

Théia. Revue d'histoire et d'histoire de l'art, 3: Experimental History and Sensoriality

Deadline: Apr 15, 2025

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Experimental history, which is developed through experimentation as a complement to and extension of traditional sources—such as archival documents, manuscripts, printed materials, and iconography—has emerged since the 1990s as one of the innovative methodologies in historical and art historical research. From Victor David Hanson's early experiments in hoplite armour to the renowned site of experimental archaeology at the Guédelon Castle (Yonne), experimentation has increasingly proven to be a fertile ground for exploring new and promising heuristic avenues, despite certain misunderstandings within the academic community. Indeed, the dialogue that experimental history has established with practitioners, such as artisans and athletes, has challenged traditional hierarchies of expertise. This has raised further doubts about the scientific legitimacy of this methodology, especially as “reconstitutions,” practiced as a hobby by enthusiasts, have developed alongside the scientifically-oriented “experimentation” conducted within applied research frameworks.

Inspired by Marcel Mauss's work on body techniques and Jean-Claude Schmitt's studies on rhythms, and enriched by the practice of experimental archaeology aimed at reconstructing operational sequences, experimental history approaches engage gestures and bodies. As it diversifies, it is gradually expanding into new fields of research, including the history of the senses, positioned at the intersection of cultural history and historical anthropology. For instance, the Knowing by Making project initiated by Pamela Smith in 2014 evolved, under the influence of several of its younger members, into The Recipe Project, a collective endeavour that emphasizes sensorialities and the knowledge they enable. However, although sensorialities have now become a fully-fledged subject of historical research—thanks to the pioneering work of Alain Corbin and the Centre for Sensory Studies (Concordia University, Canada)—the idea of using the senses as laboratories remains challenging within the Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly in history and art history. Moreover, the Peter Charles Hoffer's hypothesis, suggesting that experiencing past sensations could provide historians with access to a certain truth, has been largely discredited. It is now generally accepted that perceptions are historically conditioned, meaning that re-experiencing the stimuli encountered by people in past eras does not provide an accurate insight into how those individuals actually perceived them.

It is now time to reopen this historiographical debate, which seems to have been prematurely closed, and to shed light on the following question through the results of recent experiments: to

what extent can experimental history contribute to the history of the senses? For if experimental history teaches us nothing about past sensory perceptions, then what does it teach us? Confronting experimental history with the history of the senses, the question of the legitimacy of experimentation is raised, beginning with its scientific validity. This issue of *Théia. Revue d'histoire et d'histoire de l'art* aims to explore these foundations through an epistemological reflection rooted in history and art history. It seeks not only to highlight the relevance of establishing a dialogue between experience and sources in the history of the senses but also to understand—and to help others to understand—how experimentation is conceptualized and practiced, within which interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary frameworks, under what specific conditions, and for what purposes.

All contributions resonating with the theme are welcome. The following topics are suggested as possible avenues of exploration:

- Contributions of digital humanities
- Sensorial and tacit knowledge
- War and sensorialities
- Identification and preservation of sensory heritage
- Sensory mediation and professionalization

Submission Guidelines:

- Article proposals should include an abstract (approximately 5,000 characters, including spaces) and a short bio-bibliography of the author.
- Proposals should be submitted via email to the following addresses:
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Timeline:

- Deadline for submission of proposals: April 15 – Notification of acceptance by April 30.
- Deadline for submission of articles (35,000 to 55,000 characters, including spaces and footnotes): End of August 2025. Guidelines for manuscript formatting are available on the journal's website: <https://publications-prairial.fr/theia/index.php?id=5>
- Feedback to authors: October 2025.
- Accepted articles will undergo anonymous evaluation through a double-blind peer review process, in accordance with the journal's standard practices.

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