

Is popular dance beautiful?

A method to assess pleasure in dance

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The experience of pleasure in viewing dance is usually studied phenomenologically (Leder 1990). Here we present a tool to study pleasure quantitatively. Philosophers agree that beauty is pleasure (e.g. Kant 1764/1961; Santayana 1896). Vale and Pelli (2014) have developed an app to continuously record the observer's self-rated pleasure while looking at an image or listening to music. Their analysis focuses on the decay of pleasure after the stimulus ends. Afterwards, they ask the observers whether they had the feeling of beauty. On trials in which the observer had the feeling of beauty, pleasure lingers: still above 3 out of 10 at 30 s. On trials in which the observer did not feel beauty, the pleasure decayed more quickly (less than 3 at 30 s). We are applying this method to dance, measuring the time course of pleasure after the end of a dance video, to discover whether the observer had the feeling of beauty. Our lecture will include audience participation, allowing each person to use his or her smartphone to record their own pleasure during our video presentations of dance. The data stream will be projected live during our lecture.

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