

The Art House of Fiction and Henry James's Poethics

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This paper presents a cognitive analysis of Henry James' mental architecture of 'The House of Fiction' as it shows an innovative conceptual integration of morality as meaning and of execution as form. This analysis is based on Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier's *mental space theory* (2002), applied to fiction as semiotically developed later on by Per Aage Brandt's latest work. The extract to be analysed is a prodigious integration that Henry James experientially reports in his Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* as a "connection" taking place in a state of "felt life" sometimes and of "sincere experience" along the same pragmatic axis, that is, the continuity of inferential processes that ontologically and epistemologically bring together abstract concepts and logical reasoning as proposed by his American contemporaries the psychologists and philosophers William James and John Dewey.

My generalizing Brandt's starting point to understand James's phenomenological overlapping of morality (meaning) and execution (form) is that he counter-intuitively considered 'the moral sense' as another special aspect of subjectivity appearing to the un/consciousness as, in Brandt's terms (2003), "an autonomous formal object making its very appearing into experiences of form unfolding in abstract space or time, rather than of concerns and states of affairs in the real world", which is how most of his contemporary Victorian intellectuals could only understand it.

Considering (Short) Fiction Theory in general, what is new in our approach to the cognitive processes of James's well-known 'intense perceiver' is to see it as an in-formal narrative perception that imports modes of imagining from sensory-motor experience that entails a simultaneous cognitive arousal of moral sense and of abstract form occurring at what Brandt calls the level of the "Res Intensa" in his model of *mental architecture*.

Furthermore, Brandt's new phenomenological semantics of excess, or surplus structure, offers us the keys to the cognitive individual and social construction of James's naturalistic *cognitive morality* as it breaks the moulds of the Victorian *artificial morality* on the one hand, and on the other to a new explanation of his deep concern for fiction as "art", particularly for fiction as analogous to painting as regards the entailments of their cognitive processes. In this view, ethics would cognitively be an action esthetics.