Kaoru Noguchi (ed.) (2007): Psychology of Beauty and Kansei: New Horizons of Gestalt Perception. Tokyo: Fuzambo International. ISBN: 978-4-902385-42-7; pp 776, ca. € 45.

Perceiving and feeling sensory and aesthetic experiences, have been key assets of the Gestalt approach ever since Christian von Ehrenfels coined the term Gestalt quality to denote a remarkable coalition that was further explicated with respect to a theory of feelings by Hans Cornelius (1897, p. 76): Feelings are Gestalt qualities of the total experience (*Gefühle sind Gestaltqualitäten des Gesamtbewußtseins*). The present book, edited by the late Kaoru Noguchi, follows thus a rich tradition, not only theoretically (see the recent synopsis by Verstegen, 2005), but also in method in that it adopts Fechner's less known *supra-threshold* psychophysical methods (scaling), which he used to establish experimental (bottom-up) aesthetics ("*Ästhetik von unten*", Fechner 1876). Modern, especially neuroscientific, approaches were essentially paced by, and still largely rely on, Fechner's pioneering measuring of aesthetic qualities, besides classic and recent Gestalt approaches, especially based on perceptual grouping (see Rentschler et al. 1988, Livingstone 2002, Zschocke 2006, Pinna 2007).

Thanks to the initiative of Lady Akiko, Noguchi's widow, wife and companion scholar, this remarkable opus was to appear as a joint-effort of an apt team of distinguished members of the Noguchi laboratory (Midori Takashima, Tomohiro Masuda, Yuji Wada, and several others). With earnest dedication and zeal they succeeded in completing what *Noguchi sensei* had set out and was so close to accomplishing as an ambitious goal. Most remarkably, the book adds a genuine Japanese term/approach, that of *Kansei*, as a recent attempt to incorporate Gestalt ideas into technical culture.

Kansei denotes „feeling", "impression" or „appearance" of a product and *Kansei engineering* refers to the translation of consumers' spontaneous feelings or impressions about a product into perceptual design elements. *Kansei engineering* is also sometimes referred to as "sensory engineering" or "emotional usability". This technique involves advance specification of sensed and connotatively conveyed attributes in order to achieve particular attraction and ease in using a product so that its design is based on attributes which elicit the desired responses.

Scientifically, the *Kansei* approach evolved from yet another Japanese endeavour: "*Chikaku Kogaku*" (Engineering Perception) that started with the pioneering book edited by Tadasu Oyama and Munehira Akita 20 years ago (Oyama & Akita 1989). This book comprises a remarkable collection of contributions by psychologists, engineers, designers and architects who provide basic knowledge (perception and life, evaluation and teaching/training of perception) and experimental findings to be applied to various environments (color, lighting, sound and building) and practical problems such as smell and taste (*umami*),

feeling of texture, warmness of a floor heating system, visual display terminals, bridges, Japanese traditional architecture, gardening and scenery. According to *Engineering Perception*, the major task of ergonomics is to unify "high-technology mass products with design for human use and in creating an aesthetic value in products" (Akita 1991).

Largely independently of *Chikaku Kogaku*, the present book comprises a rich variety of topics: Seven chapters, all in Japanese as well as in English (!) provide its body, accompanied by 15 invited contributions (most of them in Japanese, but some in English). The first two chapters give an introduction to perception and neuroscientific grounding of Gestalt factors. These are followed by three chapters on perceptual organization of seeing shape, color, and motion. Chapters on multisensory perception and on seeing motion conclude the main part of the book which is variously reflected and extended by the following invited contributions. These are about experimental phenomenology (*N. Masuda*) and its importance for education in design (*Y. Kiritani*), Benussi's stereokinetic phenomenon (1924) and its parallel "rotary dimisphere" (1925) by French avant-garde artist Marcel Duchamp (*H. Yoshimura*), neuro-aesthetic theory (*I. Rentschler*), right-hand dominance expressed in Christian paintings (*K. Nakamura*), spatial anisotropy in the arrangement of Kansei attributes (*K. Shiina*), aesthetics of visual illusion (*A. Kitaoka*), visual arts classified according to Gregory's mind-design model (*J. Gyoba et al.*), pattern goodness and randomness (*K. Miura*) and broken periodicity as an artistic challenge (*K. Landwehr*). We learn that temporal accuracy is improved if an observer has active control on stimulus motion (*M. Ichikawa & Y. Masakura*) and that transparent motion is already present in infant vision (*S. Kanazawa*). Of a wider scope are the chapters by *V. Sarris* (on Gestalt psychophysics), *C. Spence et al.* (on intersensory Gestalten), and *T. Oyama* (on affective-symbolic content conveyed by perceptual qualities: color, form, and motion).

This current synopsis invites itself as a much needed text book for graduate students and experts alike who seek for an up-date on the impressive body of perceptual, affective and aesthetic knowledge from a Gestalt perspective, which overcomes the highly sterile limits of a dichotomous scheme of independently conceived top-down versus bottom-up processes. Since the seven key-chapters are well translated into English, the book affords world-wide readership and also a unique bridging between various international and genuine Japanese developments.

As to the core message uniquely conveyed here, I readily cite the superb conclusion by Noguchi's close colleague and friend, the Munich neuroscientist Ingo Rentschler (2008; in his review of the present book):

> "… it is the unity of nature itself that underlies our perception of the complex and the whole. Alfred North Whitehead, in his 1927 lecture on 'Symbolism. Its

meaning and Effects' assumed much of the same position concerning what might be termed philosophical Gestalt theory. These views of 'interactionism' are consistent with recent developments in the technical discipline of Machine Intelligence. Here the new paradigm of 'Embodied Intelligence' implies that machine vision is impossible without the interaction of the robot with the environment".

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Zschocke, N. (2006): *Der irritierte Blick. Kunstrezeption und Aufmerksamkeit.* München: W. Fink (see also review in *GT 29*, 188-191).

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