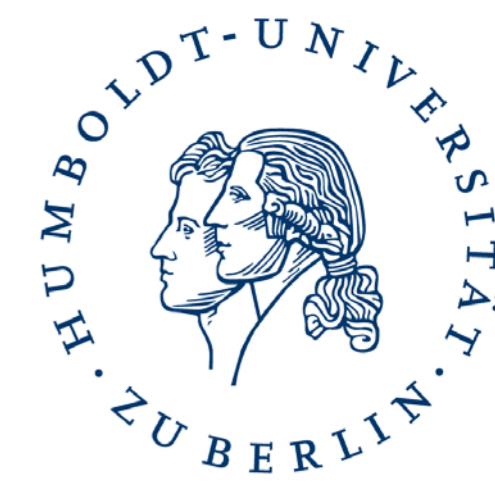


# Good, Bad, or Ugly? The Aesthetic Judgment Process



Cenk Arpa, Jasmin Dörr, Nikolai Hahn, Robin Paulat

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Department of Musicology and Media Studies

In response to music, a listener may experience 'everyday emotions' like happiness or sadness – but also emotions like awe, admiration, or wonder, which can be connected to the aesthetic value they assign the music. When do these 'aesthetic emotions' occur? How do we decide what makes music 'good' or 'bad'? To account for 'aesthetic emotions' as a reaction to music, Juslin et al. revised their BRECVEM model by adding the concept of aesthetic judgment to the framework. The figure below shows this process.

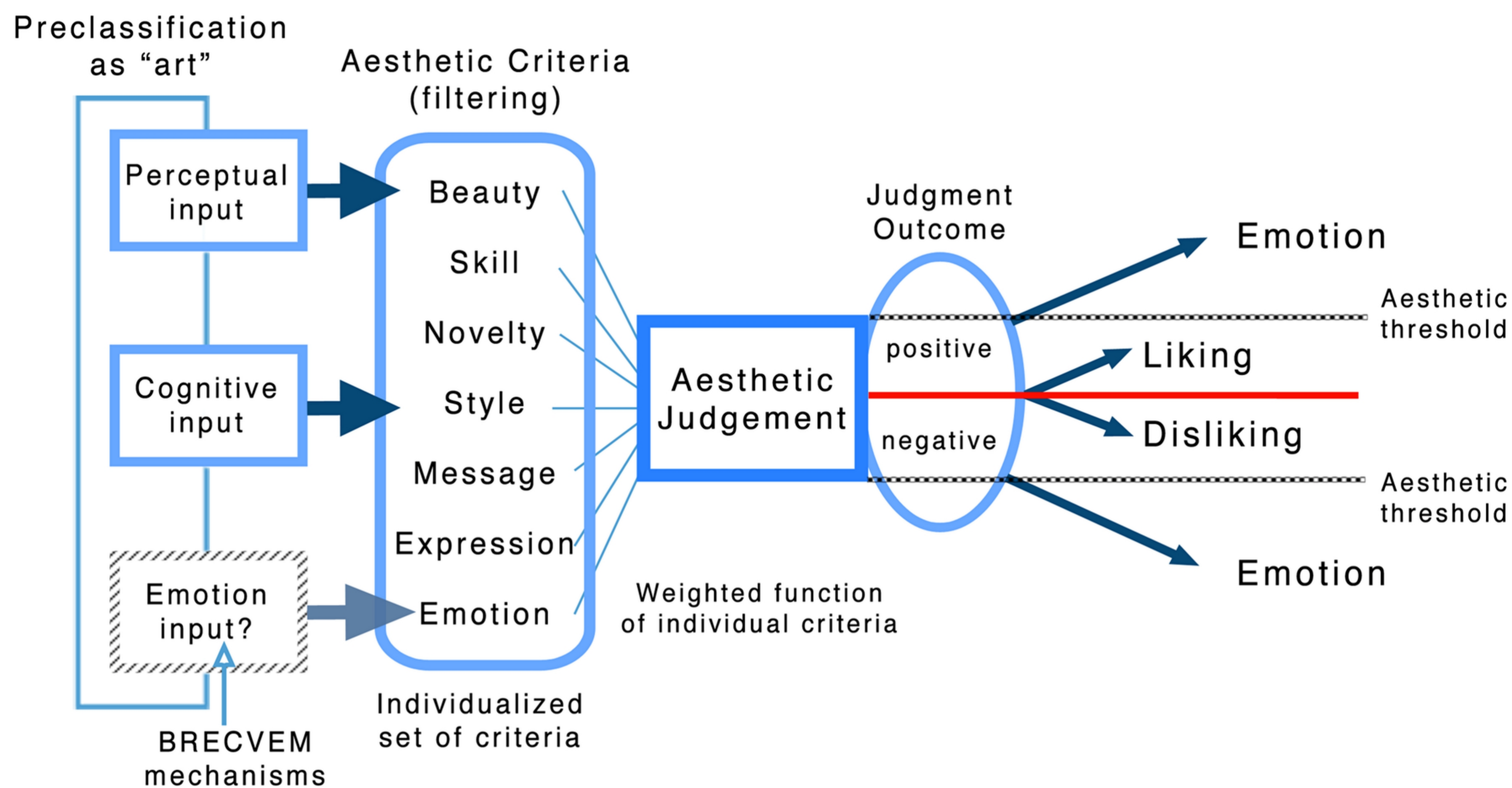


Fig. 1. Schematic description of the aesthetic judgment process in music listening.

For a music experience to be regarded as 'aesthetic', the listener has to classify what they are hearing as 'art'. This framework allows the music to be analysed on several levels:

- **Perceptual Input** is based on 'low-level' features of the music and can include the recognition of symmetry, order, proportion, or figure-ground contrast. These perceptions are seen as obligatory for the process and are generally unified among listeners.
- **Cognitive Input** includes 'higher-order' concepts organised in terms of 'schemata', e.g. domain-specific knowledge about music. The nature and extent of this analysis depends on the listener's knowledge and expertise.
- **Emotional Input** can be provoked by the BRECVEM mechanisms and influence the judgment, but is not required for an aesthetic judgment.

The listener then applies a set of **Aesthetic Criteria** to the inputs. Every listener focuses on different aesthetic criteria: Beauty, skill, novelty, style, message, expression and emotion are some of the most common ones. How these criteria are weighted is individualised for each listener and can depend on the music, the listener, the situation, etc. These different features function as 'filters'.

The filtering of the music by means of the evaluation with these criteria results in an **Aesthetic Judgment**, the outcome of which is either positive or negative: the listener likes or dislikes the music because of the subjectively perceived aesthetic value. Because of the individualised criteria, music can evoke a positive connotation for one listener and a negative connotation for another.

If at least one of the evaluative aesthetic criteria reaches a certain level, the judgment outcome can surpass the **Aesthetic Threshold** to go beyond liking or disliking and evoke an **emotion**.

If initial emotions aroused by the BRECVEM mechanisms are absent, preference, emotion and aesthetic judgment will be consistent with each other. Mixed emotions can arise when an initial emotion input by the BRECVEM mechanisms differs from the emotion aroused by aesthetic judgment. In other words: a piece of music can be perceived as of low aesthetic value and still make us happy, or make us uneasy and still be perceived as 'good art'.

1)Juslin, PN. "From Everyday Emotions to Aesthetic Emotions: Towards a Unified Theory of Musical Emotions." *Physics of Life Reviews* 10.3 (2013), pp. 236-66.