



Press Information

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1 Keyword: Empirical Aesthetics

1.1 “What Is It, and Why Do We Need It?”

Aesthetic experiences and practices have shaped cultures since the dawn of humanity. Aesthetically motivated choices permeate every area of our everyday lives. And time and again people are even persecuted for their aesthetic ideals. Against this background, systematic basic research on the nature and function of aesthetic practices, judgments, and motivations for action must be considered a necessity, rather than a luxury.

Nevertheless, despite the impressive foundations laid for it by Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), empirical aesthetics still holds a marginal position among the sciences. The Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics has set itself the task of giving the sporadic and repeatedly disconnected endeavors to develop an interdisciplinary science of aesthetics a new scientific and institutional underpinning.

1.2 Research Mission of the MPI for Empirical Aesthetics

The Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics investigates what is aesthetically pleasing to whom, why this is so, and under what conditions, as well as what functions aesthetic practices and preferences have for both individuals and societies. It is currently the only non-university research institution in the world dedicated to interdisciplinary basic research on aesthetic perception and evaluation.

In the interplay between the humanities and the natural sciences, the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics draws on a broad range of multidisciplinary expertise as well as a variety of methods. The primary focuses in our research on the many nuances of aesthetic perception include:

- the individual, cultural, and historical differences among aesthetic preferences;
- the cognitive and affective mechanisms governing aesthetically evaluative perception as well as their neural, physiological, and behavioral correlates,
- the functions of aesthetic experiences for personal development, subjective well-being, and social communication.



2 Numbers and Facts

Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, Frankfurt am Main

- Institute founded: 2013
- Institute opened: 2015

2.1 Departments

- Music, Director: Prof. Dr. Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann
- Cognitive Neuropsychology, Director: Prof. Dr. Fredrik Ullén

2.2 Staff growth

- 2014: 40
- 2015: 71
- 2023: 146

2.3 Staff composition

- Scientific staff: 99
- Non-scientific staff: 47
- Countries represented: 27

2.4 Institute directors

- Board of directors on a rotation basis
- Managing Director changes every two years



3 Departments at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics

Currently there are two scientific departments at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics.

3.1 The Department of Music, Director: Prof. Dr. Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann

In the Department of Music, music historians, music theorists, and ethnomusicologists work and conduct research alongside psychologists, sociologists, and neuroscientists. Together, they aim to develop a transdisciplinary aesthetics of music in which all relevant approaches and methods are productively intertwined. They thus hope to gain a better understanding of the specific field of experience and practice that humans have created for themselves with music and of how they make use of it.

3.2 The Department of Cognitive Neuropsychology, Director: Prof. Dr. Fredrik Ullén

The overall goal of the Department of Cognitive Neuropsychology is to increase our understanding of the neural mechanisms that underpin human expertise, skill learning, and creativity. In most of our work, we use music as a model domain. This choice is, first and foremost, motivated by an interest in music itself and its biological foundations. Music is one of the major art forms and is present in some form in all known human cultures. The neuropsychology of music has in recent decades grown to become one of the most dynamic subfields in the cognitive sciences.

4 Equipment at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics

4.1 ArtLab

The ArtLab is a multi-purpose event space specifically designed to host behavioral and physiological studies related to the aesthetic evaluation of music, literature, performing arts, and audiovisual media. To this end, it features a performance hall with seating for 46 as well as other facilities required for the presentation of professional events. An observation room designed to host scientists and research equipment during experiments is located directly adjacent to this hall. Additionally, the ArtLab features state-of-the-art audio-recording and mastering facilities as well as a professional video-production site. It fulfills virtually all requirements needed to investigate behavioral and physiological responses by an audience attending an artistic performance in an ecologically valid setting.

4.1.1 Performance Hall

- Sloped floor auditorium with a seating capacity of 46
- Rectangular stage (roughly 4 x 9 m)
- Fohhn stereo public address system (extendible as required)
- LED stage lighting with DMX control panel
- Video projector and variable screen for front and rear projection
- Variable room acoustics with defined settings
- WLAN-based measurement system for both the assessment of physiological data and the collection of self-reports via tablet PC
- PTZ dome cameras for observing stage and auditorium
- Various analog and digital interfaces for the recording and playback of audiovisual data
- Interfaces for measuring physiological data and EEG in the auditorium and on stage

4.1.2 Observation Room

- Computer workstation for the controlled playback of optoacoustic stimuli
- Computer workstation for measuring physiological data
- Video-editing suite with high-performance 10G-SAN access
- Digital audio workstation for documentation and production



4.1.3 Recording Studio

- Reference audio monitoring for production and documentation
- Lawo mc²56 mixing console with digital audio matrix
- Strauss SE-MF-2 reference stereo audio monitoring system (extendible as required)
- Various interfaces for the measurement of physiological data and EEG and for control signals (GPIO, MIDI, rtpMIDI, Ethernet)

4.2 Library

The Library provides researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics as well as interested scholars and artists with literature, scientific information, and audiovisual media in the fields of aesthetics, music, psychology, literature, and cultural studies.

- The library is open to scholars, researchers, students, artists, and other users interested in aesthetics, music, language and literary studies, as well as neuroscience.
- Opening Hours: Monday / Wednesday to Friday 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Tuesday 10 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.

4.3 Brain Imaging Center (BIC)

The Brain Imaging Center (BIC) is a research center operated by Goethe University, Frankfurt and based on the scientific cooperation of Goethe University, the Max Planck Society, and the Ernst Strüngmann Institute. It is dedicated to the investigation of the structure and function of the human brain. The BIC is equipped with:

- A 3 Tesla MR scanner
- A 275-Channel MEG System

In the framework of this collaborative project, planning is under way for an expanded research building (CoBIC; expected completion 2023). The planned equipment includes:

- Two 3 Tesla MR scanners, one 7 Tesla MR scanner
- Two psychophysiological laboratories

4.4 Laboratories

The institute disposes of a total of six laboratories. Five of them are equipped with rooms that allow sound-proof measurements. Two of these rooms are designed for the measurement of EEG data, additionally eye tracking data can be collected in one of the two chambers. Furthermore, there is an eye tracking laboratory, a psychophysiological laboratory, and rooms in which several workstations are available for rating-studies and the collection of behavioral data.



5 Vitae

5.1 Vita Prof. Dr. Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann

Research Focus

- Aesthetics of music (historical, transcultural and empirical perspectives)
- Aesthetic experience of music (theoretical and empirical approaches)
- Musical taste
- Concert Research
- Music and meaning
- Sociology and anthropology of music
- Music practices and music cultures from the Renaissance to the early 19th century
- History of musicology

Academic Education

- 2009 Habilitation, University of Zurich
(Melancholy in instrumental music around 1800, published 2010)
- 2005 Dr.phil., University of Zurich
(Athanasius Kircher's "Musurgia universalis", published 2006)
- 1997–2002 Musicology and classics (Greek) at the universities of Rostock, Marburg, Germany,
Salzburg, Austria, and FU Berlin (M.A. from Berlin), Germany

Career

- Since 2017 Co-opted Professor for systematic musicology at the Goethe University,
Frankfurt am Main, Germany
- Since 2013 Director of the Music Department at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics,
Frankfurt am Main, Germany
- 2011–13 Professor for sociology and historical anthropology of music at the Humboldt-
Universität zu Berlin, Germany
- 2010/11 Professor for musicology at the Musikhochschule Lübeck, Germany
- 2003–2010 Research assistant and assistant professor at the Institute for musicology in Zurich,
Switzerland



Awards & Grants

- 2015 Marsilius Medal of the Marsilius Kolleg of Heidelberg University
- 2009 Max Weber-Preis of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, 2009
- 2009 Hermann-Abert-Preis of the Gesellschaft für Musikforschung (German society for music research), 2009
- 2004/2005 Nachwuchskredit (postgraduate grant) of the University of Zurich (2004)
- 1998–2002 Study grant of the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes

Academic Functions

- Member of the Academia Europaea, London
- Member of the Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main
- Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences and Literature, Mainz
- Board member of the Klassik-Zentrum, Weimar
- Vice-Chairwoman of the board of trustees, Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes, Bonn



5.2 Vita Prof. Dr. Fredrik Ullén

Research Interests

- Gene–environment interplay in musical engagement and expertise
- The neural basis of skill learning and performance
- Neural mechanisms of creativity
- Neuropsychology of flow
- Cultural engagement, well-being, and health

Professional Experience

- 2021–present Director of the Department of Cognitive Neuropsychology at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
- 2012–present Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, Dept. of Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2010–2011 Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, Dept. of Women’s and Children’s Health, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2009–2010 University Lecturer in Cognitive Neuroscience, Dept. of Women’s and Children’s Health, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2006–2009 Senior Researcher, Dept. of Woman and Child Health, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2001–2005 Assistant Professor, Dept of Woman and Child Health, Karolinska Institutet, (Swedish Scientific Council position), Stockholm, Sweden
- 05/2006 Associate Professor (docent), Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1999–2001 Postdoctoral Fellow (Hjärnfonden), Dept. of Neuroscience and Dept. of Woman and Child Health, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1997–1999 Postdoctoral Fellow (Swedish Scientific Council position), Studies of Artificial Neural Systems, NADA, Royal Institute for Technology; and Dept. of Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

Education

- 2010 Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience
- 1996 Doctor of Philosophy, Faculty of Medicine (PhD), Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden
- 1990 Master Performing Arts (solo piano), Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden



Awards & Grants

- 2021 Scientific Member of the Max Planck Society
- 2017 Fellow of Academia Europaea
- 2007 Fellow of the Swedish Royal Academy of Music

Professional Service

- 2020–present Scientific Advisory Board, Centre Européen de Musique, Paris, France
- 2013–2021 Board, Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden
- 2013–2018 Nomination Committee, Swedish Royal Academy of Music



6 The Max Planck Society and Its Institutes

"Insight must precede application." – Max Planck

The Max Planck Institute as such does not exist. Instead, there are many institutes, both in Germany and abroad, whose nearly 24,000 employees conduct and support the advancement of science under the auspices of the Max Planck Society.

These 80+ Max Planck Institutes and related facilities pursue basic research in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities—often on an interdisciplinary basis—in the service of the general public.

The Max Planck Society succeeded the Kaiser Wilhelm Society in 1948. Today it is Germany's most successful research organization, with 30 Nobel Prize winners to its name.

6.1 Germany's Flagship Research Institution

The Max Planck Society is Germany's flagship research institution, attracting scientists not only from its home country but from all over the world. Every year, more than 6,000 international guest and junior researchers pursue their work at the various Max Planck Institutes. One third of Max Planck Institute Directors, half of our doctoral students, and as many as 80 percent of our postdoctoral fellows are international passport holders.

In more than one hundred countries, the Max Planck Institutes are working together with around 5,400 partners to pursue over 4,500 collaborative projects. Max Planck Institute scientists cooperate particularly closely with German universities, too: Eighty percent of our habilitated researchers are actively involved in university teaching.

6.2 Basic Research

The results of the first study on quantum physics by Max Planck and Albert Einstein took almost 50 years to be implemented in semiconductor and laser technology—two key technologies that have transformed the way we live today.

Even if it takes decades for many discoveries to be put into practice, basic research is and remains the foundation of economic innovation.

6.3 The Harnack Principle

The Max Planck Institutes are the institutional home for some of the world's preeminent scientists. Directors determine their own topics, pursue their research under excellent working conditions, and have full say in choosing their staff.



Such circumstances represent the core of the Harnack Principle—named for Adolf von Harnack, who was President of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society from its founding in 1911 until 1930. With this structural principle of centering a research organization around the work of one or more leading experts in a field, the Max Planck Society continues the tradition of its predecessor institution to the present day.

6.4 Organization and Funding

The Max Planck Society for the Advancement of Science is an independent research organization in the form of a registered non-profit association. Its legal seat is in Berlin, and the office of its President and General Administration are located in Munich.

The Max Planck Society is financed primarily by public funds from federal and state governments¹; in 2021, this amounted to just over 1.97 billion euros. It is further supported by external funding for individual projects from public and private donors and from the European Union, as well as by revenues from technology transfer. Subsidies to the Max Planck Society's budget are shared equally by the federal and state governments of Germany.

The individual Max Planck Institutes each have their own self-administered budgets, which may be supplemented by project funds from third parties.

6.5 Continuing and Developing a Tradition

The Max Planck Society was founded in Göttingen on February 26, 1948, as the successor to the Kaiser Wilhelm Society for the Advancement of Science, which had been established in 1911. Its establishment was very much in keeping with Germany's new democratic beginnings following the end of National Socialism.

What was new about this new institution was its focus on basic research far removed from political or economic influences. And following the Harnack principle, the Directors of the individual Max Planck Institutes were held to the highest standards of scientific excellence.

The institutes and assets of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society that remained after the war were gradually transferred to the Max Planck Society, and by 1953 a research program had been re-established.

The Max Planck Society also resumed relations with international partners. Important milestones in this process include the establishment of partnerships with the Weizmann Institute in Israel in 1959 and with the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 1974.

In 1997, the Max Planck Society appointed a commission of independent historians to undertake a thorough review of the history of its predecessor organization under National Socialism. This project was completed in 2007.

¹ The Free State of Saxony requests the following information: "This funding is co-financed by tax revenues on the basis of the budget approved by the Saxon State Parliament".



7 General Contact Details

7.1 Address

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7.3 Social Media

Twitter: @MPI_ae – twitter.com/MPI_ae

Facebook: MPI.EmpiricalAesthetics – facebook.com/MPI.EmpiricalAesthetics

Instagram: mpi_ae – instagram.com/mpi_ae

Mastodon: MPI for Empirical Aesthetics – social.mpl.mpg.de/@MPI_ae