

Editorial 2018

Jacobus Bracker, Hamburg

In disciplines like archaeology and art history images are traditionally dealt with as objects which are perceived by sight only. Other senses are usually neglected when it comes to analysis and interpretation.¹ Even in film studies the observation of the effects of sound on the constitution of meaning is often disregarded.² Such approaches are called into question by phenomena of multisensory integration like the so-called *McGurk effect* which drastically shows an interaction between vision and hearing in speech perception directly affecting the perceived meaning: the visual information someone gets from seeing a person speak changes the way sound is heard.³ There are further phenomena like the so-called *double-flash illusion* or the *rubber hand illusion* where information from different senses influence each other in the constitution of meaning and which are dealt with under the label of multisensory integration. Such findings from natural sciences like neuroscience and neuroaesthetics are complemented by insights from visual culture studies and opened a the new perspective of the “sensory turn”.

In 2005 William J. T. Mitchell argued that there are no visual media but, from the standpoint of sensory modality, only mixed media and that all so-called visual media like television, film, photography and painting, etc. involve the other senses. That would lead to the

- 1 Cf. Fahlander – Kjellström 2010, 2 seq.; Lacey – Lawson 2013, 1 seq.; Lauwrens 2012, 1.
- 2 Cf. Salmi 1998.
- 3 Cf. Ernst – Rohde 2012, 140; Grabbe 2015, 537 seq.

questions why we talk about some media as if they were exclusively visual and why it matters that we call something “visual media”. Mitchell points out that the conclusion that there are no pure media at all does not lead to the impossibility of distinguishing one medium from the other. Instead it allows for a more precise differentiation of mixtures.⁴ He further argues that the specificity of media is a much more complex issue than reified sensory labels. Rather, it is a question of specific sensory ratios that are embedded in practice, experience, tradition and technical inventions.⁵

Material images play an important role in the analysis and construction of past and contemporary cultures and societies. A viewpoint such as Mitchell’s – but also, for example, Panofsky’s remarks on pre-iconographic analysis in his seminal article on iconography and iconology⁶ – makes it plausible to take a closer look at how the addressing of the different senses through images gives deeper insights into the constituents of cultures. Material images of all kind are the remnants of complex communication processes, perception practices, and cultural memories. Investigating the sensual properties of the material remains can help to better understand such processes and practices.

Images possess the ability to elicit and channel certain sensory responses of their viewers.⁷ When looking at certain types of images like relief, sculpture, or film it becomes clear that not only sight is involved in the perception process but also senses like touch or proprioception.⁸ Images accentuate specific parts of the socially and culturally created sensorium in which the reception situation is embedded. It follows that a change in the sensory qualities – for example when a still image is in one way or other referenced in a moving image – may change the perceived meaning and viewers’ responses.

4 Mitchell 2005, 257. 260.

5 Mitchell 2005, 261.

6 Panofsky 1932.

7 Cf. Gosden 2001, 164 seq.

8 Proprioception – the sense of bodily movement and positioning in space –, for example, can involved when painted eyes cause the irritating effect of being looked at on the viewer’s side, cf. Bracker 2017, 100.

Through their sensory properties images may also reflect the valuing of certain sense expressions over others in a certain culture. These observations are especially important for reception studies.⁹

The twelve authors of this special issue of *Visual Past* deal with questions related to this like: Does the inclusion of the sensorial dimensions change the concept of the image? How can an embodied multisensorial perception of images and the interaction of the body and the images be conceptualised? How can the interplay of the senses in the process of constitution of meaning be described and analysed? How can socio-culturally and historically diverse sensescapes be described and analysed? How are specific sensual addressings used in communication processes? How do the images themselves deal with and represent the senses?

As our frequent readers may have noticed we are a little bit behind schedule as we are now in the year 2020 while I write this *Editorial 2018* – the courses of time and its perception are often going beyond that which our mind can grasp as you may remember from our last issue on the signs and phenomena of time. However, we are catching up and not least because of the extraordinary valuable help of our new co-editor Stefanie Johns with whom a long-standing relationship has already been established through the organisation of exciting conferences and countless discussion on the image.

Please enjoy reading and feel your way through the images.

9 Cf. Bracker 2016, 20.

Bibliography

Bracker 2016: J. Bracker, Ancient Images and Contemporary Sensoria, in: L. C. Grabbe – P. Rupert-Kruse – N. M. Schmitz (Hrsg.), *Image Embodiment. New Perspectives of the Sensory Turn*, Yearbook of Moving Image Studies 2016 (Darmstadt 2016) 17–36.

Bracker 2017: J. Bracker, The Borders of Metalepses and the Borders of the Image, in: L. C. Grabbe – P. Rupert-Kruse – N. Schmitz (Hrsg.), *Bildverstehen. Spielarten und Ausprägungen der Verarbeitung multimodaler Bildmedien* (Darmstadt 2017) 93–109.

Ernst – Rohde 2012: M. O. Ernst – M. Rohde, Multimodale Objektwahrnehmung, in: H.-O. Karnath – P. Thier (ed.), *Kognitive Neurowissenschaften* ³(Heidelberg 2012) 139–148.

Fahlander – Kjellström 2010: F. Fahlander – A. Kjellström, Beyond Sight: Archaeologies of Sensory Perception, in: F. Fahlander – A. Kjellström (ed.), *Making Sense of Things: Archaeologies of Sensory Perception* (Stockholm 2010) 1–14.

Gosden 2001: C. Gosden, Making Sense: Archaeology and Aesthetics, *World Archaeology* 33.2, 163–167.

Grabbe 2015: L. C. Grabbe, Homo immergens: Immersion als Bestimmungsgröße für eine Medien- und Kulturtheorie medialer Hybridität, in: J. Bracker – A.-K. Hubrich, *Die Kunst der Rezeption/The Art of Reception*, *Visual Past* 2.1, 527–551.

Lacey – Lawson 2013: S. Lacey – R. Lawson, Introduction, in: S. Lacey – R. Lawson (ed.), *Multisensory Imagery* (New York 2013) 1–8.

Lauwrens 2012: J. Lauwrens, Welcome to the Revolution: The Sensory Turn and Art History, *Journal of Art Historiography* 7, 2012, 1–17.

Mitchell 2005: W. J. T. Mitchell, There Are No Visual Media, *Journal of Visual Culture* 4.2, 2005, 257–266.

Panofsky 1932: E. Panofsky, Zum Problem der Beschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst, *Logos* 21, 1932, 103–119.

Salmi 1998: H. Salmi, Composing the Past: Music and the Sense of History in Hollywood Spectacles of the 1950s and early 1960s, *Screening the Past* <<http://www.screeningthepast.com/2014/12/composing-the-past-music-and-the-sense-of-history-in-hollywood-spectacles-of-the-1950s-and-early-1960s/>> (10.01.2020).