

Neuroaesthetics and Music: Difficulties of a Young Field of Research

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ABSTRACT

Background

Neuroaesthetics is a young and controversially discussed field of research. In the beginnings of the 21st century, British neurobiologist Semir Zeki brought the term “neuroaesthetics” as a subdiscipline between humanities and natural science in the discourse. Neuroaesthetics tries to investigate aesthetic problems empirically. Depending on the self-conception of the discipline, the methodological spectrum moves in a wider or narrower framework and bases only on magnetic resonance imaging or includes additionally psychological as well as evolutionary biological research methods.

Aims

In my poster presentation, I would like to delineate a series of difficulties of neuroaesthetics in music research: (1) challenges concerning the identity and aims of the field of research; (2) methodological difficulties which require substantial improvement; (3) external and internal coherence; (4) criticism on reductionism; (5) demands on a modified purpose; (6) integration of the physical dimension of aesthetic experience; call for an observance of the existence of mirror cells; (7) questions on the relevance of neuroaesthetics as an autonomous field of research; (8) criticism on the dominance of neuroimaging; and (9) ecological validity of neuroaesthetic studies.

Method

Literature review.

Results

(1) There’s still no agreement concerning the key fields, research questions and objects of neuroaesthetics. The question if neuroaesthetics should focus only on aesthetic experiences or not is still not answered sufficiently. (2) We should gain a deeper understanding of the possibilities and limits of neuroimaging methods in neuroaesthetic research projects (there’s a strong tendency to over-interpretate data gained from functional magnetic resonance imaging surveys). (3) Neuroaesthetics is a genuine interdisciplinary field of research and needs an embedment in all disciplines taking part.

Conclusion

As a young and promising field of research, neuroaesthetics has to face its difficulties and has to find appropriate solutions to them in order to stabilize and strengthen its potential as a discipline anchored between humanities and natural sciences.

Keywords

neuroaesthetics and Music; methodology of neuroaesthetics; theory of Neuroaesthetics; criticism of neuroaesthetics

REFERENCES

Zeki, S. (2001). Artistic Creativity and the Brain. *Science*, 293, 51-52.