

Measuring Aesthetic Effects: Do we need new Paradigms for Bridging the Gap between Empirical Aesthetics and Art History?

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Empirical aesthetics is a scientific discipline that examines how people perceive, interpret, and feel while engaging with objects such as artworks. Aesthetic experiences involve cognitive and affective emotional processes that are strongly intertwined, that occur through a sequence of processing stages, and that result in specific mental representations and changes in the state of the mental system (Leder, et al., 2004; Pelowski et al., 2017). With recent developments in neurosciences, empirical aesthetics have increasingly taken into account neural processes underlying aesthetic experiences (Leder, 2013; Leder, Markey & Pelowski, 2015).

The traditional object of inquiry of empirical aesthetics is visual art. While visual art is also a major topic of the art sciences, such as art history, these disciplines approach the topic with a different perspective "*the study of objects of art in their historical development and stylistic contexts; that is genre, design, format, and style*"¹. This is a perspective in which the primary focus is the art object while the role of the perceiver often is not explicitly discussed. However, when art historians do discuss the perceiver (Gombrich, 1960; Freedberg, 1989), the focus necessarily is on perceivers of the artwork around the time when it was created.

For over a century there has been this gap between the two sciences: empirical aesthetics is only able to very indirectly grasp the historical dimensions of art, or only for contemporary art (Pelowski et al., 2018), while art history considers the responses of today's perceiver as unimportant in relation to the historical context of an artwork. This gap has led to ambiguities and mistrust between C.P. Snow's "two cultures", of humanities and sciences. As both disciplines differ in their methods, topics, and historical perspectives, there is a seemingly insurmountable gap regarding the historical dimension and contexts of art. This present project discusses the potential of new research paradigms that would allow empirical aesthetics to more effectively address the historical context of art (Bullot & Reber, 2013; Leder, 2013b).

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¹ (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art_history)