



## Introduction

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The guiding theme of the contributions in this volume is the relationship between the auditory and the visual in art, media technology, science, and perception. The period covered spans from the eighteenth century to the present, with a particular focus on the twentieth century. This leitmotif is developed along four different thematic lines:

- (a) the relationship between artistic genres and their respective aesthetic theories with reference to painting, sculpture, music, literature, and film;
- (b) the coupling of images and sounds in the audiovisual media and artistic apparatus found in the realms of film, video, and immersive or interactive installations, as well as in their historical antecedents in the color-light art of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries;
- (c) the interplay between these techniques and human perception to the point of potential boundary experiences of multimodal synthesis, such as those that occur in the phenomena of cross-modality, embodiment, immersion, and dissolution;
- (d) the convergence and divergence of visual and auditory codes in various forms of cultural expression, which has been thematicized, for example, in the artistic avant-garde of the 1920s, in the intermedia art of the 1960s and digital media art since the 1980s, and in pop culture since the 1960s, as well as in the reflection of pop culture in contemporary art since the 1990s.

The complexity and intricacy of the guiding theme is evidenced, for instance, by the fact that none of the ten essays ever deal only with a single topic, but rather always create links between different levels. For example, the questions of the definition of the artistic genres, their rivalry in the *paragone*, and their reciprocal influence—long-standing questions which Simon Shaw-Miller asks with respect to the period from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century—are certainly a prelude to the dialectic relationship between visual and auditory codes, as outlined by Diedrich Diederichsen in reference to pop culture. The coupling of image and sound in media technology and the oft-forgotten contributions of the avant-garde artist-engineers of the first half of the twentieth century, which are recalled in Birgit Schneider's archaeological inquiry into the history of media technology, are likewise found at the interface between art and natural science, as are the immersive artworks examined by Chris Salter, given their connection with neurological research and studies on intermodal perception. Like Schneider and Salter, Katja Kwastek also wonders whether it is possible to draw boundaries between the technical apparatus, the performative instrument, and the reception-seeking artwork—a question that the author examines using the example of interactive art. The interplay between bodily proprioception and the transformation of the audiovisual by means of media

technology—dealt with by Michel Chion in terms of his concept of *ergo-audition*—is an important component, in turn, of the interaction between artwork and user or performer, explored by Kwastek, and of embodiment and immersion, dealt with by Salter. Finally, Hans Beller's analysis of classical film montage deals with related aesthetic phenomena, which are also studied by Christian Höller with reference to contemporary art and by Diederichsen with respect to pop culture: strategies of adaptation or even ingratiation of the auditory and visual levels encounter strategies of contradiction and unveiled incompatibility.

As already illustrated in the interdisciplinary compendium of this two-volume publication on "audiovisuality," this field of research comprises a terrain of overlaps, intermediate zones, and interferences. It is thus not a new science, but rather represents a new perspective on existing fields of knowledge; nonetheless, the new combinations created give rise to new knowledge contexts.<sup>1</sup> The aim, however, is not to establish a new discipline, but to open up and render more permeable the existing scientific disciplines. The field of audiovisuality outlined here can therefore exist only in a context of permanent dialogue between the fields of audiovisual theory mentioned above and in constant comparison with contemporary artistic practice, which often develops more rapidly than science.

Observation of the current state of research shows that in the realm of the audiovisual, practice is substantially more advanced than theory.<sup>2</sup> Vice versa, it also becomes evident, however, that the diversity and intensity of audiovisual practice is an essential impetus for the increased interest in the history and theory of combinations of image and sound. Today, the coupling and transformation of visual and auditory data by means of digital technology seems so self-evident that it is often presented as an ahistorical innovation—almost as a side-effect of the universal machine of the computer. Only against the background of the long history of struggles with audiovisual apparatus and media (often developed by artists themselves from the nineteenth century onward) does it become clear that the conceptual history of the audiovisual in turn influenced and shaped the history of its technology. Artistic (audio-)visions led to technical innovations, whereas today they often are understood only as the implementation of the potential contained in digital technology.

Nowadays, the integration of sound in the visual arts and the augmentation of contemporary (especially electronic) music by visuals are taken for granted. The pathos of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as championed by Richard Wagner at the close of the nineteenth century; the notion of a universal aesthetic validity that accompanied the endeavor to achieve a synthesis of the arts in the early twentieth century and that found concrete form in the "absolute film" of the 1920s and in the psychological and physiological color-sound research of the same era; and the aspiration for multimedia totality and the suspension of all genre boundaries, as formulated by intermedia art in the 1960s—all have today yielded to the unquestioned self-evidence of the audiovisual. Seen historically, the goal was always an overall design that encompassed not only the coupling

1 See Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann, eds., *See This Sound: Audiovisuality Compendium. An Interdisciplinary Survey of Audiovisual Culture* (Cologne: Walther König, 2010).

2 This view was expressed by the jury of the Prix Ars Electronica Media.Art.Research Awards—dedicated in 2009 to the topic of sound-image relations in audiovisual art—after having viewed the entries: "The conclusion of the jury thus was that artistic practice in its multi-medial, multi-modal approaches to sound and image is further ahead than current theory in this interdisciplinary sense." Jury Statement Prix Ars Electronica Media.Art.Research Award 2009, by Dieter Daniels, Christoph Grunenberg, Cornelia Lund, Helga de la Motte-Haber, and Christopher Salter, in "Sound-Image Relations in Audiovisual Art," in *CyberArts 2009*, eds. Christine Schöpf, Gerfried Stocker, and Hannes Leopoldseder (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 241.

of image and sound, but also a fusion of aesthetic theory and practice that would lead to a utopian unity of sensory perception. There are no longer overall designs of this kind for today's ubiquity of audiovisual art forms; rather, the advanced lead in practice mentioned above evidences a deficit at the theoretical level. And yet the omnipresence of the audiovisual has led neither in artistic practice nor in science to an ongoing discourse that spans all the genres. The valuation contexts of visual art, music, theater, and film are as separate today as they have ever been. Against this background, the compendium of audio-visuology should be understood as an attempt to link the perspectives of the individual scientific disciplines with one another.

The essays in this volume provide a critical review of the long search for possible syntheses between aesthetic theory formation and media technology practice. Whereas the individual art forms and technical procedures are presented chronologically and systematically in the compendium, the essays draw cross-connections between the four thematic levels mentioned above. The common goal is to reawaken awareness of the unquestioning acceptance of our media-based audiovisual environment as a matter of course, to once again render audible and visible that we live in the midst of a permanent artistic coupling of the auditory and the visual, and thus to allow both the possible synthesis and the contradiction between images and sounds to become explicit. Here and throughout the "See This Sound" project, the objective is to question the different artistic concepts, their models for value creation, and the relevant scientific disciplines and their concepts of truth.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See also the exhibition catalog *See This Sound: Versprechungen von Bild und Ton / See This Sound: Promises in Sound and Vision*, Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz, eds. Cosima Rainer, Stella Rollig, Dieter Daniels, and Manuela Ammer (Cologne: Walther König, 2009).