

Welcome to the revolution: The sensory turn and art history

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Figure 1: Margaret Moore, *Still sounds*, 2008-2011. 6 textile prints each 150cm x 200 cm, line, 18 wooden pegs, 6 chrome hooks, 3 plinths, 3 different audio tracks, 3 headphones. Installed size approx. 500cm x 600cm x 300cm. 2 companion videos. <http://www.margaretmooreart.com/installations.aspx>. (Courtesy of Margaret Moore)

‘Fine artists, and those given to enjoyment and criticism of visual arts ... are seen as exponents of the trained eye. They ... pretend to know how to *look*, and how to draw the highest semiological and visual satisfaction from that *looking*. Their total dependency on *sight* has almost entirely negated the senses of touch, hearing, taste and smell in an artwork’.¹

Margaret Moore’s exhibition *Still sounds* (2012) (Figure 1), held in The Crypt Gallery at St Pancras Church, London, was a feast for the senses. Combining screen prints of family photographs on large sheets of tissue paper hanging from the vaulted ceiling of the crypt with projections of images onto cloth, as well as recordings of songs and sounds originating from Glasgow and the Western Isles, the installation was both evocative and alluring.² Adding to the sensual appeal of the

¹ Willem Boshoff, ‘Aesthetics of touch: notes towards a blind aesthetic’, *Image and Text*, 7, 1997, 36, [original emphasis].

² A video recording of the installation is available at <http://www.margaretmoore.com/installations.aspx>

experience, the light in the crypt was dark and eerie, the air cool and moist, the walls rough to the touch and the smell was slightly musty in the overall dank space of the so-called gallery. Although the olfactory and tactile elements of the space in which the works were exhibited were not orchestrated by the artist as part of the work, they undoubtedly participated in the audience's experience of the installation. When standing in the midst of this sensual feast, I wondered how an art historian might investigate, not only the possible meanings of Moore's installation, but also the expanding and immersive experience of the work in its exhibition space, which encompassed far more than only the visual and the auditory. What methodological tools does art history offer for the investigation of not only the audience's multi-sensorial but also multi- and trans-medial experience of works of art? Is art history's emphasis on how people *see* art problematic, as has been argued by supporters of the developing discourse associated with the so-called 'sensory turn'?³ And, if art history is indeed ocularcentric, will the discipline (need to) adapt its procedures in order to sufficiently deal with works of art whose most interesting aspects are not necessarily what can be seen in them?⁴

That the discipline of art history has of course always been adapting owing to, amongst others, ever changing philosophical and ideological outlooks regarding its methods and practices, is well recorded and I shall not repeat them here. Suffice it to say that since its emergence as an academic discipline, art history has always received some degree of 'friendly fire',⁵ as both art historians and artists in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries negotiate its aims, protocols and disciplinary borders. As a result, the recent 'turns' that have transpired in the humanities and social sciences, as theorists battle to agree on the appropriate ways in which to deal with human cultural and artistic expressions, have also unsettled the discourse of art history.⁶ As its nomenclature suggests, apparently, the latest in this line of paradigm shifts, named the 'sensory turn' (and even the 'sensory

³ A list of sensory scholars would include, amongst others, Francis Halsall, 'One sense is never enough', *Journal of Visual Arts Practice*, 3: 2, 2004, 103-122; David Howes, ed, 'Introduction' in *Empire of the senses: the sensual culture reader*, Oxford: Berg, 2005, 1-17; Caroline Jones, ed, 'The mediated sensorium' in *Sensorium: embodied experience, technology, and contemporary art*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006, 5-49, and Patrizia Di Bello and Gabriel Koureas, eds, 'Other than the visual: art, history and the senses' in *Art, history and the senses. 1830 to the present*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2010, 1-18. Other noteworthy scholarship in this direction includes the contributions to *Senses and Society*, an academic journal dedicated to the sensory turn and the *Sensory Formations* series published by Berg.

⁴ This may well be true for all or almost all works of art as spectators' imaginations or imaginative interactions with the work are no doubt a key (yet perhaps theoretically under-acknowledged from the perspective of art history) factor in their experience of the work. In this regard, see George Taylor's investigation of Paul Ricouer's arguments dealing with the imagination in 'Ricouer's philosophy of imagination', *Journal of French Philosophy*, 16: 1 and 2, Spring - Fall, 2006: 93-104. However, in this article, I want to pursue and interrogate Halsall's contention in 'One sense is never enough', 115, that whilst what a work of art 'looks like [may be] *the very least interesting thing to say about it ...* a certain type of art history continues to stare at' its visual aspects [original emphasis].

⁵ Margaret Dikovitskaya, 'Visual Studies. Ten years after', *Visual studies / Etudes visuelles: un champ en question*. Symposium organisé par le Laboratoire de recherches sur les cultures Anglophones. LARCA, Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7. October 2011.

⁶ See the forum on 'turns' in *The American Historical Review*, June, 2012. This series of articles provides a retrospective and critical, even sceptical, examination and interrogation of the linguistic and cultural turns in order to contextualize and historicize the circumstances that generated each.

revolution'),⁷ once again puts pressure on previously accepted ways in which to deal with art.

In this paper I aim to define and contextualize the recent emergence of the sensory turn (more aptly described as 'return') in order to think through the ways in which art historians might deal with a multi-sensorial experience of an artwork such as *Still sounds*. A number of questions arise from this main enquiry: What is the sensory turn? Who is turning? What are they turning from? What are the possible reasons for the (re)turn toward the sensory? What topics are sensory art historians engaging with and, most importantly, how are they engaging with their topics?

Martin Jay's introduction to the forum in *American Historical Review* 2011, in which contributors historicized and reflected on the five traditional senses, deals with the questions and critiques that have emerged in historical studies as a result of the sensory turn. Jay concludes by stating that historians have 'at long last, come to their senses'.⁸ In this paper, I aim to bring the conversation closer to the discipline of art history, by attempting to tease apart the implications of the sensory turn for the study of *visual* art and to investigate whether or not art historians ought to – or have already – 'come to their senses'.

In particular, this paper probes an intellectual position that has surfaced in sensory scholarship in art history thus far, namely, the critique of the apparently problematic hegemony of vision in art history at the expense of the other senses. Criticism of the dominance of sight in art history's methodological toolkit is rooted in a broader cultural and philosophical interrogation of sight having become the 'master sense of the modern era'.⁹ But why is it problematic that art history privileges the sense of sight? For, in its broadest sense, art history deals with visual art. Why is art history then berated for its commitment to the visual? Tied up with the resistance to art history's ocularity is its continued allegiance to a notion of ideally detached observers, who, owing to their looking at works of art from a distance, are separated from what they see. Although these are not the only qualms against art history raised by commentators in the burgeoning field of sensory studies, these two intellectual pillars of sensory scholarship are unpacked and analysed here because it is not self-evident, to me at least, why art history should be under fire on these grounds. Finally, I probe the potential of the sensory turn to introduce novel ways in which to approach not only works of art that set out to engage the audience in multi-sensorial ways (such as immersive or interactive installation works which invite participation) but also works of art (such as paintings and photographs) that appear to limit multi-sensorial engagement.

Sensory definitions

A revival of interest in the sensorial dimension of human experience has emerged since the 1990s in various academic disciplines including history, anthropology, sociology, geography, film studies, literary studies and art history to name only a

⁷ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 1.

⁸ Martin Jay, 'In the realm of the senses: an introduction', *The American Historical Review*, 116: 2, April, 2011, 307-315.

⁹ Martin Jay, 'Scopic regimes of modernity', in *Vision and visibility*, edited by Hal Foster, New York: The New Press, 1998, 3.

few. The rise of conferences and journals dedicated to such investigations attests to the fact that sensory studies is already an important academic field of inquiry. Although the emerging discourse in this field takes on different, and often, divergent forms, according to David Howes, in general this kind of research 'emphasize[s] the dynamic, relational (intersensory- or multimodal, multimedia) and often conflicted nature of our everyday engagement with the sensuous world.'¹⁰ At the very least, the premise upon which much sociological and anthropological work is based is that 'the sensorium is a social construction' and that 'the senses are lived and understood differently in different cultures and historical periods'.¹¹

A helpful way in which to contextualize the recent sensory turn is to ask not only from which preceding intellectual positions this paradigm turns away but also to which philosophical and epistemological traditions it returns. For, the present interest in the sensory has much older historical roots in past traditions still alive today. The sensory turn stems from the empiricist tradition in philosophy and epistemology which held that mental functions like conceptualising, analysis, judgement, memory and imagination all proceed from sensory processes. With its roots in Aristotelian philosophy, the strongest twentieth century representative of this line of thinking could be considered pragmatism, in particular Richard Shusterman's variety of somaesthetics.¹² Distinct from this line would be the so-called rationalist tradition going back to Platonism (among others) and apriorism.

The twentieth century turns, most notably the so-called 'linguistic', 'cultural' and 'pictorial' 'turns' are recent developments appearing in the course of these earlier lines. Following on from Richard Rorty's linguistic turn of the 1960s,¹³ and the cultural turn of the 1970s,¹⁴ the 1990s produced the pictorial turn (formulated by William J. T. Mitchell)¹⁵ or the ikonische Wendung (formulated by Gottfried Boehm)¹⁶ each providing a different understanding of the relationship between humans, their cultural and visual expressions and their world.

According to Howes, the recent sensory scholarship rejects the logocentrism of the linguistic turn which approaches human artistic and cultural expression from the standpoint that 'all human thought and endeavour can be understood as structured by, and analogous to, language, so one may best look to linguistics for models of philosophical and social interpretation'.¹⁷ Influenced by the linguistic turn and developing on the early writings of Roland Barthes, since the mid-twentieth century, semiology was considered by those working in the humanities and social

¹⁰ David Howes, 'Charting the sensorial revolution', *The Senses and Society*, 1: 1, March, 2006, 114.

¹¹ Howes, 'Charting the sensorial revolution', 113.

¹² Richard Shusterman, 'Somaesthetics: a disciplinary proposal', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57: 3, 1999, 299-313.

¹³ Richard Rorty, *The linguistic turn: recent essays in philosophical methods*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

¹⁴ For an overview of the historical trajectory of the cultural turn see James Cook 'The kids are all right: on the "turning" of cultural history', *American Historical Review*, June, 2012, 746-771.

¹⁵ William J.T. Mitchell, 'The Pictorial Turn', *Artforum*, 30, 1992, reprinted in his *Picture Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 11-34.

¹⁶ Gottfried Boehm, 'Die Wiederkehr der Bilder', in *Was ist ein Bild?* Munchen: Fink, 1994, 11-38.

¹⁷ David Howes, ed, 'Introduction', Oxford: Berg, 2005, 2.

sciences, and in particular art history, to provide a useful model for interpreting culture and experience which were, in turn, *read as texts*.¹⁸

As a result of both the linguistic and cultural turns, in the 1980s art history turned its attention to the social history of art examining its modes of production and circulation within political and cultural realms. Art historians were concerned with the interpretation of art works on the basis of their ideological function, which could be uncovered through the mode of semiotic analysis. One of the important aims of new art history since that time has therefore been to reveal the 'ideological agenda[s]' at work in art.¹⁹ Accordingly, art historians set about to expose the racist, sexist and classist ways of seeing that are constructed in images and also engendered by them. Works of art, both past and present, are now widely regarded as both producing and articulating hierarchical ways of seeing others. Consequently, the interpretative methodologies of not only semiotics but also feminism, Marxism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis and hermeneutics have served as useful ways in which to expose the ways in which both objects and their viewers are culturally produced.

Steering away from the preoccupation with the cultural production of art, however, one aspect of the more recent pictorial turn has been described as an attempt to study images with regard to their 'presence effects' and not only to their 'meaning effects'.²⁰ Driven by interest in the materiality of images and objects, research on art has begun to pay attention to the so-called 'presence' of images, or what Keith Moxey suggests is their 'existential status as images', focusing on their 'nature and structure',²¹ and compelling Mitchell to ask, 'what do pictures want?'²² In other words, this type of research considers that which 'exceeds the possibilities of a semiotic interpretation',²³ an ingredient it no doubt shares with the sensory approach. According to Moxey's ideas about the future prospects of art history, from the standpoint of the pictorial turn, there is a sense that the 'physical properties of images are [now] as important as their social function'.²⁴

Apparently the sensory turn has emerged alongside the pictorial turn, both of which challenge logocentric interpretations of works of visual art. Howes, however, suggests that it is not only the logocentrism - or 'verbocentrism' - of the

¹⁸ See Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson's 'Semiotics and art history', *The Art Bulletin*, 73: 2, 1991, 174-208, in which the authors support a 'semiotic turn' in art history. Although they complicate and challenge key categories of the semiotic approach, in the structuralist sense of the term, Bal and Bryson nevertheless contend that a semiotic perspective, which reads every detail of a work of art as a sign to be interpreted, provides a useful approach in the analysis of works of art. See also Sunil Manghani, 'Adventures in subsemiotics: towards a new 'object' and writing of visual culture', *Culture, Theory and Critique*, 44: 1, 2003, 23-36. Manghani examines James Elkins' criticism of the way in which Bal's semiotic analysis of the textures, marks, ink spots, and so forth works to narrate and translate the work into its possible, if dynamic, meanings. From the perspective of sensory scholarship, the semiotic approach privileges the textual and theoretical, and is unconcerned with the embodied or experiential.

¹⁹ Keith Moxey, 'Visual studies and the iconic turn', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 7: 2, 2008, 132.

²⁰ Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of presence: what meaning cannot convey*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, xv.

²¹ Moxey, 'Visual studies and the iconic turn', 132.

²² Mitchell, *What do pictures want? The lives and loves of images*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, 28-56.

²³ Moxey, 'Visual studies and the iconic turn', 132.

²⁴ Moxey, 'Visual studies and the iconic turn', 132.

academic enterprise (within which the linguistic and cultural turns are seated) that is disdained by sensory academics, but also the overemphasis on vision in the interpretation of such visual texts, as historians ‘look’ for clues to interpret meaning.²⁵ Thus, in one sense, the sensory turn rejects all three turns discussed previously owing to their alleged ocularcentric approaches.²⁶ More specifically, art history has been accused of prioritising vision.

Sensory squabbles

For example, Francis Halsall argues that, as a modernist discipline, art history shares with modernity the ‘over-prioritization of sight’.²⁷ Within the framework of the development of formalism in art historical methodology, Halsall contends that the sense of sight was made important in European art historical scholarship by Alois Riegl and Heinrich Wölfflin respectively in order to lend scientific objectivity to the discipline. In the same vein, and on another continent, Clement Greenberg’s formalist writing on modern artists pursued the pure visual qualities of the work of art. Caroline Jones examines the ways in which the work of the American artists who ‘followed [Greenberg’s] formalist project’ became increasingly ‘optical’ at the same time that he praised the pictoriality and opticality of their work.²⁸ Greenberg, notes Jones, was particularly critical of sensory experience announcing his ‘contempt for everything I hear, see, eat and feel’.²⁹ Nevertheless, he ‘fetishized sight, which had traditionally been the sense capable of producing the most “distance” from the body’.³⁰ Furthermore, Panofsky’s intention of injecting art history with a new and rigorous approach – iconography – according to Halsall, once again, gives primacy to the visual components of the work of art.³¹

But why should art history, which can be defined as the study of the visual arts not prioritise vision? Why is the dominance of the visual in art history problematic? According to Halsall ‘our experience is not explicable in terms of separate senses but rather it needs to be acknowledged that all sensory experience forms part of an inter-connected experiential continuum’.³² Thus, the problem with art history is its isolation of the sense of sight from the rest of embodied experience without acknowledging that spectators see because they are embodied and not despite their embodiment. For Patrizia Di Bello and Gabriel Koureas, however, the problem is more complicated than this. These authors contend that, even when art history acknowledges vision as connected to the other senses, ‘art historical analyses ... only rarely go beyond the *visually* embodied observer’.³³ Instead, both authors support ‘art historical methodologies that can account for bodily experiences and

²⁵ Howes, ‘Introduction’, 2.

²⁶ The critique of the hegemony of vision in critical discourse is well known with Martin Jay’s, *Downcast eyes: the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, providing an impressive analysis of Western attitudes toward vision.

²⁷ Halsall, ‘One sense is never enough’, 110.

²⁸ Jones, *Sensorium*, 9.

²⁹ Jones, *Sensorium*, 7.

³⁰ Jones, *Sensorium*, 8.

³¹ Halsall, ‘One sense is never enough’, 112.

³² Halsall, ‘One sense is never enough’, 110.

³³ Di Bello and Koureas, ‘Other than the visual’, 1, [original emphasis].

the materiality of works of art'.³⁴ This type of research avoids ideologically driven discursive interpretations of images which are analysed semiotically, revealing that, as Howes suggests, 'the tower of babble' may finally be toppling.³⁵

Sensory urgency

Although that tower may well be leaning slightly, it is still quite intact, having been built on the rock-solid foundation of modernist aesthetics, on whose intellectual foundation, it may be argued, hinges the primacy given the visual sense in negotiating artworks. Sensory experience (or the lack thereof) has been fundamental in the production of a modern discourse on aesthetic experience. For the most part, art history continues to hinge on a notion of a rational person – the art historian – who is able to know the artwork (by means of analysis and interpretation) through the faculty of sight and not the other bodily senses. Born in the mid-eighteenth century, modernist aesthetics is generally understood to regard sensory and bodily experiences as subordinate to the competence of the reasonable mind whose internal structures afford clarity of knowledge.³⁶ Paul Duncum contends that 'the body has remained outside the discourse of [art history] for a long time due to limitations imposed by modernist aesthetics'.³⁷ In favour of a 'mindful' aesthetic experience, Immanuel Kant, probably the most influential theorist of aesthetics, wrote that 'the proper aesthetic response is a disinterested satisfaction, a pleasure that arises from the inner life of the mind rather than the senses'.³⁸ And as Boris Groys points out, art was the ideal 'school' for cultivating such an aesthetic attitude in viewers.³⁹

Kant attempted to reconcile the empiricist and rationalist schools of thought, mentioned earlier, theorising instead that, the human mind, more particularly, pure thought (*reinen Vernunft*), possesses innate categories by means of which one is able to know the world. He was only interested in those senses 'that arise from ... the finer feelings'⁴⁰ paying no attention to 'coarse feelings ... which can take place without any thought whatever'.⁴¹ In short, the senses had to be disciplined by the mind. Somatic sensual pleasures, Duncum concludes, have been regarded by a long line of philosophers – before and since Kant – as 'vulgar', 'coarse' and deceitful.⁴² In this way, both aesthetic theory and 'western philosophy ... have denigrated' the body.⁴³

Moreover, modernist aesthetics is grounded in the evolution of the Western sense of self and, in particular, Kant's theory of how the subject attains knowledge of both the world and the self. For Kant, it is vision that allows 'the subject, by

³⁴ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 1.

³⁵ Howes, 'Introduction', 2.

³⁶ Paul Duncum, 'Visual culture and an aesthetics of embodiment', *International Journal of Education through Art*, 1: 1, 2005, 10-11.

³⁷ Duncum, 'Visual culture', 10.

³⁸ Duncum, 'Visual culture', 12.

³⁹ Boris Groys, 'Introduction – Global conceptualism revisited', *e-flux journal*, 29, 2011, 6.

⁴⁰ Duncum, 'Visual culture', 11.

⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime*, translated by John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965, originally published in 1764, 46.

⁴² Duncum, 'Visual culture', 10-12.

⁴³ Duncum, 'Visual culture', 10.

reflection, to know the object as a thing outside him'.⁴⁴ In this way, the distinction between subject and object is made possible by vision which, guided by reflection, 'allows the subject to know the object'.⁴⁵ Thus, the Western sense of self is enabled by the detachment between the subject and what it sees. Consequently, the division and isolation of the senses, argue Di Bello and Koureas, 'seems to be fundamental in defining a clean and proper self or identity, at both conscious and unconscious levels'.⁴⁶

Arguing that 'the senses have been marginalized by aesthetics, art history and criticism', Di Bello and Koureas furthermore contend that, whilst art history continues to isolate the visual forms of art, artists have increasingly challenged, disregarded or worked outside the hegemony of sight.⁴⁷ In this way, since the nineteenth century, works of art have been produced that 'include, or powerfully evoke, non-visual elements'.⁴⁸ Equally, contemporary art and especially new media installation art, such as *Still sounds* invite a fully engaged audience to participate in the work beyond the sense of sight, thereby encouraging sensory immersion rather than detached looking only. By encouraging audiences to participate in the work, thereby breaking down physical barriers normally associated with the rational observer of visual art, not only is the hegemony of sight overturned, but the possibility of a detached subject is subverted, as artists dethrone seeing from its privileged position in the sensual body. In light of the increase of installation and performance artworks, which activate far more than the visual sense, how can a discipline continue to concentrate only on the ways in which people *see* art or visual culture – at the expense of the other corporeal senses? How can vision remain the thrust of art history? For, traditional art historical methods are ill-equipped to deal with the ways in which audiences interact with immersive installations through their entire bodies which touch, hear and smell at the same time that they see. Is it necessary to search elsewhere for the tools required for engaging with the non-visual senses? If so, in which direction should one look to update art history's procedures?

It has been suggested that the emergence of visual culture studies in the 1990s has provided art history a way in which to update its procedures and become more relevant and innovative thereby loosening its ties to its former essentialist premises. In other words, visual culture studies apparently attends to some of the problems that have plagued art history, such as its limited field of study and, more precisely, its elitist approach to the study of images and objects condoned as art. But even from the perspective of visual culture studies, however, vision has been regarded as *the* sense in need of critical analysis with regards to its discursive power. For now both art historians and visual culturalists are investigating images as representations of culture and power as well as the ways in which vision and visuality are discursively produced. Thus, both fields are centred on vision. Halsall

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, translated by Mary Gregor, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974, originally published in 1797, 35.

⁴⁵ Nicola Foster, 'Niki de Saint Phalle's *Hon*: an ethics through the visual?' *Art, history and the senses. 1830 to the present*, edited by Di Bello and Koureas, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010, 132.

⁴⁶ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 7.

⁴⁷ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 1.

⁴⁸ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 1.

sums up the situation as follows: 'visual culture studies takes the fundamental problem which has lain at the very heart of art history since its modernist foundations – the over-prioritization of the visual – and, in an attempt to cure its symptoms merely extends the scope of this problem more widely than art history ever did'.⁴⁹ Both art history and visual culture studies avoid dealing with the other senses in their isolation of vision.

Evidently the ongoing criticism of the discourse of aesthetics, aided by the critique of the hegemony of vision in art historical methodology, has led to the recognition that human beings are not merely socially constructed and images are not merely representations of discursive power, waiting to be interpreted.⁵⁰ Consequently, those engaged in sensory scholarship are not only interested in the social function of images, or their physical properties, but also the embodied – sensorially emancipated - audience.

Sensory positions unpacked

In the following section, I unpack some ways in which research into the sensual dimension of aesthetic experience is developing. While it is neither possible nor desirable to provide a comprehensive overview of the numerous strands that are emerging in sensory scholarship, it is none the less helpful to identify a few key ideas put forward by theorists engaging with the challenge to deal with people's multi-sensorial encounters with works of art.

In his foreword to *Art, history and the senses*, Simon Shaw-Miller suggests that the individual sensory faculties - sight, hearing, taste and touch – can be compared to the faculties that exist in a university.⁵¹ Considering the ways in which interdisciplinary, cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary research is gaining ground in institutional practise, this metaphor serves as a useful paradigm for thinking about the operation of the faculties of the senses within the human sensorium. For, the senses are increasingly recognised as interconnected rather than monosensory faculties.⁵²

In fact, Shaw-Miller suggests that the human sensorium 'is so enveloping as to be best described as synaesthetic'.⁵³ He argues this point by referring, on the one hand, to the way in which how people listened to music changed around 1800, and the dominant philosophical positions regarding the nature and value of instrumental music at that time on the other. Shaw-Miller shows that whilst the

⁴⁹ Francis Halsall, 'One sense is never enough', 118.

⁵⁰ Torben Grodal, 'Stories for eye, ear, and muscles: video games, media, and embodied experiences', in *The video game theory reader*, edited by Mark Wolf and Bernard Perron, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, 129.

⁵¹ Simon Shaw-Miller, 'Disciplining the senses: Beethoven as synaesthetic paradigm', in *Art, history and the senses*, edited by Di Bello and Koureas, 2010, xv-xxiv.

⁵² Michael Chion maintains that 'the eye carries information and sensation only some of which can be considered specifically and irreducibly visual (e.g. colour); most others are transsensory ... [and] there is no sensory given that is demarcated and isolated from the outset'. See Michael Chion, *Audio-vision: sounds on screen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, 137. In other words, scientific research shows that seeing takes place in collaboration with the entire body which experiences itself and the world simultaneously through all of its sense organs. This means that the senses are not isolated, but that human experience is always fully embodied, informed and shaped by the other sensory channels.

⁵³ Shaw-Miller, 'Disciplining the senses', xvii.

Romantic philosophers, such as Arthur Schopenhauer for example, considered music to be the only form of art that can fully transcend into the realm of the noumenal, separated from sensory and phenomenal experience, music can (and was) also be regarded as appealing to all the bodily senses. Ernst. T. Hoffman first explored the idea that 'music alone speaks directly to the noumenon ... and is a manifestation of that which lies behind the world, ultimate reality'.⁵⁴ In order to achieve this absolutism, however, music had to be emancipated from language. While (instrumental) music could be separated from text, ironically Beethoven's music also 'opens us to a world of images They are evoked in us; we become active in the nature of aesthetic perception, with the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as mediator between the senses and the mind'.⁵⁵ The point Shaw-Miller makes is that although music may have aspired to freeing itself not only from the other arts but also from the other senses in an attempt 'to become an art of pure sound', music is 'nevertheless everywhere implicated in interconnections with other senses'.⁵⁶ The senses, it would seem, do not operate independently from each other, but are intricately implicated in ongoing integration with each other and the imagination.

This understanding of the senses as interconnected and working in combination with the imagination is useful when analysing installation art such as *Still sounds* where sounds, smells, textures and sights work in collaboration to amplify the audience's experience thereby also enhancing its meaning-making potential. Whereas 'art reviews and first-hand accounts of installations rarely focus on their multi-sensoriality'⁵⁷ an exploration of Moore's installation would be impoverished without acknowledging the embodied participation of the audience in the imaginative construction of meaning in the work. This means that, in order to travel toward a richer analysis, the artist's use of the recording of the Scottish lamentation, Criogal Cridhe, mixed with recordings of voices, the texture of the hanging sheets of voile (onto which family photographs are printed) as one brushes past it, and the musty smell of the crypt would all guide an understanding of the various possible ways in which the work could be understood by individuals. Therefore, the intricate balance between the construction of the psychic space and the physical space would be investigated alongside the multifarious ways in which contextualized identities are affected by what is sensorially experienced.

Although investigating the ways in which the senses are affected by works of art that expressly set out to engage the senses other than sight is accomplished with relative ease - such as in the case of installations and performance works - surely sensory scholarship is not only suited to multimodal images or three-dimensional works of art and performances? For, irrespective of what they see, audiences are always and undeniably embodied. In short, can paintings or photographs also be analysed from the perspective of the embodied viewer?

⁵⁴ Shaw-Miller, 'Disciplining the senses', 2010, xx.

⁵⁵ Shaw-Miller, 'Disciplining the senses', 2010, xxii.

⁵⁶ Shaw-Miller, 'Disciplining the senses', 2010, xvii.

⁵⁷ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 12.

Sensory phenomenology

The multi-sensory and embodied connection between spectators and what they see (in works of art and photographs) is investigated by Ellen Esrock.⁵⁸ Delving into the ways in which viewers can temporarily merge with paintings and photographs when an intimate relationship between themselves and what they are viewing is reached, Esrock suggests that bodily boundaries between people and what they see can be overcome imaginatively through a process of 'somatic reinterpretation'.⁵⁹ The spectator imagines becoming intimately immersed in a work of art temporarily, thereby requiring an acknowledgement of the complex involvement of the body's imaginative capabilities in multi-sensory experience. Whilst this merging may sometimes occur unconsciously, it can also be achieved by consciously recognising how the somatosensory system is affected by what is seen. In her lectures, Esrock instructs the audience to move their eyes up and down the leaves in Paul Strand's photograph entitled *Leaves* (1929). Thereafter, the audience must imagine 'a corresponding line moving through their bodies'.⁶⁰ In this way, the viewing experience is related to felt bodily experiences, in that the line might be experienced as thick and palpable, owing to what Esrock refers to as the 'background feeling of the somatosensory system'.⁶¹ She describes the way in which this background feeling functions as follows:

On the one hand, when oriented to its subjective pole, it would possess associations of the self to which it belongs. On the other hand, in its objective orientation, the background feeling would acquire the object of the eye scan. As an imagined touch directed towards an external object, it would become a palpable feeling of that object. Perceptible qualities of the object – its texture, weight, balance, emotional tone, and colour saturation, could become identified with the palpable quality of the line echoing within the body.⁶²

In this way, the viewer feels the object within their own bodies.

In Esrock's negotiation of the merging of viewer and viewed, it is clear that a phenomenological approach, based in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas on vision and touch are close at hand.⁶³ The following extract shows how, in Esrock's

⁵⁸ Ellen Esrock, 'Touching art: intimacy, embodiment and the somatosensory system', *Consciousness and Emotion*, 2: 2, 2001, 233-254. It should be remembered that Esrock is a literary scholar interested in the reader's mental imaging. See for instance her book, *The reader's eye: visual imaging as reader response*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994. Other noteworthy scholarship on a similar trajectory includes Christopher Collins', *The poetics of the mind's eye*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991 and *Reading the written image: verbal play interpretation, and the roots of iconophobia*, Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 1991. These authors stress the functioning of the imagination in the perception of art, turning works into performances and images into events.

⁵⁹ Esrock, 'Touching art', 234.

⁶⁰ Esrock, 'Touching art', 237.

⁶¹ Esrock, 'Touching art', 238.

⁶² Esrock, 'Touching art', 238.

⁶³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, originally published in 1945.

understanding, vision and touch are always already fused with each other when looking at art:

Oriented to the objective world, touch assumes the external object provided for it by vision and thus mentally touches the visually apprehended object. But, touch also orients to the subjective pole and, thus, conveys the sensation of being touched. In this case, the thing that does the (mental) touching is the external object of vision. One's body feels touched by vision's object. Thus, in its bipolar capacities, touch refers to the self that is touched, as well as the touched object outside the body. The combination of these two polarities bridges the physical distance between the visually perceived object and the viewer, bringing the palpability of the object seen into the subjective, bodily boundaries of the subject. Thus, in both cases inner and outer realities merge deep inside the body – not merely at the top layers of skin, where surface touch operates. One finds the object within one's self or one finds that one is within the object.⁶⁴

By means of a phenomenological, or more precisely Merleau-Pontian, understanding of the relationship between the subject and what it sees, examining a painting in an art museum or a photograph from a multi-sensory perspective would seem viable. This kind of approach would analyse art through the 'lens of an aesthetics of embodiment', taking into account not only sight but all the bodily sensations including both the pleasant and the unpleasant, in sum, the affective responses activated in the process of seeing the work.⁶⁵ According to Thomas Csordas, embodiment refers to 'perceptual experience and [a] mode of presence and engagement in the world'.⁶⁶ Following a phenomenological understanding of engagement in the world through lived experience, an aesthetics of embodiment would include an interest in proprioception, which is 'our sense of being in a body and oriented in space'.⁶⁷ In this way, an aesthetics of embodiment would acknowledge the audience's bodily participation in works of art, which includes memories, beliefs and attitudes mediated through the body.

It seems feasible here to make a connection between Esrock's somatosensory viewing experience, the involvement of a 'background feeling' in this experience, an aesthetics of embodiment, and affect theory. Emphasising our unique embodied experience in the social world, affect theorists, such as Gilles Deleuze,⁶⁸ Brian Massumi,⁶⁹ Simon O'Sullivan⁷⁰ and Eve Sedgwick,⁷¹ to name only a few, generally

⁶⁴ Esrock, 'Touching art', 236.

⁶⁵ Duncum, 'Visual culture', 9.

⁶⁶ Thomas Csordas, ed, 'Introduction: the body as representation and being-in-the-world', in *Embodiment and experience: the existential ground of culture and self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 12.

⁶⁷ Csordas, 'Introduction', 5.

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays critical and clinical*, translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

⁶⁹ Brian Massumi, 'The autonomy of affect', in *Deleuze: a critical reader*, ed. Paul Patton, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, 217-239 and *Parables for the virtual: movement, affect sensation*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

⁷⁰ Simon O'Sullivan, 'The aesthetics of affect: thinking art beyond representation', *Angelaki*, 6: 3, 2001, 125-135.

share with sensory theorists a dissatisfaction with post-structuralist and determinist approaches to cultural analysis as pointed out previously. However, the authors mentioned above have slightly differing ways of defining affect and it is only possible here to make a few generalisations as to the intellectual trajectory of the so-called 'affective turn' in its relation to the sensory turn.

Primarily focussed on the non-discursive constituencies of cultural experience and subject formation, or, as Clare Hemmings puts it, the 'qualitative experience of the social world' affect theorists are more interested in 'states of being' than in social determinist perspectives of subjectivity.⁷² Summarily, an affect theory, Hemmings argues 'is all of our affective experiences to date that are remembered [...] in the moment of responding to a new situation'.⁷³ In other words, according to this view, traces of past affective experiences are uncontrollably called up - or 'registered' in Hemmings' terms - in lived experience influencing and shaping those new encounters.⁷⁴ In this way, the body, with its unique likes, dislikes, desires and revulsions is recognised as operating in ways not easily reducible to explanation through social narratives and power relations. The sensing body is thereby accorded an autonomy refused by post-structuralist emphases on discourse and interpretation.

However, to suggest that sensory scholarship whole-heartedly rejects the cultural determinism of sensory experience would not be accurate. For just as visual culture studies has made us aware that seeing has a history,⁷⁵ a growing body of literature sets out to show the ways in which the senses and sensory experience are socially constructed. For instance, in her analysis of the cultural meanings assigned to different senses, Constance Classen argues that 'sight may be linked to reason or to witchcraft, taste may be used as a metaphor for aesthetic discrimination or for sexual experience, an odour may signify sanctity or sin, political power or social exclusion'.⁷⁶ In this way different cultural groups produce a 'sensory model' of the meanings and values associated with the senses. In other words, and as Howes succinctly puts it, 'a "sensory model" [is] a way of ordering and understanding the senses that is not purely cognitive or limited to individual experiences but is a communal perceptual orientation'.⁷⁷ Thus, far from ignoring the cultural dimension of sensorial experience a great deal of sensory studies considers the human sensorium as a product of culture. Although it is difficult to resist the impulse to connect the sensory turn to the affective turn, one must tread cautiously in drawing such a conclusion. Evidently treating embodied and multi-sensorial aesthetic experience as non-discursive only does not satisfactorily describe the project of sensory scholarship.

⁷¹ Eve K. Sedgwick, *Touching feeling: affect, pedagogy, performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

⁷² Claire Hemmings, 'Invoking affect', *Cultural Studies*, 19: 5, 2005, 551.

⁷³ Hemmings, 'Invoking affect', 552.

⁷⁴ Hemmings, 'Invoking affect', 552.

⁷⁵ I am thinking here in particular of John Berger's *Ways of seeing*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972 which, arguably, catapulted the rise of subsequent social and cultural critiques of art and visual culture.

⁷⁶ Constance Classen, 'Foundations for an anthropology of the senses', *International Social Science Journal*, 153, 1997, 402.

⁷⁷ Howes, 'Charting the sensorial revolution', 114.

Nevertheless, recently academic work even beyond the borders of art history is increasingly investigating the embodiment of aesthetic experience, subtly invoking references to the affective dimension of such experience. For example, recent work by cultural geographers such as John Wylie, Tim Ingold and Christopher Tilley investigates the relationship between landscape as 'a real, palpable, worldly presence' and people's embodied lived experience.⁷⁸ As Wylie explains in his book *Landscape*, research in landscape studies and cultural geography in the mid-1980s to mid-1990s tended to emphasise the visual aspects of landscapes and the ways in which seeing landscape is constructed through cultural and social conventions. Since the late 1990s, however, what Wylie refers to as 'a new generation of landscape phenomenologists', has emerged.⁷⁹ Such landscape phenomenologists look beyond the discursive and interpretative focus of earlier cultural geography which viewed landscape as a representation of cultural, political and economic power. Instead, landscape phenomenologists' main point of entry into the landscape is from the standpoint that 'landscape is defined primarily in terms of embodied practices of dwelling – practices of being-in-the-world in which self and landscape are entwined and emergent'.⁸⁰ Thus, their interest is not so much in how power and ideology are articulated in landscape, but rather in the non-representational and affective connection between perceivers and their world.

Phenomenology has not only proved useful in new initiatives in cultural geography, but also in recent work in film studies. For example, following Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker bases her analysis of film in Merleau-Pontian theories of embodied perception.⁸¹ Investigating the ways in which 'meaning and significance emerge in and are articulated through the fleshy, muscular, and visceral engagement that occurs between film's and viewer's bodies',⁸² Barker avoids conventional analytical approaches employed by film theorists who aim to interpret films as texts, and instead, turns her attention towards the sensuous relationship between viewers' bodies and films.

Evidently, phenomenology has emerged as a popular theoretical framework amongst scholars that investigate the interaction between spectators and their world. As described by Colin Smith, phenomenology is a 'transcendental philosophy' which seeks to understand the relationship between people and the world, and seeks to 'puts essences back into existence'.⁸³ It appears that phenomenology is a useful philosophical perspective for sensory scholarship precisely because it questions the subject/object distinction characteristic of Western critical thought, thereby refusing the detachment of the subject from what it sees.

⁷⁸ See for example John Wylie, *Landscape*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009; Christopher Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape: places, paths and monuments*, Oxford: Berg, 1994; Christopher Tilley, *The materiality of stone: explorations in landscape phenomenology*, Oxford: Berg, 2004; Tim Ingold, *The perception of the environment: essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*, London: Routledge, 2000.

⁷⁹ Wylie, *Landscape*, 13.

⁸⁰ Wylie, *Landscape*, 14.

⁸¹ Jennifer Barker, *The tactile eye: touch and the cinematic experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Barker's analyses of audiences' experiences of films are grounded in Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'flesh' explicated in *The visible and the invisible*, 130.

⁸² Barker, *The tactile eye*, 4.

⁸³ Colin Smith, 'Preface', in *Phenomenology of perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, translated by Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2002, originally published 1945, vii.

In particular, and as has already been pointed out, Merleau-Ponty's ideas regarding perception, subjectivity, the reversibility of vision and touch, and the combination of proximity and distance in vision have been invoked in much recent research dealing with art, landscape, photography, cultural experience, and so forth from the perspective of the sensory realm.⁸⁴ This may, in part, be owing to Merleau-Ponty's resistance to the cultural determinism of perception as I discussed earlier.

Merleau-Ponty's main criticism of the Enlightenment model of subjectivity involves both the way in which it denies the 'corporeal nature of human being, knowledge, experience and perception' and the way in which it constructs an empty space between the subject and the object in the visual field.⁸⁵ Rather, Merleau-Ponty does not recognise a space between the one and the other at all, but argues that the observer (subject) is always part of the observed (object).⁸⁶ While detachment from the world is generally considered a good place from which to know the world (for example in language we use phrases such as: 'from my perspective', 'I see what you mean' and 'from my point or view'), Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of subjectivity insists on the corporeal and engaged nature of human experience rather than the detached rationality of Cartesian subjectivity – the rational observer.

This fundamentally alters the role between the perceiving subject and the perceived world, effectively overturning Cartesian accounts of subjectivity which presuppose that the contemplative mind of the viewer is disinterested and disembodied, and entirely outside the world it claims to know. Thus vision understood as embodied means that gazing on the world is done not from without, but from within it. For Merleau-Ponty our bodies are simultaneously seeing and seen, touching and touched, active and passive, observer and observed, subject and object.

Sensory prospects for art history

Sensory scholarship has cast a wide net across academic disciplines, and similar kinds of investigations are evidently not limited to art history. Scholars in diverse fields are challenging the rational and detached position of the perceiver in order to delve beyond the social dimension of cultural production into the non-discursive and experiential nature of social interaction. However, academic interest in the ways in which the human sensorium mediates experience is not a new endeavour. In 1778, Johan G. Herder wrote the following in the essay, *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*:

However different this contribution of the different senses to thought and sensation may be, in our inner selves everything flows together and becomes

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty's theories on vision and touch have been masterfully applied to works of art by Renée van de Vall, *At the edges of vision: a phenomenological aesthetics of contemporary spectatorship*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. One of the notable criticisms against Merleau-Ponty is his fusion, or reduction, of vision to touch, which is unpacked by Luce Irigaray, *An ethics of sexual difference*, translated by Carolyn Burke and Gillian Gill, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: beyond recognition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, and Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of light: vision and touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*, London: Routledge, 1998.

⁸⁵ Wylie, *Landscape*, 2007, 147.

⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, 133.

one. We usually call the depth of this confluence *imagination* [*Einbildung*], but it does not consist only of images [*Bildern*], but also sounds, words, signs, and feelings, for [which] our language would have no name. Sight borrows from feeling and believes that it sees what is only felt. Sight and hearing decode each other reciprocally. Smell seems to be the spirit of taste, or at least a close brother of taste. From all this now, the soul weaves and makes for itself its robe, its sensuous universe.⁸⁷

Whilst the sensory turn may be better conceived of as the sensory *return*, it does appear feasible to suggest that, owing to the prominence given to rationalist thinking in the modern period, the involvement of the non-visual senses in human aesthetic experience has not always been acknowledged. In striving to achieve the ideal aesthetic disinterest, art history may have been complicit in dismissing sensual experience as a valid mode of artistic enquiry. A re-conception of aesthetic experience may thus be necessary. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714-62), whose works have long been neglected, considered experience to be influenced by all the senses. Baumgarten maintained that 'cognition through the senses has its own significance, as sense perceptions generate specific and valuable meanings which do not need and cannot be translated into rational thoughts'.⁸⁸

I have attempted to show that scholarly negotiations of the visual field have, until recently, often avoided explorations of the affective multi-sensorial body of the viewer in relation to what it sees. Sensory scholars, however, propose that it is no longer feasible that art history limit its enquiries to the *visual* field alone, for this field is also informed by the senses of touch, hearing, and so forth. Phenomenology has been employed in sensory research as a means to dismantle and dissolve Cartesianism as the primary strategy for negotiating the relationship between a viewer and an artwork. In this endeavour, aesthetic experience may be better conceived as contingent upon corporeal experience which is not always easily explained through social and ideological critiques. At the same time, it must continuously be acknowledged that the realm of the senses is also not outside of social meaning.

As academics chisel away at the distance between their objects of study and the perceiver – or rather, 'senser', as Di Bello and Koureas argue⁸⁹ – the sensory revolution is putting some pressure on art history to introduce novel approaches into its language. The challenge to the academic practice of art historians who search beyond the visual and into the embodied dimension of aesthetic experience is whether or not they are sufficiently able to thicken their analyses of this multi-sensorial experience and ensure that art history retains its significance as a rigorous discipline.

Currently, the multi-sensorial body in post-industrial societies is increasingly drawn not only into installation art, digital art, and interactive

⁸⁷ Johan G. Herder, 'On the cognition and sensation of the human soul', in *Philosophical Writings*, edited by Michael N. Foster, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 204-205.

⁸⁸ Di Bello and Koureas, *Art, history and the senses*, 4. See also Steffen W. Gross, 'The neglected programme of aesthetics', in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42: 4, October, 2002, in which the author argues that Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* should be revisited in order to lend a more inclusive concept of aesthetics.

⁸⁹ Di Bello and Koureas, 'Other than the visual', 3.

museums, but also into a complicated visual culture of sensory spectacles targeting the consumer body in ever more sophisticated ways. It would seem likely then, that research dealing with the experiences of embodied audiences in these sites in nuanced ways will provide art history much fruitful ground for future research.

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