discontinuity between us and the entire rest of Life. To have a cognitively modern human mind is to be robustly artful, and conversely. This equivalence provides the inevitable starting point for a research program aimed at answering obvious yet hard questions: What is the evolutionary path from our remoter ancestors, who somehow lacked artful minds, to the existence of cognitively modern human beings, who cannot fail to be artful? How did the artful mind emerge? In a leap, or through slow development? What are the basic mental operations that make art possible for us now, and how do they operate? What neurobiology subtends these abilities? What is the interplay, in the phenomena of artfulness, between biological dispositions, individual experience, and cultural history?