

Concept & Organisation:  
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A workshop in the context of  
Sonderforschungsbereich - SFB 626  
*Ästhetische Erfahrung*  
*im Zeichen der Entgrenzung der Künste*  
Freie Universität Berlin



## Observing Nature – Representing Experience

Practices and Concepts 1800-1850

Max-Planck-Institut  
für Wissenschaftsgeschichte  
MPIWG Berlin  
Wilhelmstr. 44 · D-10117 Berlin  
Conference Room 605,  
6th floor

Workshop 28 – 29 January 2005

**D**uring the first decades of the 19th century, the relationship between the observation of Nature and its recording has an own peculiarly ambivalent quality characterized by a coincidence of aesthetic experience and quantification. The workshop wants to explore this quality, which can be detected in fields with heterogeneous intentions, from both the viewpoint of art history and the history of science as to:

- what was expected from the images resulting from the observation of natural phenomena or experiments
- the problems arising from and connected to the rendering of individual experiences of Nature
- the historical character of the ambivalence in the relationship between Nature's observation and recording, in order to find a key to specific concepts of aesthetic appreciation of Nature in this time.

To do this, the workshop focuses on practices of observation and recording, in order to discuss them in terms of both the epistemological and the aesthetic value of observation when related to representations or descriptions as images of individual experience. Some leading questions will be the following: Can we find normative strategies considered to allow a representation to be 'authentic' both in its relation to 'reality' and to the feeling and judgement of the observer? For instance, what was the role of selection in determining the relevant particulars and singularities of an observed phenomenon? If visual interpretation and selection were ordinary tools for conveying the 'true shape' of the observed, in how far were such tools critically related to questions of individual experience? What was the value of 'having seen with one's own eyes' when the observer applied norms for the translation of experience to the production of images? To what degree was the experimental reconstruction of natural phenomena and its presentation designed to appeal to the aesthetic feeling of the spectator while conveying the 'reality' of otherwise only indirectly perceivable phenomena? What was the meaning of practices in which visualization presupposed an experiencing individual when compared to procedures of mechanical registration and geometric construction of visual spaces? Finally, if we can infer from modes of observation and recording a definition of the ambiguity inherent in this processes, can we also shape a formula relating this ambiguity as a historical category to a concept of aesthetic appreciation of Nature specific for this time? And can we draw on this practice-related formula to particularise the blurred general concept of romantic Zeitgeist?

## FRIDAY 28 January 2005

9:00 Welcome – Introduction

### I. RECORDING THE EXPERIENCE OF NATURE

9:15 Erna Fiorentini (FU Berlin/MPIWG):  
“An inexhaustible source of pure and exciting contemplations”. John Herschel’s Priorities in Observation and Depiction

10:15 Charlotte Klonk (University of Warwick):  
Theoretical Change and Visual Depiction.  
Artists and Geologists on the Isle of Wight in the Early Nineteenth Century

11:15 Coffee break

11:45 Vladimiro Valerio (Università IUAV di Venezia):  
Cartography, Art and Mimesis

12:45 Lunch

14:15 Charlotte Bigg (ETH Zürich):  
The Panorama or La Nature À Coup d’Oeil

15:15 Annik Pietsch (MPIWG):  
“Gottes Natur empfunden und erkannt”.  
Carl Blechen’s ‘Naturgemälde’.

16:15 Coffee break

### II. BEYOND EXPERIENCE? THE VALUE OF THE SENSES VS. NATURE’S CONSTRUCTION

16:30 Nino Zchomelidse (Princeton): H.C. Oersted und die Königlich Dänische Kunstakademie in Kopenhagen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert

## SATURDAY 29 January 2005

9.00 Regina Schubert (FU Berlin): Natur re-konstruieren.  
Perspektive als Erkenntniskonzept und künstlerische Praxis

10:00 John Tresch (University of Chicago):  
Estrangement of Vision: Edgar Allan Poe’s Optics

11:00 Coffee break

11:15 Bernhard Kleeberg (MPIWG):  
Ideal Geometrical Types and the Epistemology of Morphology

12:15 Friedrich Weltzien (FU Berlin):  
Describing Landscape – Experiencing Nature:  
A. W. Schlegel’s conception of “Selbstthätigkeit” and aesthetic judgement.

13:15 Lunch

### III. WORKING SESSION OF DISCUSSION

14:15 Translations of experience? Images of the observed, cognition and the aesthetic appreciation of nature.  
DISCUSSANTS:  
Lorraine Daston (MPIWG)  
Bettina Gockel (Universität Tübingen)