Methods of Analysis
Perceptual History

Stephen Petrina (2017)

Perceptual history commonly refers to events recently witnessed and memories (explicit, implicit, conscious, unconscious) formed to help anticipate or establish object recognition, sensitivity, or permanence. In this sense, perceptual history is microhistory and challenges us to account for minute timescales and encounters with minutiae of experience. Perceptual history acknowledges that "each brain has uniquely marked in it the consequences of a developmental history and an experiential history" (Edelman, 1998, p. 42).

As the history of perception, perceptual history is often used interchangeably with the history of body, consciousness, emotion, experience, and the senses (Carp, 1997). Subjective experiences of qualia or the sensational qualities of hearing, olfaction, sight, taste, and touch animate actors and have histories. These sensory modalities, along with extrasensoriality, intersensoriality, kinesthesia, proprioception, and synesthesia, give a phenomenal character to experience. In a sense, perceptual history is existential history— "the history of intentional life encompasses more than just personal matters" (e.g., autobiography) (Farin, 2012, p. 22). Emotions, feelings, and moods, pain and pleasure, colour everyday life and challenge historians to find traces of expression. First-person and third-person phenomenological records intended to explicitly document perceptual or preconceptual experience are few and far between. Similarly, client and patient therapeutic records are not readily archived. This *not* to say that historians are merely left with records of *perspectives on* emotional or perceptual experience rather than actual *experiences of* feeling and perception (Stearns & Stearns, 1985). And this is *not* to say that the focus of perceptual history is "the mystery of the inner sanctuary of private awareness," as communal or shared sensations are common (perhaps more common pre-capitalism) (Herrick, 1945, p. 69).

Nor is perceptual history's purpose to discriminate illusion from fact. John (ca. 90 CE, 7.24) writes, "judge not according to the appearance" (*nolite judicare secundum faciem* [*ὄψιν*]) but for perceptual historians this does *not* necessarily mean that beneath the surface of percept, ideology, impression, or subjective meaning, lies actuality or reality. This does *not* necessarily mean that behind a percept is a concept, behind the somatic is intellect, or behind feeling is being. Here, perceptual history is a history of misperceptions (e.g., critique of doxasticism, "perceiving is believing"). On the other hand, perceptual history may focus on how concepts, mentalities, and being are coloured by perception. Or the focus may be on perception management, which filters or shapes how things are perceived over time. What did people expect to hear or see in a specific garden, home, landscape, market, person, sacred space, school, or setting for instance? How did expectations colour perceptions (Hyde, 1993)? How did expectations shape impressions of others? How are perceptions and impressions ordered over time into experiences? In Jung's terms for example, how is a momentary stereotype interdependent with a timeless archetype?

If conceptual history is a study of "conceptual change," then perceptual history is a study of "perceptual change" or how and why phenomena are encountered, entangled, and experienced differently (Taylor, 1979, p. 18). The challenge is to explore the past of perceptual worlds assembled, composed, and shared. The challenge is to perceptualize history.

1. Definitions and Scope of Perceptual History
    a. Taylor (1979): Intellectual history has always been characterized by its preoccupation with thought at the point of origin: it tends to be thinker-bound and idea-centered to the point of becoming a history of intellectuals. (p. 17)
        i. It may be presumptuous that it is perception we must now try to historicize, but the suggestion seems warranted by what has just been said. Perception has the virtue of referring to a whole range of environmental responses, of thinking, feeling, seeing. While it can be precise and probing in its examination of the formulation of ideas, it is too often vague and, in its generalizations, over arching in its ascription of historical consequences. The new work, therefore, differs in both scale and in preoccupation. It also ranges beyond thinking to touch upon a whole spectrum of human response, of sensory, passional experience. (p. 17)
        ii. Some new term seems to be needed that stresses, among other things, the functional, day-to-day character of human responses as a dimension of historical change. (p. 18)
    b. Cassirer, "Language and Art," (1942/1979): In art we do not conceptualize the world, we perceptualize it. But the percepts to which we are led by art are by no means those perceptions which in the traditional language of the systems of sensationalism are described as the copies, the faint images of sense-perception. The imagery of art is of quite a different, nay of the opposite character. Art is not reproduction of impressions; it is creation of forms. These forms are not abstract, but sensuous. They would immediately lose their ground, they would evaporate as soon as we abandon the sphere of our sense experience. (p. 186)
    c. Carp (1997): Historical artifacts and texts give evidence of bygone perceptual reality, but what people said about their perceptions, and our interpretations of the material culture that engendered and reflected those perceptions, are equivocal evidence as to how they actually perceived…. If perception is culturally variable, it is historically variable as well. (p. 270)
        i. Our perception is global (pertaining to the whole, rather than its parts), synaesthetic (involving all the senses at once), and somatic (incorporating perceptions of my body, its feelings and capacities with perceptions of the world in which my body finds itself). Perception is also to a large degree learned. Through our developing perception of the world, including our own being in the world, we acquire the rich subtlety of adult experience. (p. 275)
    d. Sullivan (2013): scholars are becoming increasingly enthusiastic about exploring cultural history 'from the inside out', in finding new colours in the 'conditions of existence' that inflect the history of everything else. (p. 101)
    e.
2. Definition and Scope of the History of Consciousness
    a. Collins & Savage (1983): An investigation of the relationship between consciousness, order and social reality, then, requires that we study consciousness in history— or, the history of consciousness— which may be formulated along the lines of T. Kuhn's "paradigms" or M. Foucault's "epistemes," as the prevalent time bound "mentality" or "attitude" which shapes and orders private and public perceptions of social reality. Consciousness, then, appears as the quality of perceiving order in things. And the history of consciousness is concomitantly a

history of changes in modes of perception and modes of communication; it is thus a history of different "orders." As Jaynes (1976:66) says, "conscious mind is a spatial analog of the world and mental acts are analogs of bodily acts." Consciousness creates an analogous world which it bases upon and represents by language. (p. 92)

3. Definition and Scope of the History of Emotions
    a. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882/2001): So far, all that has given colour to existence still lacks a history: where could you find a history of love, of avarice, of envy, of conscience, of piety, of cruelty? (p. 34) (J. Nauckhauff, Trans.)
    b. Febvre (1941/1973): *Sensibilité* (sensibility, sensitivity) is a fairly ancient word. It appeared in language at least as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century; the adjective *sensibile* (sensible, sensitive) had preceded it by a short interval, as is often the case. During the course of its existence, moreover, as often happens, *sensibilité* has taken on various meanings. Some of these are narrow, some are broad, and they can to a certain extent be situated in time. Thus in the seventeenth century the word appears above all to refer to a certain responsiveness of the human being to impressions of a moral nature — there is at that time frequent mention of *sensibilité* to the truth, to goodness, to pleasure, etc. In the eighteenth century the word refers to a particular way of experiencing human feelings — feelings of pity, sadness, etc. (pp. 12-13)
        i. But the word has other meanings. There are semi-scientific and semiphilosophical meanings which the culture that is handed out in our schools is tending gradually to uphold. *'Sensibilité'*, Littré began by saying, 'is a property of certain parts of the nervous system by means of which men and animals receive impressions either from external objects or from within themselves.' (p. 13)
        ii. *sensibilité* implies… the emotional life of [hu]man[s] and all its manifestations ('la vie affective et ses manifestations')… the role of emotional activity in the history of huhmanity compared to the role of intellectual activity. (pp. 13, 25)
        iii. if from the outset we lean firmly on the latest critical and positive achievements of our neighbours the psychologists, then we might, I feel, be able to undertake a whole series of studies none of which have yet been done, and as long as they have not been done *there will be no real history possible*. No history of love, just remember that. We have no history of death. We have no history of pity, or of cruelty. We have no history of joy…. When I say that we have no history of love, no history of joy, you must realize that I am not asking for a study of love or of joy throughout all periods, ages and civilizations, I am indicating lines of research. And I am not doing so with isolated individuals in mind. Or pure physiologists. Or pure moralists. Or pure psychologists in the usually accepted sense of the word. Far from that. I am asking for a vast collective investigation to be opened on the fundamental sentiments of man and the forms they take. (p. 24)
4. Definitions and Scope of Existential History
    a. Simth (1964, pp. 202, 205, 216): There are in fact two distinguishable classes of historical phenomena: the first we shall call existential history, and the second, symbolic history. Existential history is the history of the most dramatic and

sharply defined episodes of the past…. "Definitive" existential history may be written very soon after the termination of the event, and will perhaps be better the closer it is to the events themselves, allowing always for a "cooling-off" period-a time long enough for the participant- historian to have second thoughts, to see ~he dimensions of the conflict which extend beyond his own partisan involvements. It may also be written some years after the event…. The events of existential history have the character of dramatic art-the capacity to recover their original form even after they have been hacked to pieces by the busy analyzer.

b. Bentz & Kenny (1997, p. 94): The existential essence of the world may be characterized as the phenomenology of the body…. The body and the world come to us in existential history, and they continue into existential futures.
c. Farin (2012, p. 22): Compared with autobiographical history and its narrow focus on the person's particular life story, the history of intentional life encompasses more than just personal matters. As the center point of intentionality, the intentional self encompasses or integrates the entire history of (i) all involvements with the world it has performed in sole responsibility, and (ii) all affects that this has had on it itself. The history of the self 's investment in its acts and its responsibility (acknowledged or unacknowledged) for these acts lie on a different plane altogether than the account of outward personal accomplishments, the trials and tribulations, the victories and defeats in life, which make up the stuff of autobiographies.
    i. (p. 23): However, the two sides that we have distinguished here, the personal and the intentional history, exist only together in the concreteness of a human being. In fact, what early Heidegger calls *Dasein* or *existence* always refers to this unity of an intentional and personal or autobiographical self. Accordingly, we shall call the "history" that pertains to this existing self, "existential history."
    ii. (pp. 23-24): Heidegger then claims that *existential history* captures, or at least, comes closest to the *original meaning* of history, relative to which the other concepts of history are "derivative" (GA 59: 75). They are real, but non-original "descendants" of the original meaning and original experience of existential history. The crucial step for making this claim is Heidegger's stipulation of a specific criterion of originality.
d. Heidegger (1920/2010, pp. 45, 46): The `having one's own past' is based in the innermost self-worldly directed tendencies and aims at the past as what was earlier, as the yet still vital part of one's own self-proper [*selbsteigentlichen*] tendencies at the time…. History as ownmost past in the correlate of a `having' that is motivated in only self-worldly directed tendencies.

5. Definition and Scope of Experiential History
    a. Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1929): It is not experience which is experienced, but nature— stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced. Linked in certain other ways with another natural object— the human organism— they are *how* things are experienced as well. Experience thus reaches down into nature; it has depth. It also has breadth and to an indefinitely elastic extent. It stretches. That stretch constitutes inference. (pp. 4a-1)
        i. Colapietro (2008): In our time, the meaning of experience is inextricably intertwined with the question of otherness, in its multiple senses, so much

so that arguably the question of experience, in our time (as distinct from when Peirce, James, and Dewey were writing), has for most practical purposes been transformed into questions concerning alterity. The history of experience— both what philosophers have tried to identify by this term and the vagaries to which the word itself has been subjected— is one in which not only the meaning of this word but also its retention as a pivotal term of philosophical discourse are called into question, time and again. (p. 125)

b. Herrick, "The Natural History of Experience" (1945): There is, first, extrospective experience consciously directed outward toward objects sensed, either within the body or outside of it, and toward appropriate response to the sensory data…. This awareness, is subjective, but since it is directed outward toward the objects by which it is excited it may be termed objective…. In sharp opposition to this is that subjective [introspective] experience which has no external reference. Here the knower is set over against the known. These experiences may, apparently, be emancipated from the limitations of space and time as these are recognized in the external world. The there may be here in thought, the past in memory and the future in anticipatory imagination may be tied in with the now of present experience. (p. 65)
    i. The engineer says that a cantilever bridge experiences certain measurable stresses when a train of cars passes over it, and it reacts to this strain in measurable ways. The bridge experiences the strain but, so far as we can tell, it has no scientific knowledge about it… An ameba experiences the satisfaction of hunger when it devours a smaller animalcule. (p. 59)
c. Eckert & Jones (2002): In recent decades various historiographical activities and trends have centred on concept of everyday life. The phrase itself is fairly old: *la vie quotidienne* was the title a series launched by the French publisher Hachette in the 1930s. In France the concept social history designed by the Annales school incorporated from early on a focus upon everyday life…. recently, the debate has broadened considerably, so that it now includes, for example, history of experience(s) ('Erfahrungsgeschichte') and micro-history. Finally, concept has become part of a more general debate about cultural history. There were numerous reasons for this shift, which reflects trends within historiography as well general social experience. The approach to everyday life can be seen as a politically motivated movement in opposition to the 'reigning authorities', the academic establishment of historians. The political aspect has been expressed, among other things, through the perspective 'from below', that is the effort to analyse 'the experiences of mass of the people'. (p. 6)
d. Synonymous with an individual's perceptual history, "experiential history is the full set of adaptive problems that an individual has faced" (Terzis, 2011, p. 388).

6. Scope of perception, experience, etc. (see also Perceptual Analysis)
    a. MacDougall (1906): The perceptual world as it is presented in consciousness any moment is thus a complex product which can only from the manifold and repeated experiences of moments in which the sensory content has been subjected experimental variation and associated with specific self-activity and its objective limitations. The more we have reacted upon the physical world the more full of meaning is the system of sensory stimulations which it affords, more extensive and exact our discrimination of its characteristics and relations. To a being

sensorially perfect but incapable of reaction upon its environment, the world in which we live must remain a pure phantasmagory of shifting sensations, a dream not of things but of impalpable subjective visions [e.g., Plato's cave]. The world becomes real to us only in so far as we are active in relation to it. (p. 239)