The findings indicated that aesthetic judgements of beauty rely on a network that partially overlaps with the network underlying evaluative judgements on social and moral cues. This neural overlap was taken to reflect the neural underpinnings of domain-general processes of self-reflective, subjective evaluation. The findings of the study also substantiate the significance of symmetry and complexity for our judgement of beauty.

The meaning of the word ‘aesthetics’ is multilayered and has changed over time. Two main clusters of meaning can be identified. The first is related to processes of sensation, as illustrated by its derivatives ‘anaesthetic’, the absence of sensation, and ‘synaesthetic’, involuntary co-sensation. The second cluster is related to the meaning of aesthetics as discussed in the humanities, philosophy and art history. In a recent study of German college students, a bipolar beautiful/ugly dimension clearly appeared to be the primary and prototypical descriptive dimension used to address the aesthetics of objects (Jacobsen et al. 2004). This result, of course, converges with the main conceptualization of aesthetics in philosophical and psychological aesthetics: ‘beauty’. At a secondary level, there is a conceptual system entailing a larger number of concepts, e.g. elegant, harmonious, shapely, small, big, round and coloured.

The first meaning, related to sensation, however, is inherent in that a sensory component is mandatory for aesthetic processing. For instance, an aesthetic judgement of beauty requires sensory processes, whereas a memory-based judgement of beauty does not. Consequently, aesthetic processing is sensation-based evaluation of an entity with respect to the above conceptual system, primarily the beauty dimension. The sensory sub-components of aesthetic processing can be mentally simulated using imagination. Throughout this text, the word ‘aesthetics’ will
be understood as referring to beauty, the arts, shapeliness, elegance, harmony and the like, rather than as referring to the study of perception *per se*.