



ResearchSpace@Auckland

Version

This is the Accepted Manuscript version. This version is defined in the NISO recommended practice RP-8-2008 <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/>

Suggested Reference

Davies, S. (2011). Questioning the distinction between intra- and extra-musical meaning: Comment on "Towards a neural basis for processing musical semantics" by Stefan Koelsch. *Physics of life reviews*, 8(2), 114-115.
doi:10.1016/j.pprev.2011.05.005

Copyright

Items in ResearchSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated. Previously published items are made available in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher.

NOTICE: this is the author's version of a work that was accepted for publication in *Physics of life reviews*. Changes resulting from the publishing process, such as peer review, editing, corrections, structural formatting, and other quality control mechanisms may not be reflected in this document. Changes may have been made to this work since it was submitted for publication. A definitive version was subsequently published in *Physics of life reviews*, Vol. 8, 2011 DOI: 10.1016/j.pprev.2011.05.005

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/issn/1571-0645/>

<https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/docs/uoa-docs/rights.htm>

Comment

Questioning the distinction between intra- and extra-musical meaning
Comment on "Towards a neural basis for processing musical semantics"

By Stefan Koelsch

Stephen Davies, Philosophy, University of Auckland

Important note: This is a final draft and differs from the definitive version, which is published in the journal **Physics of Life Reviews**, 8 (2) (2011): 114-115. I have been assured by the University of Auckland's research office that if they have made this publicly available then it does not violate the publisher's copyright rules.

"Towards a neural basis for processing musical semantics" [3] relies on a distinction between extra- and intra-musical meaning that I do not think is sufficiently clear.

Music is meaningful not only because it is rich in perceptual information – a patch of grass is similarly rich but not meaningful – but because it is organized and we can predict with more or less success how it will progress. There is a danger, though, of wrongly assimilating musical meaning to the dominant paradigm of linguistic meaning. I think this happens when it is suggested that a theme refers to its original statement when it is repeated, or that, when it is expressive, music refers to human emotion much as the word "sad" does. The distinction between intra- and extra-musical meaning inherits these problems when it is based on this mistaken model: the first reference is "intra" because the repeated theme refers to intrinsically musical features, while the music's expressiveness is "extra" because the reference goes outside the musical work to the world of human feeling.

Where music is symbolic it is referential. It may be so also when it is iconic: if one work quotes from another musical work there is reference. Similarly, indexical musical meaning may also involve reference, for example, where a composer alludes to an archaic style. But many iconic or indexical connections are non-referential. One bar of soap might be iconic with another but does not refer to it; smoke indicates fire but does not refer to fire. I suggest that iconic and indexical meanings in music are typically more a matter of presentation or display than of reference. A theme or phrase that is repeated in a work usually does not *refer* to its earlier statement though it brings that statement to mind and is iconic with it. And music can present an appearance of emotion directly, rather than referring as words do, which is why hearing music's expressiveness is more like encountering the direct expression of an emotion than like hearing a verbal description of that emotion [1, 2].

In consequence, the distinction between intra- and extra-musical meaning employed in "Towards a neural ..." lacks precision. Expressive features of the music are as much internal to it as are its themes and internal structures and they involve presentation rather than reference. As such, they should count as intra-musical modes of meaning, rather than as extra-musical. Meanwhile, thematic relationships may involve reference beyond the work, and so be extra-musical rather than intra-musical, as in the case in which one work quotes from another.

References

- [1] Davies, S. Artistic expression and the hard case of pure music. In *Contemporary debates in aesthetics and the philosophy of art*, M. Kieran (ed.), 179–91. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.

- [2] Davies, S. Emotions expressed and aroused by music: Philosophical perspectives.' In *Oxford handbook of music and emotion: Theory, research, applications*, P.N. Juslin and J. Sloboda (eds.), 15–43. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- [3] Koelsch, S. Towards a neural basis for processing musical semantics. *Physics of Life Review*, this issue.