Introduction
Other than the Visual: Art, History and the Senses

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In recent years, art history has been criticized, de-centred and opened up, amongst other things, by a growing interest in the wider field of visual culture. But what of the cultures other than the visual – what of the other sense perceptions that are also involved in experiencing and making sense of the objects designated as art in Western societies? Can and should the authority of the visual be deconstructed, and what role do the other senses play in this process? We have inherited an art history dominated by the visual, in both its Modernist developments, and its critiques since. The visual has been privileged as a rational source of knowledge, able to transcend lowly sensuality, while the proximity senses have been marginalized by aesthetics, art history and criticism, disciplines that rely heavily on mechanical reproduction techniques that have been available since the nineteenth century but only for sight and sound. Discourses foregrounding the separateness and independence of artistic practices as ‘visual’ continue to be influential; as the contributors to this book demonstrate, however, artists from the nineteenth century onwards have increasingly challenged, disregarded or worked outside the hegemony of sight by producing works that include, or powerfully evoke, non-visual elements. Art historical analyses, however, only rarely go beyond the investigation of visually embodied observers. Fuller exploration of the role of the senses in past and present artistic cultures has been left to sociologists and anthropologists working on the senses’ socially constructed nature. The contributions in this book explore the role of the non-visual senses in making and engaging with the visual arts. By focusing on the role of touch, taste, smell or sound; the interaction of all the senses in synaesthesia; and the pleasures and pains of experiencing art and its objects, we propose art historical methodologies that can account for bodily experiences and the materiality of works of art. This provides a better understanding of
the ‘affective economies’ that are in circulation when the two meet, and a powerful, much-needed contribution to theories otherwise based mainly on verbal and visual communication.

The book covers the period from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present, a time of dramatic sensual changes related to the development of mechanically produced and reproduced stimuli through technologies varying from mechanical pianos to photographic cameras. As Caroline Jones points out, ‘the human sensorium has always been mediated’. Air, for example, is the basic medium through which we perceive sound. Yet this mediation has increased as modern means of productions have developed numerous new ways to amplify, shield, simulate, stimulate or irritate our senses, which have been modernized through practices as diverse as waste management and town planning (which took care of bodily smells), the development of sound insulation (which sheltered the middle-class citizen from the noise of the modern city at home or at work) and the development of artificial flavourings and dyes. Through its own process of modernization, philosophy by the beginning of the nineteenth century was no longer concerned with defining the sensorium and discussing hierarchies of the senses, but with establishing the scientific basis for knowledge. As the study of the senses became a scientific pursuit, or a matter of chemistry and product design, their separation became entrenched in the development of discrete specializations for the study of each sense (opticians, otologists, naso-specialists, etc.), mirroring the status of the senses in culture by giving more importance to sight and audition. As Jonathan Crary argues, it was this physiological research on vision which led to a change, in early nineteenth-century Europe, in the conceptualization of the observer. No longer a figure based on the camera obscura as an actual and metaphorical device to bracket off the body of the viewer to produce a ‘stable and fixed … objective ground of visual truth’, the observer became endowed with a body, in which the senses were not passive receptors but active agents creating shifting, mobile and subjective sensations. In his account, however, this body seems to remain largely without a gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or indeed a full sensorium, as the research that reconfigured vision as subjective also separated it from the other senses. Vision is embodied but does not lose its precedence. Crary is aware that concepts such as ‘the observer’ or ‘a history of vision’ are problematic, as all we have to work with is ‘an irreducibly heterogeneous system of discursive, social, technological, and institutional relations’ (p. 6), fragments from the past we can only use to have an effect in the present. If, as Mitchell argues, Crary is too quick to generalize his claims into sweeping master narratives of vision, this book, on the contrary, is not trying to excavate a true, complete or hegemonic history of the other senses, but to consider moments in this heterogeneous field. We want to mobilize fragments from the past to be used in the present, in the belief that art history can take up its position as a central discipline in the current ‘sensual revolution’ only if
it embraces its multi-sensuality, if it acknowledges makers and observers (or, rather, sensers – we are still working with a limited language) endowed not only with a body but with a sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and a full sensorium alive with currents of desires, repulsions, volitions, affects and pleasures that are cross-modal and cross-sensual.¹⁴

In his ‘Sociology of the Senses’ of 1907, Georg Simmel argues that modernity affects the senses, emphasizing individual likes and dislikes. ‘The modern person is shocked by innumerable things, and innumerable things appear intolerable to their senses’ even as they lose their ‘perceptual acuity’ in the long range: ‘we become not only short-sighted but short-sensed in general; yet at these short distances, we become that much more sensitive’.¹⁵

As modernity makes us less reliant on our senses for survival, these become more fastidious and irritable, less a matter of understanding and relating to our environment for practical purposes but more a ‘sensual and sometimes aesthetic’ mode of reacting (p. 118), making the individual prone to want to retreat into privacy, where the senses and their stimuli can be controlled to cope with life in the modern metropolis and its fast-paced tempo of change, movement and sensual overload. Sensual arrangements and discrimination become crucial for social and cultural purposes – people are excluded or included in social groups according to what and how they look, smell, taste, listen to and feel. Social and individual identities are created around tastes and preferences at once shared and individualized through dinners, concerts, visual spectacles, social chat, personal hygiene, fashion, and all the changing varieties of social and cultural interactions. For Simmel, understanding ‘the meanings that mutual sensory perception and influencing have for the social life of human beings, their coexistence, cooperation and opposition’ is crucial to an understanding of larger social structures (p. 110). The premise of our book is that this is valid for art as a social system too. The senses are not just the instruments of social interaction but the form and content of much social activity. Sensory effects are the cells of larger social organisms, and studying sensual interactions within society is likened by Simmel to the study of cells under the microscope. The collection in this book could similarly be likened to a study, at a microscopic level, of the multi-sensorial interactions at work in individual works of art and at specific times and places, rather than an engagement with an overarching narrative or theory of art and the senses.

**Art, History, the Senses**

Modernity is associated with art becoming a specialized field pertaining to the optical rather than the tactile or the narrative, pushing further academic discourses which have exploited the higher status accorded to the visual in classical hierarchies of the senses, to establish the ‘fine arts’ as having a higher
status than the applied arts or crafts. The concept of the aesthetic was crucial in the process of defining art as opposed to or at least different from practical or utilitarian concerns, and from cognitive or intellectual matters, despite their coming together in late nineteenth-century notions of high culture ‘in which the contemplative character of aesthetic disinterest acts as a modern-day surrogate for the ancient contemplation of ideas’. In its original meaning, the concept of ‘aesthetics’ coined by Baumgarten in the eighteenth century (from the Greek aesthesis, meaning sensation or perception by the senses) encompassed all the senses. As Peter Osborne argues:

Aristotle attributed an independent non-intellectual cognitive value to the senses. In inventing the term ‘aesthetics’ … to denote the science of the sensory knowledge of beauty – ‘perfection of the senses’ – Baumgarten was deploying a broadly Aristotelian conception of aesthesis to counter the shortcomings of rationalism … in matters of taste: its derogatory, or at best contradictory, estimation of the senses.

Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt an der Oder, wrote Metaphisica (1739), Ethica (1740) and Aesthetica (1750–58). Influential at the time, his works have been somewhat neglected since, especially as they were mostly written in Latin, but they are being rediscovered as part of a ‘sensual turn’ taking place in the humanities, after linguistic and semiotic turns which were dominated by the textual and the theoretical, rather than the experiential or the embodied. Baumgarten recognized that ‘all signs, be they written characters, visual forms or acoustic images, operate sensuously’. He understood the senses as active generators of meaning rather than just passive receptors of sensations, providing an alternative approach to the traditional dichotomy between rationalism and sensualism with his belief that human beings could and should not be reduced to either purely rational or purely sensual beings. Rationalist thought considered knowledge gained through the senses as confused and imperfect, of no intrinsic value other than as providing material for the sciences, while 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. Their ‘confused representation’ is not a defect but a positive quality, an ‘extensive clarity’ which is impossible to divide into smaller entities or components, as rational thinking would (Baumgarten, Meditationes Philosophicae, § 16–18).

Sensations ‘must be dealt with as the complex assemblages that they are’ (p. 410). Baumgarten thus embraced the confusion of sensual experiences as a sign of wholeness. He advocated cognitio sensitive (Baumgarten, Aesthetica, § 17) – a sensitive knowledge of and from the senses – as able to grasp human experiences which cannot be grasped through logical thinking (p. 410). Sensitive knowledge preserves the abundance, richness, and liveliness of sensual perceptions in their specificity, and can encompass the special and the
particular (rather than the normal and the general of rational logic) in their complex, diverse relations and connections.

There is a ‘logic of the senses’ and this is ‘one of the central objects of aesthetics’.

As ‘the philosophy of sensitive knowledge’, aesthetics is not just a philosophy of art, but of a way to grasp reality grounded in sensitive experiences and representations. This ‘beautiful thinking’ (Baumgarten *Metaphisica*, § 533, and *Aesthetica*, § 1) is ‘a way of thinking that is very much aware of and sensitive to its object, and not the object alone but to all the relations of that object’ (p. 411). This awareness is also the aim of the chapters in this book, keen to explore not only how signs operate sensuously, but also how all sensations have semiotic potential. For Baumgarten, sensitive cognition, like all cognitive capacities, is

... depending on and preconditioned by the circumstances of one’s own situation
... To think beautifully, that is, to grasp the object in a way that acknowledges its embedded-ness in the various relations that constitute its specific character, unavoidably presupposes a person in a continual process of developing all his powers and senses, and exploring them in all possible directions (pp. 411–12).

Sensitive perception is both the foundation of our experience and access to reality, and ‘an independent principle’ shaping and reshaping these realities. It is not a ‘merely passive reception and mimesis but always an active doing ... an active bringing out of its own objects of knowledge and cognition’ (p. 413).

Most importantly, as the chapters in this book also demonstrate, this aesthetic experience is a bodily experience. As Terry Eagleton emphasizes, the idea of the aesthetic ‘is born as a discourse of the body’ and it is a form of cognition that is achieved through the whole corporeal sensorium, with the sensitive skins and membranes of the body mediating the boundary between inner and outer stimuli. According to Susan Buck-Morss the senses maintain an uncivilized and uncivilizable trace, a core of resistance to cultural domestication, because their immediate purpose is to serve instinctual needs. Eagleton provides an exploration of the consequences of this association of the senses with basic biological needs and self-preservation, arguing that by the time of Kant’s philosophical treatises on the aesthetic a complete disassociation with the senses has taken place. For Buck-Morss this disassociation was very much related to a need to control what were perceived to be the uncontrollable forces of both nature and industrial society, in order to create an ‘autonomous, autotelic subject’. The contributors to this book attempt to bring back to life this – as she argues – ‘sense-dead’ subject, to the possibilities offered by the senses.

Much Anglo-American philosophical tradition since the 1960s has equated aesthetics with pretentious vagueness, yet art, as Osborne argues, remains seen as ‘irreducibly aesthetic ... because it offers ... a pleasure of the senses,
in a cognitively expanded interpretation’, while at the same time, a notion of the aesthetic as ‘a reflective judgement of taste … appears to capture so little of what is significant and challenging about specific works of modern art’. Osborne highlights the difference between ‘a judgement of art’, based on Kantian aesthetics – ‘to judge a painting qua painting’ and a ‘judgement of sense made about a work of art’, based on Baumgarten. This book is thus concerned with a Baumgartian aesthetic, and aims to unravel and make palpable the logic of the senses in a selection of works of art from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. If Osborne’s book wants to ‘explore the notion of the aesthetic as the constitutive excess which marks art off from other kinds of intellectual production’ (p. 8), we want to explore the notion of how a particular logic of the senses marks these works off as works of art.

The Senses

Scientists on the whole agree that the senses are shaped by environmental, cultural and social circumstances rather than being solely innate. They need to be, as they need to adapt to changing circumstances to work efficiently as tools of survival. The extent of their plasticity, however, is still much debated. Do senses perceive the world, or do they make it for us, by shaping our perceptions? How do cultural and historical differences impact on neurological processes? More widely, how can we study the senses, if the senses of those who study them are as culturally constructed as those under scrutiny? By starting from our senses as socially constructed we can better understand how we are constructed as viewers or sensors of works of art through a social system that, of course, includes these works. As art historians, this poses exciting if difficult research questions: if our present sensual perception of music, paintings, sculptures – or any surviving material culture – cannot be assumed to be the same as that from the past, how can we reconstruct not only a ‘period eye’, but a whole ‘period’ sensorium? Rather than attempting to construct an overarching theory of art and the senses, or to survey the whole field, this book is concerned with analysing individual case studies in specific social, historical, cultural and sensorial circumstances. As such, it aims to contribute to Karl Marx’s idea of a history of mankind as a history of the senses, as played out in some specific moments in the history of the privileged domain defined as art.

As in themselves the result of interactions between nature and culture, body and mind, the senses are where these distinctions become problematic, blurred and impossible to maintain. Yet splitting the senses seems to be important to create disciplines and to establish notions of disciplined behaviour – at art exhibitions, concerts, at the table, or in the laboratory and the lecture room. Splitting the senses, at least in Western cultures, seems to be
fundamental in defining a ‘clean and proper’ self or identity, at both conscious and unconscious levels. The boundaries between the senses can become one of the sites of abjection, as splitting the senses is one way to demarcate a field to establish mastery over it.  

The senses have thus been separated, ranked and studied by producing disciplined bodies as both subjects and objects of investigation. Yet sensations – the actions and productions of the senses – are synaesthetic. They work both in isolation and together, multi-, trans- and inter-sensorially. Visual stimuli, as new brain-imaging techniques now show us, activate parts of the brain associated with processing other sense data – seeing movement in a picture activates parts of the brain that process motion. Touching activates visual recognition areas, even in the blind. In its etymological origins, the word taste (from Old French: to touch, to try, as well as to taste – to eat a morsel) blends the act of touch and the perception of flavour. More generally, all cultural apparatus organizing and enabling sensorial experience is multi-sensorial – music, for example, is always also visual, tactile and embodied. It can be felt by deaf people. The look and feel of musical instruments and media, from drums to i-Pods, is of crucial importance in the development of music – audition organized as a cultural practice. Hearing also plays a decisive role in the lateralization of perceived space, which is listened for as much as seen. Hearing plays a mediating role between the body and the spatial localization of those outside it. The space we inhabit is not a pre-existing ‘world’ we ‘see’, but a product of the kinaesthetic, perceptual, practico-sensory realm, in which all the senses are employed. Equally, as Mitchell argues in a recent article, all the ‘visual’ media involve or evoke all of the senses. We need to examine critically and historically not only the ‘sensory hygiene’ that fetishized the ‘purely visual’ as the goal of modern art, but also, more generally, the validity and usefulness of the concept of visual culture.  

The senses shift the idea of narrative to a different temporality. According to Mieke Bal, this new temporality relies on the ‘senses based bodilyness of the specific viewer that each act of viewing produces and shapes’. For Bal the substance of narrative is not so much the process of viewing as the work imagines and offers it in fictional form, but the actual ‘utterance or enunciation that it performs in a temporality that is located in the present’. In doing so the senses work beside a processual narrative staged by the artist and an anterior narrative imagined by the critic, in order to construct a third performative narrative done by the viewer. Both Bal and Buck-Morss argue that aesthetic experience should be understood in relation to bodily experience: ‘it is not because I am a woman, or conditioned by mass-media images that I find something beautiful, but because, given those contextualized identities something affects me from outside myself. My senses are affected’. 
The Contributions to this Book

Notions of synaesthesia and the multi-sensorial were important to a series of art movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from symbolism to abstraction, futurism and surrealism to happenings and performance art. In this book, we trace the multi-sensorial implications of some works at specific moments in their history, when senses other than the visual have affected, disrupted, contradicted or strengthened the meaning of visual works. Explicitly or implicitly, many of the contributors question how and why vision has been privileged in Western culture as a sense that can be addressed through the specialized, mono-sensorial discourse of ‘visual art’. All of the chapters in this book consider how senses other than the visual have interacted with it, and how this interaction (or the lack of it) has affected the meaning of specific works or fields of activity defined as visual.

The book thus aims to contribute to a sensory re-turn: to a re-evaluation of the role of sensory knowledge and experience in the arts, no longer tied to the creation, perception or evaluation of beauty. For the writers in this collection, the ‘perfection of the senses’ means that sense experiences are embraced as embodied and contingent rather than transcendental; and that sensual dissonance, pain, and noise – sensual interference – are as important as pleasure. The chapters, in their different ways and approaches, affirm the importance of the actual works as that which we need to start from, or go back to, with all our senses open and alert, to retrieve their sensual logic from the layers of theories and texts which at times seem to dull our perceptions like layers of accumulated dust. They all imply a phenomenological understanding of the senses in terms of relationships of meaning created by a particular work of art. We propose that this emphasis on the ‘sensual logic’ of works is a productive way to re-engage with notions of style and form, as that which we perceive not through our eyes only but through all of our senses. Rather than superficial pleasures, markers of a romanticized and idealized notion of artistic identity, or passive carriers of meaning, the sensual effects and affects of the material qualities and properties of paintings, sculptures, photographs, art objects and installations are that which engages us as embodied participants in a process of creating meaning. They are the political and ideological territory over which ‘authors’ and ‘readers’ meet, not to declare the death of either, but to create the experience, event, or face to face encounter that is the object of all art forms.

New technologies for the mass production and reproduction of images are a key aspect of nineteenth-century culture. An often-mentioned but little-analysed effect of these technologies is the impact they had on the tactile relations embedded in and engendered by objects such as sculptures and photographs. Patrizia Di Bello, in ‘Photography and Sculpture: A Light Touch’, examines how the touch of the artist, valorized in the nineteenth
century as a hallmark of creativity and individuality, mingled with that of the viewer (or more specifically, purchaser or consumer) in mechanical reproductions made using techniques, such as photography and carving machines, defined as indexical. The market for statuettes, mass produced through Parianware and other inexpensive casting materials, boomed in the nineteenth century. Sculptures and statuettes were also the subject matter of several now canonical early photographic images. This chapter explores the problematic and pleasurable dynamics between vision and touch, the artist and the beholder, and the sensual relations embedded in originals and those engendered by copies. Conceptualized as the most tactile of the fine arts (and at times downgraded for this) sculptures are not supposed to be experienced primarily by touch. In photographs, we are allowed to look and touch – but the two senses are dislocated as we look at the subject of the photograph but we touch the print medium. These are the two media that best problematize the role of the touch of the artist in our relation to an object valorized as a work of art.

If the touch of the hand of the artist was valorized by nineteenth-century culture, and the desire of the viewer to touch was mobilized to stimulate sale of reproductions, touch through the mouth – taste – remained taboo. Eating, oral sensations and taste, more than any other sensual experience, can collapse not only distinctions between the senses (taste, smell and texture) but also between subject and object, the eater and the eaten, the nourishing and the disgusting, the pure and the impure. Such ambiguities are at the core of rituals such as taking Holy Communion. These dynamics are highlighted by ‘Seeing and Tasting the Divine: Simeon Solomon’s Homoerotic Sacrament’, Dominic Janes’s chapter on Solomon’s paintings depicting the Holy Communion as both a Catholic ritual and as an explicitly homoerotic adoration of Eros. His contribution vividly brings to the fore the tensions between taste as a matter of aesthetics and of ingestion. Solomon’s paintings were considered an act of bad taste visually and religiously, partly because of the sexual overtones of taking communion as oral ingestion of the body of the Other. The journey from visual appreciation to oral ingestion and dissolution of the Host provided not only inspiration for Solomon’s form of ‘tainted love’ but are also the key to a full experience of these works as more than just visual.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, artists were experimenting with the senses through formally and culturally more explicit ways than could be achieved in painting alone. In ‘A Trip to Japan in Sixteen Minutes: Sadakichi Hartmann’s Perfume Concert and the Aesthetics of Scent’, Christina Bradstreet attends to the overlooked perfume concert held by Hartmann at the Carnegie Lyceum in 1902. During the period c. 1890–1905, artists and writers increasingly reflected upon the emotive and imaginative properties of smell. Calls for an aesthetic reconsideration of this previously neglected sense, however, remained problematic, given the difficulties in producing narrative
meaning (in this case, an imaginary olfactory journey) and controlling audience responses to this most elusive of senses. Hartman’s scent concerts failed to register with his audiences as coherent events. Their expectations that to go to a concert as part of a theatrical entertainment involved being addressed first and foremost by sound and vision, meant that, in the absence of enough visual or textual clues the scents drifting from the stage remained a meaningless cacophony of smells, ‘stink’ as the olfactory equivalent of noise.

If substituting vision and sound with just smells proved too problematic, the idea of the concert as a synaesthetic form continued to be productive throughout the twentieth century. In ‘Intimate Modernism: The Nabis, Symbolist Theatre and the Gesamtkunstwerk’, Katherine Kuenzli examines the French re-writing of Wagner as a miniaturist by focusing on his significance for the Nabis, a group of painters who were known, then as now, as Intimists. They forged a Wagnerian aesthetic in their decorations for the Symbolist theatre. Inspired by Mallarmé’s poetry and essays on Wagner, these decors directly informed their painterly practice and mark a profoundly anti-heroic moment that characterizes the French Symbolist response to Richard Wagner. Unlike the later German Expressionists and the Italian Futurists who courted mass audiences, French Symbolist writers and painters emphasized the difficulty of obtaining their goal of unity. Symbolists and the Nabis replaced Wagner’s musical dramas’ spectacular effects with a difficult, hermetic language that could only be understood by a small and intellectually sympathetic audience – the kind of sensual community or sub-group posited by Simmel. The Nabis disprove a later, twentieth-century Modernist equation of artistic purity with the isolation of individual art forms and senses. Far from leading to artistic confusion, the Gesamtkunstwerk as the Nabis understood it results in a purified and highly self-critical approach to composition.

The transformative powers of multi-sensorial works are also explored by Francesca Bacci in her chapter on Futurism. The early avant-gardes of the twentieth century recognized the new possibilities offered by the sensorium in communicating with their audiences. Bacci’s contribution, ‘In Your Face: The Futurists’ Assault on the Public’s Senses’, explores the tactile and audio engagements of Tommaso Marinetti and Luigi Russolo, who wanted to break the barriers surrounding visual and harmonic works. For Russolo this was achieved through the removal of the distinctions between harmonic sounds and indeterminate noise in order to allow new experiential possibilities. For Marinetti tactility offered the key to new and more involving interactions with audiences. Whether in the form of rooms, streets or theatres these tactile environments could reveal the inadequacies of exclusively visual forms of representation. Through an analysis of responses at the time Bacci discusses the relationship between artistic intention and actual outcome of the Futurist Gesamtkunstwerk as well as their continuing relevance for contemporary art practices. She proposes a possible connection between
Futurism and Maria Montessori’s ideas on education, which fostered a less atomized education of the senses and understood the importance of a whole-body sensorial education even to achieve practical aims such as learning to read and write.

Equivalence and conceptual synaesthesia – between music and painting – has been recognized as one of the alternatives to the sensually specialized Modernism of the ‘purely visual’. Sound and music in relation to artistic agency and articulation are the main focus of ‘Between Sound and Silence: John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen and the Sculptures of Dorothea Tanning’. In this chapter, Victoria Carruthers discusses Tanning’s use of the negative space between objects in her soft sculptures produced between 1969 and 1970, using her extensive, previously unpublished interviews and discussions with the artist. These sculptures are preoccupied with themes of emergence and entrapment, exploring the function of memory and sounds such as whispers to allude to the unconscious, and collapsing the boundaries between psychic and sensorial space.

Sound, whether instantly recognizable or disguised as incidental noise, is (as we have seen) an important concern of many twentieth-century artworks. The often-ignored electric hum of Dan Flavin’s light installations forms the main pre-occupation for Alexander Dumbadze, who details some of the permutations that arise from the inclusion or exclusion of sound from our interaction with Flavin’s work. In ‘Can You Hear the Lights?’ he discusses how the noise generated by the buzz of fluorescent lighting originally used by Dan Flavin in his installations is on the cusp of being meaningful. Flavin was part of a generation of artists only just moving away from the ‘Greenberg effect’ which privileged eyesight alone and ‘the optical’. In this context, it is easy to understand the artist’s unwillingness to comment one way or another on the buzz emitted by his fluorescent lamps. On the one hand, he did not want to commit himself to the ‘mixed media’ impure cacophony of the sound-and-sculpture artists who were his contemporaries, yet he was no longer so sure of the primacy of eyesight alone to want to suppress the buzz even if he could. The inability of most visitors to Flavin’s installations to become fully conscious of this sound is not so much a failure to hear, but a demonstration of their having been constructed by dominant art discourse as taking to the white-cube art gallery only their eyes. These were the same audiences that would have demonstrated their sophisticated audition by buying sound-proofed homes to escape the buzz of New York traffic, or hi-fi equipment purifying music from unwanted noise. To go on about the buzzing sound of an art installation, to focus one’s perception of it, would have been symptomatic of a failure: of not having constructed one’s ‘clean and proper’ modern-art-public self as focusing on eyesight alone, of not having had one’s senses sufficiently educated by modern and Modernist regimes to know when and where to switch them on or off. Dumbadze argues that the hum is not only a material...
property of the works but it also amplifies our physical experience before a Flavin and challenges recent scholarship that wants to situate Flavin in a more illusionist and optical ‘light’.

Of course, the ‘buzz’ of Flavin’s installations is invisible in the photographic reproductions used, amongst other records, to recreate them in contemporary exhibitions and to illustrate verbal accounts of them. The move from fine to visual arts to escape aesthetics as elitist obfuscation has also contributed to block the consideration of the role played by the other senses in our experience of multi-media works. Art reviews and first-hand accounts of installations rarely focus on their multi-sensoriality. This failure is compounded by the fact that installations, often on exhibition only temporarily, are more than other works known through photographic reproductions. In ‘Niki de Saint Phalle’s Hon: An Ethics through the Visual?’, Nicola Foster discusses a range of philosophical positions on the senses, from Plato and Kant, to Lacan and Irigaray, in order to deconstruct the dominance of the visual in Western tradition. Through an analysis of Hon (1966) as a now-destroyed work of installation art, Foster argues that simply replacing the aesthetic of the visual with an aesthetic of multi-sensory experience does not solve the problem of Modernist aesthetics and its focus on the visual. For the visual is problematic in its deep connection to autonomy and mastery, to reason and knowledge. It is not enough to suggest that this would be changed or resolved by a multi-sensorial aesthetic, and by giving up reason and knowledge with it. Through Lacan’s account it is possible to understand the visual as also hostage to the gaze, not only master of it. This in turn might allow us to not only celebrate a multi-sensorial aesthetic, but also prompt us to rethink models of rationality and knowledge based not on distance and objectification, but on the ethics and aesthetics of fully embodied beings.

Installation art, however, seems to have provided contemporary artists working with smell with a more productive model than that of the concert proposed by Hartmann at the beginning of the twentieth century. Jim Drobnick’s chapter, ‘Airchitecture: Guarded Breaths and the [cough] Art of Ventilation’, investigates contemporary artistic interventions with air conditioning in order to question indoor climate controls. Whereas in the nineteenth century the weather and its spectrum of mercurial and sublime effects inspired artists such as Constable, Turner, Whistler and Monet, the latter half of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first evidenced a shift to the indoor climate, where mastery over the weather has been presumably achieved. Within these standardized, neutral and isolated environments, artists have appropriated the ventilation apparatus to introduce idiosyncratic, discomforting and ecologically informed disturbances. Canned air is denatured air, and if Modernist technology has purged air of its vestigial mythologies and folklore, artists have intervened to re-endow it with a host of new meanings through air deconditioning. By exaggerating air conditioning’s
basic functions, corrupting it with symbolically loaded scents, particularizing it with personal concerns, politicizing it by drawing out its implicit social dimension, and reconnecting it with the environment it was designed to supplant, contemporary ventilation artists make conspicuous the subtle but problematic influence of air conditioning, and suggest ways in which the sensory environment can be reconceived.

As Gabriel Koureas argues in his concluding chapter, reconceiving a sensory environment can be a profoundly political act, especially when sense experience in the present is layered with the sense memory of traumatic events from the past. In recent years the concepts of cultural memory and trauma have become important methodological tools of analysis, in particular as part of what some authors have called a ‘wound culture’ in which memory offers a connection not only between the past and the present, but most importantly to the future. Cultural memory mediates and modifies difficult or tabooed moments of the past and determines their impact, sometimes disastrous, on the present. Cultural recall is the product of a collective agency, which does not just happen to the bearer but is ‘actually performed’. Memories can be described as ‘found objects’ integrated into narrative frames which are formed by the cultural stock one carries. However, certain memories resist integration. This is the case with ‘events so horrific that the one to whom they happen lacks the necessary framework to experience them’. Such memories are to a great extent bodily memories ‘full of fleeting images, the percussion of blows, sounds, and movements of the body’. This is what Charlotte Delbo has termed ‘sense memory’, where emotions and sense-experiences are compulsively repeated as raw and chaotic rather than being integrated into the verbal narratives of ‘thinking memory’. Koureas’s chapter on ‘Trauma, Space and Embodiment: The Sensorium of a Divided City’ explores the transformative sublime power of the senses brought together to reconstruct a forever-lost unity in politically divided Cyprus. By concentrating on the sensorial culture of the divided city of Nicosia in Cyprus, Koureas investigates the importance of the senses in incorporating traumatic memories in the everyday narratives of the city space and the consequences of this on the cultural production of the island. The artists try to find a language through which trauma, grief and memory can be conveyed to the viewer through ‘affective connections between bodies’. Koureas emphasizes the importance of extending ‘looking’ beyond the visual as a facilitator of ethnic reconciliation.

Conclusion

Since the 1970s and 1980s cultural studies and critical theory have dominated discourses on art with their critique of aesthetics as an ‘anti-
intellectual form of cultural elitism, the claims to universality of which are based on little more than a mystical veil of intuition shrouding a defence of inherited authority’. This emphasis on theory seems at the moment to have somewhat run out of steam, as Marxists and feminist approaches find themselves in a political crisis, semiotics seems to be in the doldrums, and psychoanalysis no longer generates new possible interpretations to offer, but seemingly complicates existing ones. These once most vital and productive art theories seem to have left art history somewhat sulking amongst verbally laden approaches. Going back to the senses might be a way to rediscover the artworks we are supposed to be concerned with historicizing.

As Nicholas Davey argues, Baumgarten accepted that

The passage from the immediacy of significant experience to the anonymity of conceptual reduction involves a serious loss. … [B]ut why is it for the most part assumed that, once reason takes over, one cannot return to aesthetic consciousness? Why … cannot the circle which commences with aesthetic intuition be closed by its return? Once rational analysis ceases to provide a satisfactory way forward with regard to a certain problematic cannot aesthetic intuition return?

In its way, this book is proposing a going back to aesthetic intuition as sensitive knowledge, to close the circle from works to ideas and theories, back to the works again. ‘Baumgarten’s notion of aesthetic truth … gives rise to the possibility not of deciding … between opposing interpretations but of being open to the most unified, meaningful and pleasing reading’ (pp. 112–13). As this book hopes to show, this can only be achieved by considering how the senses other than the visual effect and affect making, perceiving and interpreting visual works.

The media discussed in this book are multiple. What they have in common is the investigation of the social life of the senses in specific historical periods, as they mediate between selves, bodies and objects. The contributory chapters provide a specific focus for the study of embodied experiences in different times and places, revealing as a result the multiple forms of human sensuousness. In this collection, the role of the artist is seen as that of mediating the senses according to subtle yet socially specific cultural codes. If, as Merleau-Ponty argued, ‘a work of art is something we perceive’, and the meaning of works of art is given first and foremost to our senses, this, like other sense perceptions, can become ‘hidden from us beneath the sediment of knowledge and social living’ (p. 93). The chapters in this book want to reveal again to our senses the works they discuss, and thrust us once again into the presence of works of art as lived experience, so that our sense perceptions can be fully part of the social life of works of art as they ‘stand “bleeding” before us’ (p. 93).
Notes


3. See for example Art History through the Camera Lens, ed. H.E. Roberts (Australia: Gordon & Beach, 1995).


12. Contemporary neuroscience is now giving further scientific underpinnings to an understanding of the senses not as passive receptors but as active agents creating sensations; see Art and the Senses, eds F. Bacci and D. Melcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).


16. R. Williams, Keywords (Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976), pp. 27–8.


36. Ibid.


Symptomatic of this is the title of the conference at which some of these papers were first aired, *Art and Art History: Content, Discontent, Malcontents* (Association of Art Historians, University of Leeds, 5–7 April 2006. We want to thank in particular Fred Orton for his support of our session on ‘Other than the Visual’.
