

TENDENCIES IN EXPERIMENTAL AESTHETICS

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Background

The term 'aesthetics' has been coined by the philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten as early as 1750. As a philosophical discipline the field remained occupied by philosophers and art historians until the mid 19th century. In 1876, however, experimental aesthetics was founded by Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887) as a field of psychological inquiry.

Aims

The basic aim of empirical aesthetics (this is the broader term for 'experimental aesthetics') was and still is to give a scientific basis for theorizing on the reception and production of the arts and aesthetic phenomena in general. Although there is a methodological tradition (principles of psychophysics) new methods have been used to get insights into the field. The aim of this paper is to show some lines of development.

Main Contribution

Some of the new trends came from outside empirical aesthetics, mainly from psychology, of course. One of these aspects is a tendency to consider ecological factors, another one is the growing interest in creativity and brain research.

Implications

As the traditional starting point of the field was visual aesthetics the museum had been treated with more attention than before, i.e. the places of the exposition and reception of the arts received more interest. On the other hand, some of the empirical results have influenced traditional fields of aesthetics, i.e. there is an export of knowledge to the philosophical area of aesthetics.