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In the Theater of Consciousness : The Workspace of the Mind

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The study of conscious experience has seen remarkable strides in the last ten years, reflecting important technological breakthroughs and the enormous efforts of researchers. Although still embroiled in debate, scientists are now beginning to find common ground in their understanding of consciousness, which may pave the way for a unified explanation of how and why we experience and understand the world around us. This book brings the subject to life with a metaphor that has been used to understand consciousness since the time of Aristotle—the mind as theater. Here consciousness is seen as a “stage” on which our sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings play to a vast, silent audience (the immensely complicated inner-workings of the brain's unconscious processes). Behind the scenes, silent context operators shape conscious experience; they include implicit expectations, self systems, and scene setters. Using this framework, the book presents compelling evidence that human consciousness rides on top of biologically ancient mechanisms. In humans it manifests itself in inner speech, imagery, perception, and voluntary control of thought and action. Topics like hypnosis, absorbed states of mind, adaptation to trauma, and the human propensity to project expectations on uncertainty, all fit into the expanded theater metaphor.