The Five Senses in Medieval Art
A study of the representations and rarity of the Five Senses in ecclesiastical art of the Middle Ages in Western Europe

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1. Introduction

Similar to the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins, the Five Senses figured in religious medieval life on a regular basis. Namely, the Five Senses were often found alongside the vices and virtues and were influenced by these accordingly. The preoccupation with the human senses as well as the divine control over them is evident in a range of narrative texts, scientific treatises, creative literature as well as the visual arts and music from the pre-modern period. Furthermore, a hierarchical order can be observed that lists the senses according to their perceived nobility. The Middle Ages were particularly influenced by iconographical traditions. Therefore, representations of the Five Senses, either as the main topic of a piece of art or referenced in a detail were not unusual in medieval art. However, considering the popularity of the topic in medieval culture, only a few examples are known to us today. This paper will consider the representation of the Five Senses with regard to the perceived dangers that they epitomized in terms of temptation. The paper will therefore examine how the Five Senses were represented in medieval art and how this representation attempted to shape both the meaning of the individual senses and their public perception. In order to do so, the paper will consider the following questions: What was the intention of the commissioners of such prints? Or, in other words, how could they have wanted to affect and influence the targeted audience by means of the representation of the Five Senses? From which societal background was the intended audience and how did this factor into the appearance and the design of the representations of the Five Senses? And, why are there only so few known examples of the representations of the Five Senses in religious medieval art, especially when it comes to representing the dangers that the senses inhabited?

As a main reference piece, this paper will focus on a single sheet woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee. The woodcut provides an excellent example in order to visualize the position of the Five Senses in between the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. The senses, which are susceptible to temptation by sin and the need to exercise control over them are constant subjects in medieval secular and ecclesiastical culture. Both the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins tie the Five Senses into the ecclesiastical context. However, in order to understand medieval art and culture, it is important to focus on the social and, more importantly, the religious
structures that underlie medieval culture. Knowledge of the fundamental makeup of medieval society, especially its religious aspect, will enable us to fully grasp the depth of the meaning of the Five Senses in medieval culture and how this topic was connected to the Renaissance. After a thorough examination of the woodcut, the paper will focus on the Five Senses and their symbolism in Christianity, including the connection of the senses to the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. The Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins are necessary counterparts, representing the rules of God and the temptations of the devil. The concept of the Five Senses is placed in between both notions, as though in a constant state of temptation. A detailed comparison between the different iconographic traditions concerning the Five Senses will therefore shed light on the connection between the specific choice of representation and the targeted audiences.

While the Five Senses were widely discussed in the scientific and ecclesiastical context during the Middle Ages, only few representations of the Five Senses survived to present day. And, of the few examples that are known to us today, an even smaller amount of pieces represent the perceived dangers that emanate from the senses. This observation raises the question as to why so few examples survived of a topic that was both popular and widespread at the time? Especially in the ecclesiastical realm, it seems that there should have been more, since religious art was predominant in the Middle Ages. The Five Senses have figured as a common topic in art since the sixteenth century, especially in French and Dutch paintings. Allegorical representations of the senses in secular art but also in connection with Christian scenes from the Bible witnessed an increasing popularity over the course of the sixteenth century that lasted well into the eighteenth century.

While a host of scholarly works have been published on the Five Senses, the research tends to focus on the post-medieval period. The representation of the senses in art and the connection between the senses and art have only recently figured more prominently amongst scholars. The more recent studies consider the sensory dimension of medieval art and culture with a special focus on the materiality of works, the conception of various objects and their underlying theological meanings.¹ Carl Nordenfalk was among the first to properly examine the Five Senses in the Middle Ages and provided an overview over the historiography of the Five Senses and their

appearance in medieval art with a special focus on the “Lady and the Unicorn”
tapestries. While the topic has become ever more popular since Nordenfalk’s first article
on the Five Senses in 1976, religious depictions of the Five Senses and the perceived
dangers associated with the individual senses have not been studied adequately. A
general lack of primary source representations depicting the said theme plays a crucial
role in the apparent absence of scholarly work. The recently published series on the
cultural history of the senses explores the cultural life of the senses from Antiquity to
Modern Age in great detail and focuses on all areas that the subject of the senses was
applied to.² For the purpose of my research the volumes on the Middle Ages and the
Renaissance are particularly interesting since they give very deep insight into the
cultural history and development of the perception of the senses in the Middle Ages and
how the medieval perception was transported into the Renaissance. Both volumes serve
as an excellent starting point since they include all relevant theories that have been
formed and give insight into a wide array of angles in different fields were the senses
are to be found. Comparing both volumes makes the changes in the representation and
perception of the senses in both societies visible, which leads to an understanding of the
chronological development and the shift in importance of the matter. Furthermore
serves the rather small section on the senses and their connection to art also as an
identifier on the importance and the existence of art on this subject.

The most popular example is the series of the “Lady and the Unicorn” tapestries,
which are on display in the Musée de Cluny in Paris. Even though the tapestries are the
most referenced pieces of medieval art with regard to the representation of the Five
Senses, this paper will not consider them for several reasons. First, the tapestries go
beyond the mere depiction of the Five Senses and, although the topic of a large number
of publications, a significant amount of uncertainties remain when it comes to the
iconography and interpretation of the depictions. Moreover, the tapestries were not
meant for the wider public but a small and very specific audience, since they were
commissioned to be hung in a private interior. For the purpose of this paper, the
tapestries in question, as well as pieces of art of similar nature, will not be considered.
This paper will also not focus on depictions that feature only one specific sense or draw

² Roodenburg, Herman (ed.), A Cultural History of the Senses, in the Renaissance, Bloomsbury, London,
attention to one organ in order to refer to the dangers or the properties of one specific sense.

2. The single-sheet woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee

This chapter will focus on the single-sheet woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee and give an overview of its interpretation, iconography and provenance. This chapter will also examine the purpose of the woodcut as well as the audience it was intended for.

The woodcut shows a depiction in emblematic form of the Ten Commandments, the Five Senses and the Seven Deadly Sins. (fig.1) The print is fairly small at 228 x 170 mm. The woodcut was printed on paper and carefully colored in by hand. The print dates back to 1480 and was commissioned by the Abbey of Tegernsee in Bavaria. However, the origin and place of production of the print as well as its whereabouts for over three hundred years remain unknown. Yet, several indices help us solve the puzzle with regard to the likely course of the print and the history of its production. The print was part of the collection of fifteenth century prints formed by the French numismatic and collector Michel Hennin (1777-1863) in 1839 and is now part of the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Theodor Schreiber mentions that the print that is now in Paris was found in the Abbey of Tegernsee in 1803 during the secularisation of the monastery, but then vanished mysteriously until it reappeared more than thirty years later in Hennin’s collection. The print was first detailed by the German historian and librarian Johann Christoph von Aretin (1772-1824) in 1803 when it was discovered during the course of the secularisation of ecclesiastical commodities in the electorate of Bavaria. Aretin worked on behalf of the Hof-und Staatsbibliothek in Munich, Bavaria and was responsible for archiving prints and books. Judging from the well-preserved condition of the woodcut, it is plausible that the print was never in circulation prior to its discovery in 1803 and even more likely that the print was simply kept in the abbey since its production.

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4 Schmidt, 2003, p. 190.
The single-sheet woodcut is one of two prints whose origin is indubitably attributed to the Abbey of Tegernsee. The second print shows a depiction of a crucifixion (fig. 2) and also dates back to 1480. Both woodcuts that were found in the Abbey after the secularisation remain the only known specimen of these prints. Ferdinand Geldner and Dieter Kuhrmann interpreted the discovery of the Abbey’s coat of arms on both woodcuts as evidence that the abbey owned a woodcut workshop itself. However, considering that the monastery operated over the course of several centuries, Geldner and Kuhrmann’s argument, which rests upon the discovery of only two individual designs that both date back to 1480, seems forejudged. If the monastery had indeed owned a woodcut workshop, a higher number of prints bearing the Abbey’s coat of arms would have been expected to be found during the secularization of the Abbey in 1803. The possibility that both woodcuts were commissioned somewhere else therefore seems more likely.

2.1 The depictions

The Ten Commandments, the Five Senses and the Seven Deadly Sins are each represented by small depictions that are grouped together in a series of interlaced circles. The circles act as frames for the small, almost emblematic depictions they carry inside. The depictions have a common purpose: to be easily identifiable without the need of any further written or pictorial indicators. In the case of the single-sheet woodcut, the mere number of depictions in each group of circles serve as identifiers. The intertwined circles are grouped into three sections; each section is devoted to a specific group of emblematic depictions.

The iconography and the respective hierarchy according to which the circles are arranged form important features of the woodcut. The concept of hierarchization was a crucial sphere of the Middle Ages. Hierarchies were applied to all aspects of social, religious and artistic nature. The notion of hierarchies in the Middle Ages in connection with the Five Senses more generally will be further explored in chapter 3.1. The concept of hierarchization can be found in the layout of the single elements of the print in

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7 Both woodcuts can be attributed to the Abbey of Tegernsee due to the coat of arms of the abbey on the woodcut. But the design of the coat of arms on both prints is very different form one another. Which might lead to the suggestion that the crucifixion had the coat of arms added later on, or at least not during the initial creation process.
8 Schmidt, 2003, p. 190.
question. The depictions are grouped in three different categories, with the Ten Commandments representing the supreme guidelines to abide by in Christianity, followed by the Five Senses and lastly the Seven Deadly Sins. The depictions in the woodcut guide the viewer’s eye from the most important rules to follow, to the human properties that need to be observed in order to comply with those rules and principles, and finally to the various sins and temptations that ought to be avoided. In this context, the Five Senses represent the earthly realm. The senses are positioned in between the Ten Commandments, which represent the gateway to heaven and the Seven Deadly Sins, which embody the gateway to hell. The layout of the woodcut's design is therefore quite telling with regard to the desired interpretation of the print. The inscription on the woodcut also adheres to this concept, thus strategically leading the reader from one group of depictions to the next. The layout as well as the art of carefully guiding the eye of the beholder across the print are crucial elements of the woodcut itself. Namely, this technique enabled the printmaker, or rather commissioner, to convey the desired understanding and meaning of the woodcut in question to its intended audience.

The Ten Commandments are portrayed at the top of the print, arranged in two rows of five depictions each. Each Commandment is represented by either an animal, a number of objects or by the use of one or several personifications acting out a specific gesture. The Commandments are arranged according to the hierarchy prescribed by the beliefs of the Catholic Church. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century onward, representations of the Ten Commandments usually had a purely educational character with strong moralizing narratives. This practice was also used in the single-sheet woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee; each Commandment is represented by using imagery reduced to the most simple and straightforward form.

The First Commandment, “I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods besides me,” is represented by the depiction of a hand holding a rosary. The Second Commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord God in vain,” is represented by a hand in a blessing gesture. The Third Commandment, “Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day,” is represented by a large bell, a popular symbol at the time used to refer to church service. The Fourth Commandment, “Honor your father and your mother,” is represented by the depiction of the busts of a man and a woman. The

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10 This applies only to the printed letters that are part of the initial design of the woodcut and not the handwritten notes in red ink.
woman is wearing a bonnet to symbolize that she is married. The Fifth Commandment, “You shall not kill,” is represented by a dagger, a sword and a lance crossing one another. The Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery,” is represented by a gibbet with a noose. The rope is an attribute of the devil, symbolizing slavery and servitude. However, the rope is also the attribute of Rahab, the harlot of Jericho. The Seventh Commandment, “You shall not steal,” is illustrated twice on the woodcut. It is represented by a rooster, which was also the symbol for the sin of lechery (luxuria). The Eighth Commandment, “You shall not bear false witness,” is represented by a man’s head in profile with his tongue stuck out towards a knife. The Ninth Commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife,” is represented by a man and a woman that resemble the depiction of the Fourth Commandment. However, the woman in this depiction is not wearing a bonnet. And lastly, the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbour’s goods,” is represented by an opened wooden case with a heart rising from it. While some of the representations are readily understandable and identifiable, others require further explanation and contextualization.

The Five Senses in the single-sheet woodcut are arranged according to the most popular hierarchical order at the time with the sense of Sight ranked highest, as it was considered to be the sense with the highest nobility. Sight is then followed by Hearing, Taste, Smell and, lastly, Touch. The senses are depicted either by a person acting the sense out with an object or by the object alone. Sight is represented by a man looking at his own reflection in a mirror. Since the beginning of the fifteenth century, mirrors were frequently used to symbolize the sense of Sight but they could also refer to either lechery (luxuria) or pride (superbia). Hearing is represented by an ear above two musical instruments, a flute and a lute. Musical instruments were conventional symbols to represent the sense of Hearing. However, a harp, though another musical instrument, could also refer to the sense of Touch, since the French word toucher referred to the plucking of the instrument. Taste is represented by the picture of a man’s head licking a spoon. Smell is represented by a flower, probably a rose. Lastly, Touch is represented by a hand with an upwards-pointing thumb, representing a “grabbing” gesture. Each one

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15 For a more detailed explanation of the hierarchy of the Five Senses in the Middle Ages see subchapter 3.1.
of the senses can be easily identified since each representation uses only the most necessary of information to portray the individual characteristics.

The Capital Sins are each represented by different animals portraying the individual sins. Representing the sins with animals was a popular practice in the fifteenth century. And, even though this iconographical tradition reached its zenith of popularity during the fifteenth century, this style of representation dates back to the thirteenth century. During the Middle Ages, the order in which the Seven Deadly Sins were represented was summarized in the acronym “SIIAAGL,” standing for Superbia, Invidia, Ira, Avaritia, Acedia, Gula and Luxuria. Pride was seen as the root cause for all other sins and was therefore usually listed first. The woodcut, however, lists them in a different order starting with Superbia followed by Avaritia, Gula, Ira, Invidia, Luxuria and Acedia.

Superbia is represented by a peacock, an animal, which, until the present day, still epitomizes pride. The peacock was a symbol of resurrection and paradise in early Christianity. However, the Physiologus and several medieval animal books attribute a negative symbolism to the peacock. The animal is often depicted in connection with superbia, vanitas andluxuria. Avaritia is represented by a wolf with a dead goose in its snout. During the Middle Ages, the wolf was perceived as a cunning, yet malicious animal and was often used to represent the devil. Nordenfalk interpreted the animal in the wolf’s snout as a lamb and not a goose. The lamb often refers to Christians that followed Christ as their shepherd, an attack by the wolf/devil would seem more appropriate in the context of the Seven Deadly Sins as well as Christian iconography in general. The goose, on the other hand, is an emblem of vigilance, prudence and incorruptibility and is, in a few isolated cases, also a symbol of the following of Christ. The wolf is an attribute of gula, avariata and, when represented in form of a mount, a symbol of rapacitas. Gula is represented by a pig or a boar. The boar was usually associated with strength and heroism, thus making it also a popular choice as a

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19 Pride, Envy, Wrath, Greed, Sloth, Gluttony, Lechery.
21 Nordenfalk, 1985, pp. 3f.
22 Schreiber also identifies the animal in the snout of the wolf as a goose. see Schreiber, 1927, no. 1849.
23 Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 4.
heraldic animal. However, during the Middle Ages, the boar as well as the pig, had negative connotations, as they were associated with crapula, luxuria, gula and, when depicted as a mount, ira. Hunting pigs therefore also symbolized hunting evil.\textsuperscript{28} Ira is represented by a lion. The lion could be interpreted as both good and evil. One the one hand, he is seen as the king of the animal kingdom and is often used as a symbol of resurrection.\textsuperscript{29} Yet, while its power and strength make it a favorable animal in heraldry, the lion can also be referred to as a dangerous beast of prey. Moreover, the lion was known for its untamed violence and could therefore also be seen as a symbol of the devil.\textsuperscript{30} Invidia is represented by two dogs fighting over a bone. While dogs often had a positive symbolism during the Middle Ages, representing loyalty and amity, black dogs or dogs with shaggy fur could also refer to invidia and ira.\textsuperscript{31} Luxuria is represented by a rooster, a popular symbol of suspicia and gelosia.\textsuperscript{32} Due to its reproductive instincts, the rooster is often associated with luxuria.\textsuperscript{33} Acedia is represented by a donkey, which symbolizes indolence. The donkey had a positive iconographical connotation prior to the sixth century until the introduction if horses to the Mediterranean area.\textsuperscript{34} During the Middle Ages, the donkey was mostly seen as a symbol of acedia, stultitia and luxuria.\textsuperscript{35} The Physiologus even compared the wild donkey to the devil.\textsuperscript{36}

The tradition of ascribing morals as attributes to animals was recorded in the Physiologus. Representing the vices in animal form facilitated their identification, especially if those vices were represented in a group. Compared to human personifications, animals were easier to identify and distinguish from one another. Human personifications usually lacked noticeable attributes that could define and differentiate one vice from another. Animals, on the other hand, each had a specific symbolism.\textsuperscript{37} In addition to representing the vices through either animal or human personification, it was also possible to combine both. According to the Christian belief system, humans turned away from God when giving in to temptation and committing

\textsuperscript{28} Kretschmer, 2014, p. 382f.
\textsuperscript{29} Schönberger, 2014, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{30} Kretschmer, 2014, p. 267f.
\textsuperscript{31} Kretschmer, 2014, pp. 195ff.
\textsuperscript{32} Kretschmer, 2014, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{33} Kretschmer, 2014, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{34} With the appearance of horses, the donkey as an animal was perceived less admirable and its symbolism was downgraded accordingly and had mostly negative tendencies moving forth.
\textsuperscript{35} Kretschmer, 2014, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{36} Schönberger, 2014, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{37} Evans, 2004, p. 22. Morton Bloomfield created an elaborate list of different species of animals associated to sin and provided sources where these animals could be found in medieval art and literature. see Bloomfield, 1967, pp. 245ff.
Similar to the Five Senses, the sins have a long-standing history and tradition in art and literature. Especially during the later Middle Ages, the topic became increasingly secularized. As a result, it was no longer restricted to a moralizing context but was now also to be found as a decorative element in art.\textsuperscript{38} Other than one might expect, the Deadly Sins do not delineate sins that will lead to the death of a human being if committed. Rather, the term “deadly” is directed towards the soul; in other words, the commission of these sins will lead to damnation and the death of the soul. And, without a soul, one cannot enter heaven.\textsuperscript{39} Lastly, behind the Seven Deadly Sins there are two more elements on the woodcut.

The coat of arms of the Abbey of Tegernsee is depicted in the lower right-hand corner of the woodcut. It consists of two simplified water lily pads, which are intertwined so as to form the letter “T.” The letter is underlined by a series of waved lines that represent water as a reference to the Tegernsee, a large lake in Bavaria. To the left of the coat of arms, a small confessional scene is depicted. A penitent is kneeling before his confessor.\textsuperscript{40} The confessional scene takes place in an architectural setting. Even though the rectangular shape of the confessional scene seems out of place given the otherwise uniform layout of the print, with the representations in interlaced circles, the outline of the confessional scene nevertheless touches upon the margin of the woodcut, thus creating a sense of order. The scene, though seemingly misplaced, is clearly a structural part of the woodcut and not a single print element that was added as an educational indicator or signatory addition at a later stage. And, even though the confessional scene seems to attract less attention than the Ten Commandments, the Five Senses and the Seven Deadly Sins, the element is nevertheless of high importance. Following the depiction of the sins, the confessional scene conveys to the audience that the penitent should confess his sins if he is not strong enough to resist the temptations of the material world. This scene delineates the ideal response that the commissioner wants to evoke amongst the audience. The confessional scene combines all three concepts depicted on the woodcut: the Ten Commandments, which ought to be followed, the Seven Deadly Sins, which ought to be avoided, and the Five Senses, which ought to be kept in check. If, however, all else fails and an individual cannot

\textsuperscript{38} Bloomfield, 1967, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{39} Bloomfield, 1967, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{40} LCI, 2004, Vol. 2, p. 86.
keep guard of his senses and eventually gives in to temptation, the act of confession can cleanse him from his sins.

2.2 The inscriptions

The three groupings of depictions are divided by short descriptive sentences, which are printed in bold letters in old German. The first line, “Das sein die zechen bott für die ungelerte lait,” translates into, “these are the Ten Commandments for the uneducated people.” This line is followed by, “Das sein die fünf sinn,” meaning, “these are the Five Senses” and lastly, “Das sein die siben tod sund,” meaning “these are the Seven Deadly Sins.” The inscriptions not only identify the depictions but also delineate a certain dedication. The inscriptions confer a strong educational meaning on the woodcut. The text is organized in a descriptive and simple style with the titles providing an introduction to the theme of the woodcut.

In addition to the inscriptions, handwritten notes in red ink can be found next to each depiction. These notes identify each one of the Ten Commandments, the Five Senses and the Seven Deadly Sins. The fact that the notes are handwritten as opposed to being printed indicates that these were added at a later stage. While it is impossible to state who exactly added those notes to the print, it is safe to assume that they were added by a scholar who was examining and attempting to identify the depictions. Similar to the inscriptions, these notes are written in old German. Since the print was likely kept in the abbey until 1803, it is possible that the inscriptions were added after the secularisation or during the process of the secularisation of the abbey. Aretin might have added them when he examined the woodcut or they might have been added in the years before the woodcut ended up in the collection of Hennin.

The inscriptions on the woodcut might at first not seem revealing, but the text provides insight into the purpose and use of the woodcut as well as its targeted audience.

2.3 Purpose and targeted audience

In order to fully understand the meaning and the design of the woodcut, it cannot be examined without also taking into account the audience it was intended for. Furthermore, the interaction between the print and the audience as well as the
commissioner is of indisputable importance when it comes to the interpretation and relevance of the depictions in question. The exchange between the audience and the art, and the way specific messages that were contained in artistic representations were transported to the audience, sheds light on the utilization of the print medium and its importance in medieval culture. The main purpose of the woodcut was to convey a message to a specific audience. The commissioner, in this case the Abbey of Tegernsee, a Benedictine monastery in Bavaria whose foundation dates back to the late eighth century, probably commissioned the woodcut in order to use it for educational purposes outside of their own institution. And, since the woodcut was commissioned by a Benedictine monastery, a connection to the Benedictine teachings can readily be established. The main focus in the excerpt below derives from the *Regula Benedicti* and leans towards the self-awareness of sin and the practice of penance.

- To put one's hope in God.
- To attribute to God, and not to self, whatever good one sees in oneself.
- But to recognize always that the evil is one's own doing, and to impute it to oneself.
- To fear the Day of Judgment.
- To be in dread of hell.
- To desire eternal life with all the passion of the spirit.
- To keep death daily before one's eyes.
- To keep constant guard over the actions of one's life.
- To know for certain that God sees one everywhere.
- When evil thoughts come into one's heart, to dash them against Christ immediately.
- And to manifest them to one's spiritual guardian.

The assumption that the print was not meant for the internal and personal use of the Benedictine monastery derives from the dedication, which is found in the first line of text on the woodcut itself. This print was meant for the *ungelerte lait*, the uneducated people. These types of illustrations cannot only be interpreted as “bible[s] for the illiterate” but they also provide contemporary historians with valuable insight into the methods of spreading knowledge in the medieval period. The practice of using illustrations to convey knowledge was more than just a way of educating the lower classes of society. Rather, it followed a precise teaching technique.

The woodcut is the oldest printing technique in Europe and first gained popularity at the beginning of the fifteenth century. It is a relief printing technique that allows mass production of a design. The use of the woodcut changed the possibility of reproducing at large scale and therefore increased the potential of spreading prints to a wider area in

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42 Faust, 2011, p. 37. chap. 4, 41-50.
Europe drastically. Woodcuts had a strong mediating role during the Middle Ages, since they opened up the possibility of spreading information without the need of verbal propaganda. The choice of using the technique of print for a certain design was revealing with regard to the intended use and purpose of the work in question. Woodcuts were significantly cheaper compared to illuminations, since a single design could be multiplied for only a fraction of the price of a book. The relatively cheap price did not only make them more affordable but it also meant that woodcuts were worth less than illuminations. Prints were therefore not necessarily made to be appreciated as treasured possessions but rather as practical conveyors of knowledge. Meinhard Ungut, a fifteenth-century German printer, provides an adequate example of the scale of the prints that could be commissioned at once. In 1493, Ungut received a commission for fifty thousand parchment prints. This is an exceptionally high number, especially when taking into consideration the comparatively small amount of books that were in circulation at the time. The print medium therefore opened up a whole new territory for the distribution of illustrations.

David Areford and Peter Schmidt both maintain that prints of an ecclesiastical nature were likely kept and valued in the homes of middle-class families. Areford and Schmidt base their argument on a painting, which shows a similar woodcut hung on the walls of a normal living environment. (fig. 4) Of course, paintings cannot necessarily be utilized as contemporary witnesses of a time period in question, but the painter must have seen this kind of display somewhere and, based on this observation, chose to replicate this custom in his work. The assumption that prints were kept and displayed inside homes was highly plausible, not least owing to the affordability and multitude of woodcuts, meaning middle-class families were able to acquire and afford such prints. Most woodcuts at the time had a strong educational and moralizing character, which meant that putting them up inside someone’s home served as a reminder of but also testament to the duties of a good and pious Christian.

In addition to the painting referred to by Areford and Schmidt, several other paintings exist that show a domestic display of woodcuts connected to prayer scenes.

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45 Eisermann, 2000, p. 156.
The Annunciation by Joos van Cleve features a woodcut of a saint put up on the wall in the background of the painting. (fig. 5) The same can be found in the Annunciation by the Master of Flemalle, which is on display in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels. (fig. 6) A woodcut with a depiction of Christopherus is placed above the fireplace. It is important to note here that the depiction of an interior setting in a painting is not a “snapshot” of a moment. Rather, every element depicted has a specific reason and purpose in order to communicate a certain message to the beholder.

The woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee was most likely not the only print that was made from the woodblock. This raises the question as to why no other known examples survived the course of time? One reason may be that these prints were not collectibles, aimed at being treasured in a library or a private book collection. Rather, the prints were fashioned in order to display them to as many people as possible. Given the purpose of the prints, they would, in all likelihood, have been exhibited in a religious or social space, which was accessible to the public and where people of all societal strata could be found. Another possibility, however, was that the prints were given to priests to educate their parishes. The single-sheet woodcut clearly has an educational purpose that was supposed to be accessible and comprehensible for everyone, regardless of their educational or socioeconomic background.

Over the course of the Middle Ages, only a limited segment of the population could read and write. The literate classes of society formed a small intellectual elite, consisting mainly of philosophers, thinkers and clerics. The Catholic Church often provided the only opportunity where one could learn how to read, write and further one’s knowledge. This was done either at cathedral schools or privately at the good grace of a Benedictine abbot.47 The prints were, in this context, supposed to educate and inform its audience. And, in the case of the single-sheet woodcut, also served as an instructional manual due to the depiction of the confessional scene in the lower right-hand corner.

In some cases, determining the audience that was supposed to be reached by a certain piece of art, writing or print, was not always straightforward. The print from the Abbey of Tegernsee was exceptionally easy to understand. As indicated in the inscriptions, the print targets the “uneducated people,” which also provides an explanation as to why every Sense, Commandment and Sin is represented by means of

47 Sturlese, 2013, pp. 33f.
symbolism. However, this leads to another question: namely, why did the commissioner of the print give instructions to include a written dedication at all? What was the purpose of a written dedication, which states that the print is directed to an audience that was illiterate? One explanation is that the woodcut in question as well as similar prints were given to priests for educational purposes, meaning the inscriptions were intended for the priests rather than the intended audience. Especially in the countryside, priests represented often the only source of education for the lower social classes. Priests did not only offer spiritual guidance but they also informed and educated their parishes about messages passed along by the Pope or other bishops. Moreover, the order of Saint Benedict has a long-standing tradition of educating children in their monasteries. Ever since the sixth century, Benedictine monasteries housed schools.\footnote{Holzherr, 2007, pp. 9ff.}

The Middle Ages were dominated by the Catholic Church, to the extent that all aspects of cultural, social and regular everyday life were shaped by religious traditions, moral guidelines and other festivities. However, did commoners really go to Church as often as we assume now? Surely, churches and chapels were frequented more regularly as they are nowadays and masses were also held more frequently. However, big religious festivities were mostly celebrated in cities. Nevertheless, cities at the time remained small and, with the majority of people having farms to attend to, visiting cities was a luxury so time-consuming and complex that most people could not afford. Considering these realities, can we really assume that every farmer had the opportunity and means to hear sermons on a regular basis? According to Rob Meens, some people did not visit a sermon or give confession for two years.\footnote{see: Rob Meens, The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance, in: Handling sin, confessions in the middle ages, eds. P. Biller, A. J. Minnis, 2013, pp. 35-55.} Educating people by means of spreading prints was therefore logical and more practical. So was the idea of keeping and displaying said prints in private homes as a constant reminder of the responsibilities of a good Christian.

2.4 Similar examples of depictions of the Five Senses

As discussed earlier, only a limited amount of artistic representations of the Five Senses focused on the dangers associated with the latter. In addition to the single-sheet woodcut that we have examined earlier, an illumination from the Abbey of Heilbronn provides another valuable, yet rare example. While this illumination dates back even
further than the single-sheet woodcut and was also designed with a different purpose, both representations nevertheless bear striking similarities and therefore welcome a detailed comparison.

The illumination from the Abbey of Heilbronn is part of a German book, originating from the same Abbey, which dates back to the first half of the twelfth century. However, this illumination was intended for a different audience than the woodcut. Illuminations and books were expensive at the time and therefore accessible for a privileged and, compared to the print medium, comparatively small segment of society. Nevertheless, both depictions bore the same message of the Five Senses and their dangers. Unlike the woodcut, the illumination shows the direct consequences for the soul for two scenarios: when the Five Senses are ruled wisely and when an individual gives in to their temptation. In so doing, the illumination delineates both the reward as well as the punishment for a life spent by either obeying or disobeying the rules of Christianity.

The senses are arranged in the conventional hierarchical order, starting with Sight and ending with Touch. Each sense is represented as a step on a curved ladder that splits up into two different parts after the fifth step. After the forking of the ladder, one set of steps leads up while the other set of steps leads down. Namely, prudetia, temperantia, fortitudo and iusticia are leading upwards while iprudentia, itemperantia, levitas and iniustitia. The depiction suggests that the role of the Five Senses and how an individual exercises control over his senses can influence the future outcome of the soul. Again, the symbolism of the depiction is straightforward. The ladder has an important iconographical connotation, which dates back further than Christianity. Ladders were commonly used to symbolize a connection between heaven and hell. A prominent example of this kind of representation is the Chaldon mural in Surrey, England in the Saint Peter and Paul Church, which dates back to 1200. (fig. 8) The mural is divided into heaven and hell among horizontal lines with the ladder occupying a central spot that connects both the heavenly and the hellish spheres.

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50 Jütte, 2005, p. 90. Fischer, 1928, pp. 14f. The Illumination is now part of the University Library of Erlangen Nuremberg.
51 Lutze, 1936, p. 4.
52 Kretschmer, 2014, pp. 259f.
interpretation, the act of climbing a ladder in the art works of early Christianity is often used to portray the human struggle on his path to heaven.

The soul, portrayed in human form, appears to be rising from the open mouth of a human head in the bottom right-hand corner. The soul is climbing up the ladder with the steps representing the Five Senses. This particular choice of representation was likely to illustrate the disconnection of the metaphysical soul from its physical body; after the earthly death of the body, the soul ascends into the spiritual world. Following the last step of the ladder, the soul can go either upwards towards heaven or downwards into hell. Both heaven and hell are depicted by the use of architectural structures. The fortress of hell is depicted upside down, the way that Christ would hypothetically see it looking down from heaven. The devil is joined by several demons in the flames of hell, with one of the demons forcing the damned soul of a sinner into the gate of hell. The fortress of heaven shows Christ in the middle, surrounded by Mary and St. Peter, as well as an angel, who supposedly helps Christians through the gate of heaven. A bundle of seven rays fans out from both Christ’s and the devil’s hands. The rays represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (*septes dona spiritus sancti*) and the seven vices (*septem demogia*). The action of climbing up the steps also has a symbolic connotation. Namely, the depiction of physical effort can be seen as a reference to the self-control that is needed in order to resist temptation and strive for purity. This strongly contrasts with the act of going to hell, which is merely sliding down, therefore representative of giving in to temptation.

The clothes of the soul that is descending to hell resemble those of a fool’s dress. Accordingly, Brant notes, “Some clothes they wear would put to shame, full many a man’s unblemished name, shoes pointed, bodice cut too low [...]” The man depicted is wearing exaggeratedly pointed shoes and a tunic, which are both covered in a polka dot pattern. The oversized pattern distinguishes him from his God-fearing counterpart, who is climbing up to heaven in a plain tunic. During the Middle Ages, bold patterns and

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54 Attributing the depiction of the partly shown human figure in the lower right corner should however not be linked to the depiction of the fortress of hell right next to it. Even though representations of hell are sometimes represented with an entrance in the appearance of a mouth, the so-called mouth of hell, this is not one of these, since the human personification is rising from the mouth, and then climbing up the ladder that either leads to heaven or hell.

55 Lutze, 1936, p. 4.

56 Brant, 1962, p. 61.
overly exaggerated appearances of garments were popular methods to present fools by visual distinction.\textsuperscript{57}

While the audience towards whom the Tegernsee woodcut was intended can be readily deduced, the illustration from the Abbey of Heilbronn is more ambiguous. In contrast to the Tegernsee woodcut, the illustration is not a single-sheet print, but part of a manuscript, and would therefore not have been accessible to a large audience. Nevertheless, the style of representation would, in all likelihood, have been understood by illiterate people of a lower societal and educational background. This is mainly due to the simplistic iconographical representation of both God and the devil. Furthermore, the concept of the stairs leading to heaven was also a popular topic in Christian religion and would have been known to everyone who attended religious sermons on a regular basis. The illustration follows some basic iconographical rules that facilitate the identification of the scene. However, the illustration also sheds light on an aspect that the woodcut ignores. Namely, while the Tegernsee print focuses on conveying to the viewer what to do and what not to do as a pious Christian, it fails to acknowledge the consequences, whether good or bad, that arise from either adhering to the rules of the Catholic Church or committing sin. The illumination from the Abbey of Heilbronn is therefore remarkable in that it shows said ramifications. Moreover, the illumination does not only illustrate the human struggle of staying on the path to salvation but it also shows what happens if one does not manage to maintain control over your senses.

It is important to consider several limitations when comparing both prints. First, the illumination dates back almost two hundred years earlier than the woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee, so there is a significant time gap in between them. Furthermore, the style of both depictions is dissimilar and, while both representations portray the same underlying message, they convey it differently. The educational character of the Tegernsee woodcut becomes even more visible if compared to the illumination. Moreover, print and illumination target different audiences, since the accessibility of illuminations in general was more limited. However, the Tegernsee woodcut and the Heilbronn illumination are the only known representations of the Five Senses in medieval art that illustrate the concept of the treacherous senses in a clear and structured way and therefore warranted a detailed comparison.

\textsuperscript{57} Jolivet, 2013, pp. 113ff. for further information on patterns popular in the context of social exclusion and distinction see Pastoureau, Michel. L’étoffe du diable, une histoire des rayures et des tissus rayés, Points, Paris, 2014.
3. The Five Senses in the Middle Ages

Different to the modern-day perception of the Five Senses as merely numbering cognitive functions of the human body, the Middle Ages attributed more meaning to the senses, as they were often deeply intertwined with spiritual and religious culture. The practice of dividing the perception of the senses into five different cognitive functions that are assigned to either a specific body part or an organ goes back further than western Christian culture.\textsuperscript{58} In order to fully understand the history of the Five Senses, this chapter will consider earlier interpretations of the concept and will thereby explore how medieval culture incorporated different notions from Antiquity and other cultures.

Similar to the majority of medieval philosophy, the study of the Five Senses relies mostly on a model passed down from classical sources. While Aristotle (384-322 BC) was one of the most popular and influential sources in this context, the physiological theory of perception of the Greek philosopher and surgeon Claudius Galenus’s (129-200) was of equal significance.\textsuperscript{59} Aristotle’s teachings did not perceive the senses as corrupt in and by themselves. Rather, he believed that virtue could be gained through the correct use of the senses.\textsuperscript{60} When focusing on medieval scholars, Thomas of Aquinas (1225-1274) and Albertus Magnus (1200-1280) were among the most important figures. Even though both these scholars were professed Christians, their research also focused on the work of Ibn Sinâ (980-1037), also known as Avicenna, whose work on the subject of the human sensatory perception was, and still is, of major importance.\textsuperscript{61} His doctrine was an intellectual anthropological concept, which considered the practice of philosophy as a gateway to increasing levels of perfection. Avicenna considered the soul as a substantial “self” that was independent of a person and navigated the human body.\textsuperscript{62} For Christian scholars, the senses were seen as instruments of vice and virtue, and their use would provoke moral dilemmas triggered by the engagement with the outer world. The Christian author Lactantius (ca. 250-325) perceived life as a “crusade where the senses are the warriors of demonic armies, which aim at our physical and moral demise.”\textsuperscript{63} When focusing on early Christians, Augustine

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\textsuperscript{58} Jütte, 2005, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{59} Jütte, 2005, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{60} Sanger; Kulbrandstad Walker, 2012, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{61} Jütte, 2005, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{62} Sturlese, 2013, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{63} Sanger; Kulbrandstad Walker, 2012, p. 7.
of Hippo (354-430) is another influential figure when it comes to the Five Senses in connection with religion in the Middle Ages. The works of Robert Grosseteste (ca. 1170 – 1252), Johannes Duns Scotus (1266 – 1308) and Roger Bacon (ca. 1214 – 1292) also contributed to the development of the theory of the senses. The sheer number of scholars that studied the history and the interpretation of the senses is a testament to the widespread significance of the topic in medieval culture.

To the philosophers and scholars of Antiquity as well as the medieval thinkers and, later, the academics of the Renaissance, the Five Senses served as instruments to unlock knowledge and, for that reason, they also represented a potential danger as a gateway to sin. The common denominator between these scholars was the idea that the senses formed the connecting link between the body and the soul. In this context, the connection between the Five Senses and the human being was the heart. This organ became one of the main topics in the history of the senses and, as a result, the idea of a sixth sense was articulated by several scholars of the Middle Ages. The Italian humanist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) argued to include reason, which according to his beliefs, was located in the heart, as a sixth sense, reigning over all the other senses. In early Christian psychology, the senses are surmounted by the heart. Earlier examples of scholars examining the idea of a sixth sense are for example Brunetto Latini (1220-1295) and Jean Gerson (1363-1429). The Italian philosopher Latini lists the heart above Sight in the hierarchy of the Five Senses, “Et le veoir les sormonte trestous, et de leu et de dignité. Mais toutes ces choses sortmonte l’ame, ki est assise en la maistre forterece dou chief et esgarde par son entendement de raison ce ke li cors ne touche et ki ne vient jusques au autres sens dou cors.” While Latini does not see the heart as a sense per se but rather as a sixth element, Gerson sees the heart as a sixth sense. Gerson, the French scholar and former chancellor of the University of Paris, identified the heart as the sixth sense and as the only inner sense, “Et parleray des six sens, cinq dehors et ung dedans qui et le cuer, lesquelz nous sont baliezz à gouverner comme six escoliers. Premièrement le cuer demande à raison, cuer, bouche, l’eul, tast,

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64 A more detailed focus on the teachings and influence of Augustine of Hippo is to be found in sub-chapter 3.2.
66 Dobschütz, 1929, p. 409.
68 Latini, 1975, p. 29.
flair, oye, De cuer: qui son cuer garde son âme garde.”

According to his interpretation, the heart was the seat of all feelings with the senses as the tools of the heart. Achieving the purity of the heart was one of the main goals in the Christian belief system and is addressed on multiple occasions in the Old and the New Testament. Nevertheless, the Bible holds no theories on the senses or their relation to rationality. If individual senses are addressed, then mostly in a figurative manner to explain or describe hidden morals or interpretation of certain pieces of art or literature. The positive or negative smell and beautiful or ugly appearance, for example, become important indicators on how to interpret a story in biblical but also in religious texts in general.

While control of the senses was one of the major aspects when examining the Five Senses in medieval culture, loss of the senses was also a danger that was addressed. Loss of a single sense, or even of all senses, was a consequence of physical or psychological illness. C. M. Woolgar lists several documented cases in his publication of the senses in late medieval England where people had either lost one sense or were completely deprived of all their senses. Most of these accounts also feature a miraculous recovery by regaining the senses. Complete loss of all sensation could not only be a sign of madness but also a sign of approaching death. Furthermore, the loss of a sense due to natural causes was often seen as a punishment from God. In some cases, punishment by removing a sensory organ was also executed, often further leading to social exclusion. Sensory loss was deemed as evil and sometimes even seen as the work of the devil. Moreover, disability or loss of limbs or other sensory functions were perceived as shameful. Woolgar’s research proves that the medieval society was very aware of their senses.

As already discussed earlier, the Five Senses were a popular topic in the secular culture of the Middle Ages and often figured in literature and art of the courtly culture. This led to the noticeably higher amount of depictions of the senses in a secular context as opposed to the ecclesiastical context. Sebastian Brandt’s satire, *The Ship of Fools*, provided a particularly popular account of the Five Senses. However, art and literature concerning the senses was not accessible to all social classes of the Middle Ages since only a small percentage of the population was able to possess a book or even read one.

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69 Gerson, 1960-73, p. 826. The quote derives from a sermon delivered in Paris on the 17th December 1402.
70 Dobschütz, 1929, pp. 409f.
71 Dobschütz, 1929, p. 383.
72 Woolgar, 2006, pp. 8f.
73 Woolgar, 2006, pp. 8f.
While the illustrations might have been understood by the less educated social groups, literature was neither available nor useful for them. In addition to the costliness of books, which only a small segment of society could afford, literacy was still considered a privilege that remained reserved to royalty, nobility and the clergy until well into the nineteenth century. The senses in the courtly culture of the Middle Ages were applied to a considerably wider spectrum and could also be approached from a more philosophical angle, dealing with different interpretations of the senses mostly in connection with love and romance. The *Roman de la Rose* and the *Roman de la Dame à la licorne et du beau chevalier au Lyon* both serve as examples.

This short introduction into the historiography of the Five Senses indicates that this topic did not originate in the Middle Ages. Rather, the symbolism and interpretation associated with the Five Senses date back to Antiquity and were elaborated in medieval art and literature.

### 3.1 The hierarchy of the Five Senses

The number of senses has been set at five not only in western, but also in Indian and Chinese culture. The number five is attributed to humans, as they have five fingers, five toes and, therefore, five senses. The number also corresponds to religious topics, such as the five holy wounds of Christ. In order to understand the importance of the “fiveness” of the senses and what the number five adds to the symbolic interpretation, this chapter will examine the number’s significance from both a theological and secular perspective. However, it is important to note that several numbers had religious and otherwise symbolical connotations. The number seven, for instance, is often associated with the Seven Deadly Sins while the number ten was linked to the Ten Commandments. The number three was commonly associated with the Holy Trinity or the three wise men, while the number twelve often referred to the twelve apostles. These examples show that numbers often served as contextual identifiers in religion.

The classical hierarchy according to which the senses were arranged in the Middle Ages originated with Aristotle, who ranked the senses as follows: *visus* (sight), *auditus*  

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74 Dobschütz, 1929, p. 380.  
75 Kretschmer, 2014, p. 460.  
76 Jütte, 2005, pp. 54f.  
77 The maxim quoted on p.25 of this thesis is an excellent example for this.
(hearing), oduratus (smell), gustus (taste) and tactus (touch). While this hierarchical order applied to the majority of medieval art and literature, some scholars debated the prioritization and the ensued ranking of the senses, in particular regarding Sight and Hearing.\(^78\) While the sense of Sight usually occupied the highest position in the ranking, some scholars argued that Hearing was actually superior to Sight and should therefore be ranked highest. The positioning of the sense of Hearing at the top of the hierarchy rested on the argument that this sense was used and needed to hear and absorb the words of God and the teachings of the Church. To some scholars like Aquinas, the sense of Hearing was more noble than the sense of Sight since he believed that Hearing was the only sense that could be trusted, since the sense of Sight could easily be influenced. Moreover, the need to have visual proof in order to believe it was often interpreted as a weakness in faith.\(^79\)

The ranking descends from the noblest sense, usually the sense of Sight, to the least noble sense, usually the sense of Touch.\(^80\) The reasoning behind the individual positioning of the senses sheds light on the perception of each sense and its symbolical importance in medieval culture.\(^81\) Moreover, the ranking also depended to some extent on the unique humanness of the sense. For instance, Smell was considered superior to Taste since, according to medieval beliefs, some animals did not possess a sense of Smell. This distinction between human and animal characteristics was therefore also an important aspect in determining the hierarchical order. And, even though some animals were believed to have at least one sense that was stronger developed than the others, most animals were believed to possess less than five senses. It was also the general belief that animals did not possess a soul. This conviction might explain why animals were frequently chosen to represent the Seven Deadly Sins, as they never even possessed a soul in the first place. The senses as well as the soul, which could only be saved if the senses are contained, were attributed that were limited to humankind alone. In light of this reasoning, it seemed logical to represent the Seven Deadly Sins in animal form.

\(^78\) Jütte, 2005, p. 61. Especially in connection with the senses of sight and hearing.
\(^79\) Sanger; Kulbranstad Walker, 2012, p. 3.
\(^80\) Jütte, 2005, p. 63.
\(^81\) see Dobschütz, 1929, p. 395. Dobschütz explains that it is a normal human approach to give higher importance to the organs of the sense of sight than to the one of hearing. The eyes are the first thing we see, looking into each others faces and they are of high importance when it comes to recognizing someone as an individual.
3.2 The Five Senses in the ecclesiastical context of the Middle Ages

The ecclesiastical sphere of the Middle Ages shaped the general interpretation of the Five Senses in medieval art and culture. The history of the Five Senses runs “like a red threat through the history of the Church since Augustine.”82 St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) believed that sentire was a sensation that could not occur in the human body but only in the soul.83 Augustine’s approach to the topic was of theological nature. He tried to detect how the human mind (intellectus) could be freed from its servitude to material bodies (sensibilia) in order to follow its predetermined path toward wisdom (sapientia), which might eventually lead to the knowledge and sight of God. According to Augustine, nothing could be alive if it had not been „animated“ by a soul (anima) first. The soul was considered as the root of all process, growth and reproduction.84 And, according to the Christian belief system, the Five Senses and the soul were inseparably linked.

Religious concepts could even be detected in secular art, which focused on the Five Senses. Unlike the belief system in Antiquity, medieval contemporaries did not consider the immortality of the soul as an innate quality. Rather, the immortality of the soul was bestowed upon the devout person by God and was therefore based on merit.85 In order to achieve the immortality of the soul and ascend into heaven, a person had to prove themselves worthy by resisting the temptations of the Five Senses. Since the Five Senses were crucial to adhering to the rules of God and remaining on the path to salvation, they were, in this specific religious context, connected to the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins.

Among all the pleasures which affect our senses, some are licit; these are great spectacles of nature which enchant one’s gaze; the eye, however, also relishes the spectacle of the theatre. The ear enjoys the harmonious chant of a sacred psalm; it also likes the song of the minstrels. The flowers and the perfumes which are also God’s creation enchant our sense of smell; but it also partakes joyfully of the incense burnt on the altars of the demons. The sense of taste likes permitted foods; but it also likes the food served at the sacrilegious feasts of idolatrous sacrifices. The same thing can be said of pure and impure embraces. As you can see, dearest brothers, among these material delights, some are licit while others are forbidden.86

82 Jütte, 2005, p. 80.
85 Lang, 2009, p. 45.
Despite the prominence of the Five Senses in Christian theology, they are not mentioned in the Bible. Neither the Old nor the New Testament referred to the Five Senses in their „fiveness“ nor did it address the function of the senses and the impact they can have on the fate of the soul. This observation leads to the conclusion that the teachings of the Catholic Church were not fully based upon biblical texts.

Moreover, the Christian theological consensus towards the Five Senses was of a relatively negative nature. The senses were seen as treacherous and unreliable, leading St Anselm (1033-1109) to describe them as follows, “delight coming from the senses is rarely good: more often it is truly bad.” The justification for this hostile assessment of the senses could be found in the Bible. Church Fathers often preached certain passages from both the Old and the New Testament, which underlined the negative connotations of the senses, such as the temptation of Eve who was tricked by the sense of Sight to eat the apple or the story of Lot and his wife, who turned into a pillar of salt after she looked back. These passages served as useful cautionary tales for the Catholic Church to control the commoners. Since the Five Senses served as a perfect instrument to maintain the faithfulness of the soul. The Five Senses embodied the fundamental dangers of human life, as they would determine the destiny of an individual’s soul. Namely, the senses communicated the impressions of the environment to the human being (i.e. the look of a crisp, red apple) and, in so doing, they exposed human beings to the endless temptations of the physical world. In sum, the purity of the soul risked corruption through the sinful temptations of the material surroundings.

The interrelatedness of the Ten Commandments, the Five Senses and the Seven Deadly Sins was often touched upon in religious texts, sermons, penitentials or maxims:

Kepe well X and flee from VII
Rule well V and come to Heaven.

The proverb provides a perfect example of the Church’s attempt to connect the Five Senses with the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. It also illustrates how


87 Dobschütz, 1929, p. 380.
88 Woolgar, 2006, p. 16.
89 Jütte, 2005, p. 80.
90 Dobschütz, 1929, p. 407.
91 Secular lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins, Oxford 1955, p. 80, no. 83.
the Church tried to make the association between these three concepts readily understandable and memorable for members of all social strata, regardless of their educational background. The woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee abides by this rule by ordering the beholder to follow the Ten Commandments and to avoid the Seven Deadly Sins in order to gain access to heaven. The woodcut effectively articulated that the senses needed to be domesticated and spiritualized.

The theme of the necessary domestication of the Five Senses dominated medieval art and literature at the time. The senses needed to be ruled wisely in order to maintain the purity of the soul and ensure the ascension into heaven. In the 1183 allegorical epic *Anticlaudianus* by Alanus ab Insulis (1128-1202), the Five Senses are represented by five horses drawing a chariot on its way to heaven. The allegorical illustration of the senses as five horses harnessed to a chariot conveyed the idea of guiding and taming the fierce nature of the senses.92 A Sanskrit text that dates back to the fourth century BC also describes the senses in the form of horses restrained by a charioteer.93 The concept of the senses as properties that require guidance is therefore considerably older than the Catholic Church.

The need for domestication and spiritualization is also to be found in the act of confession. The confession touches upon the concept of placing the Five Senses between Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins. In other words, if one was unable to resist the temptations of the Seven Deadly Sins, confession offered a last resort. A confessional formula from a fifteenth-century German book expresses the message that the interrelatedness of the Five Senses, the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins should convey to pious Christians.


The commission of sin through the abuse of the senses was also occasionally addressed in late medieval books of hours and prayer books. Prayers addressed to the Virgin Mary asking for protection from sinning through either Sight or Hearing were therefore not

unusual. The confession, in that case, provided individuals with a last resort if all else failed and the temptation was too big for the senses to resist. The possibility of confession therefore instilled hope in the people, as it offered a final option for the penitent to return onto the path towards salvation. This perception further strengthened the dominance of the Church, as it represented the only place where a sinner could renounce his or her sins. As a result, penance occupied a major role within the conceptualization of the Five Senses. This also holds true for the woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee, which features a confessional scene next to the Seven Deadly Sins. Representations of this nature could be found in art since early Christianity where visual articulations of an important practice connected to the church would be depicted.

### 3.3 Iconographic imagery tradition

Though growing into a widespread and popular theme over the course of the Middle Ages, the Five Senses were absent from early medieval art and literature. Since the senses did not figure prominently in the art of Antiquity, only few inspirational sources for depictions were passed on to the Middle Ages. The iconographical language and style of imagery, which are known today as typical representations of the Five Senses, developed over the course of the Middle Ages.

The Five Senses were often included in cosmological cycles, which, amongst others, also featured constellations, the seasons, the elements, the winds and the ages of men. While all of these features were commonly included in these cosmological cycles by symbolic representation, the Five Senses were usually referred to by their written names exclusively. This practice can also be observed in the illumination from the Abbey of Heilbronn discussed in the previous chapter. Even though the senses are the main feature of the illumination, they are not represented by a certain symbolism but merely through the written word.

However, this changed from the thirteenth century onwards when the Five Senses increasingly became the sole topic of a piece of art. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, an iconographical imagery tradition had developed. The earliest known example

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98 Mutherrich, 1955, p. 140.
for a depiction of the Five Senses is the Fuller brooch, an Anglo-Saxon piece of jewellery made from silver, dating back to the ninth century. (fig. 9) The senses are represented by human personifications arranged in a circle, with Sight occupying the middle position. The senses are identified through the gestures that the male personifications are acting out.99 Similar to the brooch, most examples of medieval representations of the Five Senses fit in to secular imagery. However, considering that the Tegernsee woodcut and the Heilbronn illumination were fashioned almost four hundred years later and the Fuller brooch is the only known example of this style from the ninth century, it is safe to assume that the brooch was, in all likelihood, an isolated case, rather than the norm, for representing the Five Senses. Furthermore, the stylistic appearance of the decor on the brooch as well as the use of male personifications were commonplace techniques for Anglo-Saxon jewellery design of the period.

The Five Senses used a certain iconographic imagery, which developed throughout the Middle Ages and facilitated their identification. Two different methods of artistic representation of the senses existed at the time. First, the senses could be represented by certain animals. The tradition of depicting the five senses in animal form derived from the belief according to which the senses are stronger developed in certain animals than in men and was first quoted by the Belgian theologian and preacher Thomas Cantimpratensis (1201-1271) in his Liber de natura rerum. “Nos aper auditu, lynx visu, simia gustu, vultur odoratz praecellit, aranea tactu.”100 According to Cantimpratensis, Hearing was attributed to the boar, Sight to the Lynx, Taste to the Monkey, Smell to the vulture and Touch to the spider, since the development of the specific senses of each of those animals was superior to those of any other animal.101 This formula provided a strong influence for early visual articulation of the topic and the earliest illustrations relying on this practice date back to 1240. The French philosopher Richard de Fournival (1201-1260) makes use of this technique in the illustrations of his Bestiaire d’amour.102 Attributing special properties to animals was a common practice and can already be found in the Physiologus. The Physiologus is a

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99 Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 1. Lupant, 2010, p. 66. For a more detailed description of the Fuller Brooch see: Bruce Mitford, R. The Fuller Brooch, in: the British Museum Quarterly, Vol. 17, No. 4, Dec. 1952, pp. 75f. Bruce-Mitford was the first scholar to identify the depictions on the Fuller Brooch as representations of the Five Senses, since he didn’t have any similar examples to justify his identification, the idea was rejected by several other scholars.
100 Cantimpratensis, 1973, p. 106.
101 Interestingly Cantimpratensis does not follow the hierarchy in which the senses are usually ranked, but he lists the sense of hearing first following sight, taste, smell and touch.
text dating back to the second century with a collection of animal descriptions often paired with a corresponding moral narration.\(^{103}\) During the Middle Ages, several bestiaries were composed, which did not necessarily concentrate on a natural and true-to-life rendition of the animals in question, but rather put a focus on lore and mystical significances.\(^{104}\)

The two best examples for representing the Five Senses in animal form are two wall paintings, one in the monastery of Tre Fontane in Rome and the other in the Longthorpe Tower near Peterborough, dating ca. 1330.\(^{105}\) (fig. 10) The Longthorpe Wheel shows a big wheel with five spokes, surrounded by animals representative of the Five Senses. A crowned male figure is portrayed behind the wheel. He holds one hand on one of the spokes, thus conveying the impression of a steering wheel.\(^{106}\) The crown, a symbol of kings, could also be understood as an act of reigning. The painting could therefore be interpreted as the figure ruling over the Five Senses and carefully steering them into the right direction. The figure then becomes the personification of reason, carefully evaluating the risks of sensory engagement.\(^{107}\)

In the second depiction in the Roman monastery, the senses are represented in human form. This stylistic practice witnessed an increase in popularity following the publication of the Latin translation of Aristotle’s *Parva naturalia*.\(^{108}\) Aristotle was already acquainted with the belief that certain senses were supposedly stronger developed in certain animals. The animal imagery, however, was not necessarily suited to address the senses in man, especially when talking about the psychological treatment of the senses.\(^{109}\) The texts of Aristotle led to a different approach in depicting human senses, namely by putting a strong emphasis on the organ that is tied to each sense. This method led to a more anatomical approach in the style of representation and could therefore also be found in depictions that did not bear a scientific background.\(^{110}\) (fig. 11) As seen in the woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee, the sense of Hearing is, for example, represented by an ear above two musical instruments. The organ is represented without any attachment to the human body. This practice was common in

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\(^{104}\) Barber, 2013, pp. 7ff.  
\(^{105}\) Pastoureau, 2013, pp. 7ff.  
\(^{106}\) Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 2.  
\(^{107}\) The identification if the wheel as a steering wheel would make sense, since this would also apply to the topic of ruling the senses and guiding them.  
\(^{108}\) Rouse; Baker, 1955, p. 34.  
\(^{109}\) Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 2.  
\(^{110}\) Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 2.  
representations where the Five Senses were at the core of the artwork as opposed to allegorical elements, which formed just one of the multiple iconographical layers.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, Five Senses were routinely depicted as human properties, which were attributed a cleansing or healing power for the soul. Notwithstanding, the imagery tradition revolving surrounding the depiction of the senses evolved quickly and became even more pronounced during the Renaissance, especially in the Netherlands and France.\footnote{LCI Band 3, Page 159f.} While initially relying mostly on animal representations or object symbolism, the Five Senses became increasingly represented in allegorical human form only from the late fifteenth century onwards. While men figured as the common allegorical personifications of the senses during the Middle Ages, women became more prominent towards the end of the medieval period and the dawn of the Renaissance. In her 2010 article on the iconography of the senses, Chrystel Lupant provides two explanations for the change in gender: The first pertains to a conceptual global iconography, which aims to reconnect the tradition of female personification of the Vices and the Virtues to that of the Five Senses. Second, it appears that the assimilation of the ancient imagery of femininity and sensuality starts to regain popularity during this period.\footnote{Loupant, 2010, p. 66.}

Lastly, the senses and the temptations of the material world apply to both genders equally, even though the assumption that the temptation of the flesh had a greater impact on men was considered normal. This evidence leads to the conclusion that the human personifications, which either represented or acted out a certain sense, did not segregate based on sex but rather addressed the audience as a whole. Sebastian Brant (1457-1521) described it as follows, “For man is not the only loon, amongst women fools are hardly fewer”\footnote{Brant, 1962, pp. 60f.} Even though the popularity of the topic decreased, the female personification predominated.\footnote{Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 16.}

The idea that the Five Senses must be controlled by reason also influenced earlier depictions of the senses. As already discussed above, the Anticlaudianus described the Five Senses as horses, leading a chariot. A thirteenth-century manuscript from the Bibliotheca Capitolare in Verona refers to the poem by Alanus ab Insulis (1128-1202) where each sense is represented in horse form with an added element indicating the
corresponding sense.\textsuperscript{115} (fig. 12) This example closely resembles the representations of the senses on the single-sheet woodcut form the Abbey of Tegernsee. While the horse representing Sight has two eyes depicted next to it and the horse representing Hearing two ears, the remaining three senses/horses are identified by a male personification acting out the respective sense in pantomimed clues. Even though the text states that each of the horses representing the senses is harnessed to a chariot, thus referring to the potential dangers that the senses represent, the actual depiction focuses merely on the horses and their identification with a specific sense.

Other than the animal attribution, the senses can also be applied to objects, passages from the bible, mythology or allegorical personifications that can be distinguished from one another by the use of specific attributes. (fig.13)

\textsuperscript{115} Mütherich, 1955, p. 140.
4. The rarity of ecclesiastical representations of the Five Senses in the Middle Ages

While the Five Senses routinely figured in medieval religious life, the documented success of books like *The Ship of Fools* demonstrated that the senses also featured in secular culture rather than just popular culture.\(^{116}\) In light of this observation, the existing discrepancy between the secular and ecclesiastical depictions of the senses is surprising. While only few examples of representations of the Five Sense in medieval art exist, the ones dedicated to the ecclesiastical realm, referring to the dangers that the senses hold, are even scantier. Even though Nordenfalk was one of the first historians to note that rarely any depictions of the Five Senses in ecclesiastical art exist, he did not care to find an explanation for this reality.\(^ {117}\) In this context, it is also interesting to note that the renowned French art historian Emile Mâle did not mention the Five Senses once in his extensive oeuvre on religious art in the Middle Ages.\(^ {118}\) The same can also be said of Schreiber, in his *Handbuch der Holz- und Metallschnitte des XV. Jahrhunderts*, the Five Senses are only referred to when discussing the woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee.\(^ {119}\) This raises a pertinent question: Why would a topic of great popularity and importance be largely neglected in ecclesiastical depictions? After all, the senses represented the connecting link between a human being and the morals preached by the Church. Moreover, ecclesiastical art was the predominant art form during the Middle Ages. Without senses, one could neither obey nor disregard the rules taught by the Catholic Church, so it seems even more peculiar that such a significant topic was mainly found in secular art, if at all. The Five Senses recurred constantly in Christian texts, as well as in biblical commentaries and sermons.

The Five Senses were particularly used for educational purposes where the senses imparted a strong moralizing undertone, delineating the gateway to sin.\(^ {120}\) A visual articulation of the topic appeared to be the logical conclusion in order to reach a wider crowd of people.

Sensus sunt quinque quos custodire debemus

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\(^{117}\) Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 2.  
\(^{118}\) Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 2.  
\(^{120}\) Nordenfalk, 1985, p. 2.
The awareness of the dangers attributed to the Five Senses was a returning topic throughout the Middle Ages and was first discussed by the Fathers of the Church. Countless examples on theological writings featuring the Five Senses and their negative interpretation that they had received over time exist. An important example of such a text featuring the dangers of the senses is the *Versus de quinque sensibus* by Notker of Saint Gall (840-912), a Benedictine monk from Switzerland. The senses are here referred to as instruments of carnal love. Instead of seeing the senses as blank properties that can be influenced by either the word of God or the temptation by the devil, the senses are perceived uniquely as elements that need to be tamed, rather than shaped by individual choices. Another example was Jacopone da Todi’s *Lauda* entitled, “How to keep watch over the Senses,” in which every stanza ends with the exhortation: “Guarda!” Again, a strong focus was put on the need to mandate, tame and control the senses, since the general belief was that the senses are easily corrupted by the temptations of the material world. While both examples mentioned above already put a strong focus on the need to govern the senses with caution, the most striking example of the distrust that the Church inhabited towards the Five Senses was the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. This Sacrament consisted of anointing the sensory organs, so that “the stains which through the Five Senses and weakness of mind and body might adhere to them, thanks to this spiritual medicine and the grace of God might be purged.”

In light of these revelations, it is not surprising that the Five Senses figure frequently in Penitentials. The senses can be seen as a gateway to the human soul, with the Seven Deadly Sins tempting the senses to disobey the Ten Commandments and, in so doing, repudiating the word of God. The Ten Commandments as well as the theme of staying on the path to salvation were often depicted in ecclesiastical art. (fig. 14) It is therefore even more surprising that the senses did not figure in most of these depictions, especially when considering that depictions of the Ten Commandments and of the Seven Deadly Sins often served an educational purpose as well. While other depictions revolving around the importance of human reason and staying on the righteous path

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124 Voyage littéraire de deux Bénédictins, II, Paris 1724, p. 121.
125 Nordenfalk, 1985, p.3.
often also demonstrated the vices and virtues associated with the abuse of the senses, most illustrations lacked a visual articulation of the senses.

A number of elements might have factored into the rare depictions of the dangers associated with the Five Senses. In order to discern any representation of the Five Senses, an individual needed to make use of the sense of Sight. The message spread by the Church was, however, that the senses were treacherous and dangerous, requiring caution and prudence when dealing with them. This rationale also corresponded to the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, who pleaded that the senses of Sight, Taste and Touch could not be deemed reliable. The only sense that was trustworthy was Hearing. This statement was directed towards the ability of the sense of Hearing to receive the words of God and listen to the teachings of the Church.

Uisus, gustus, tactus in te fallitur/ Sed solus auditus tute creditor/ Credo, quicquid dixit dei filiu/Nichil ueritatis uerius.\textsuperscript{126}

Despite its negative connotations, the sense of Sight was, however, critical. On the one hand, Sight was ranked highest in the hierarchy of the senses due to its perceived superior purity as opposed to the other senses. The eyes were considered to be the doors to the soul, therefore forging a link between the inner and outer senses. On the other hand, relying on the sense of Sight in order to believe was interpreted as a weakness in faith.\textsuperscript{127} Several passages in the Bible remind us of the perils that our senses can present to our own fate, with the sense of Sight often being singled out in this context. The most popular biblical reference to the danger of a sense is the story of Eve and the apple. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”\textsuperscript{128} According to this account, the woman saw the fruit and gave in to its pleasing appearance. In this context, the sense of Sight led to temptation. More famously, Eve was tempted through Sight as well as the weakness of her body and mind, eventually leading to her being banned from paradise. As such, Eve became the archetypical sinner and the incarnation of the seductive danger inherent in feminine beauty. The story of Eve is also visualized in the woodcut “The ship of Eve,” produced by Jehan Drouyn (1478-1507) circa 1500 for \textit{The Ship of Fools}.\textsuperscript{129} (fig. 15)

\textsuperscript{126} Raby, 1945, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{127} Dobschütz, 1929, p. 389.
\textsuperscript{128} Gen. 3:6.
\textsuperscript{129} Pinson, 2010, pp. 214f. Even though the woodcut clearly touched upon a religious topic, this cannot be considered as a representation of the dangers of the senses. The woodcut, which is part of the illustrations
As the Catholic Church portrayed the senses as treacherous, relying on them for guidance was deemed a weakness - a weakness of the soul, the body and the faith in God. Those who did not believe unconditionally, strove for proof and explanation by using their senses. As already mentioned above, the loss of either one or all senses was considered dangerous, since it was associated with the devil. The reasoning that depictions of the dangers of the senses are so seldom, because one would have to use at least one of the senses in order to perceive such depictions, does not seem strong enough to hold up critical argumentation.

However, early Christianity was often suspicious of figurative sacred art, even though scholars such as Augustine and Aquinas were pleading for a visual repository of images.130

There was a triple reason for instituting images in the church. First, for the instruction of simple people, who are taught by them as if by some books. Second, so that the mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the saints remain more in our memory, as they are presented to the eyes daily. Third, to excite devotional feeling, which is stimulated more effectively by things seen than those heard.131

Even though the triplex ratio was generally intended for art that was displayed in churches, the same concept was also used with woodcuts, including the single-sheet print from the Abbey of Tegernsee. The strong emphasis on conveying knowledge through the medium of visual representation was a prominent practice throughout the Middle Ages. According to Aquinas, the purpose of art in churches was to teach religious lessons to the simple people in order for them to recall and memorize them. The overall goal was that these teachings would influence commoners in their day-to-day lives and inspire them to act as good Christians. Aquinas was not alone with this opinion. Even amongst the Church Fathers, the use of imagery in order to spread knowledge and explain the ways of the Church was a widespread and favored custom.

For it is one thing to adore a picture, another through a picture’s story to learn what must be adored. For what writing offers to those who read it, a picture offers to the ignorant who look at it, since in it the ignorant see what they ought to follow, in it they read who do not know letters.132

of the ship of fools, was not made in order to educate. It is a satire, meaning secular entertainment for the higher social classes of medieval society.

132 Registrum epistularum quoted and translated after Chazelle, 1990, p. 139. “Aliud est enim picturam adorare, aliud per picturae historiam quid sit adorandum addiscere. Nam quod legentibus scriptura, hoc
This quote originates from one of the two letters written by Pope Gregory (ca. 540-604) to Serenus, (died after 601) the bishop of Marseille and a convinced iconoclast. The statement above is one of the most frequently cited texts concerning the use of images in the Middle Ages. Pope Gregory clearly spoke in favor of the use of imagery in an educational context so as to convey knowledge towards the “ignorant.”

While the Tegernsee woodcut is, of course, not necessarily a print that depicts the explicit dangers associated with the Five Senses, it can be seen as a manual on how to guide and carefully use the senses in order to avoid temptation. Other than allegories or biblical stories with complex narratives and complicated messages, the artistic representations of the Five Senses were readily accessible and comprehensible for members of all societal strata. The senses were part of human nature and were used on a daily basis for almost every interaction. The moral connotations, religious messages and perceived metaphysical threats conveyed through the depictions of the Five Senses were therefore relatable and understandable.

idiotis praestat pictura cementibus, quia in ipsa ignorant quod sequi debeant, in ipsa legunt qui litteras nesciunt.”

133 Endrödi, 2010, p. 137.
5. Conclusion

This paper has shown the extent to which the Five Senses were connected to Christianity and were intertwined with all aspects of medieval life. Having examined a multitude of literary sources of theological and philosophical nature, it remains nevertheless surprising that only few evidential examples exist.

In spite of the perceived dangers of temptation and the threat to the metaphysical fate of the human soul, the Five Senses nevertheless guided the actions of individuals on a daily basis and therefore enabled the latter to abide by the Ten Commandments. As a result, the senses were depicted as instruments that needed to be used with caution in order to ensure a pious lifestyle, resist temptation and attain the final objective of gaining access into heaven. According to medieval religious thought, the Vices and the Virtues, the Good and the Bad, the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins were intertwined and were therefore often depicted together, particularly in ecclesiastical art. And, just like there cannot be any Good without Evil, the Ten Commandments cannot be followed without the existence of the Five Senses. Despite the contrasting destructive and uplifting natures of both the Five Senses and the Ten Commandments, they are also mutually reinforcing. Hence, while the Five Senses provided the possibility of leading human souls into eternal damnation, they also facilitated their ascension into the kingdom of heaven. The possible spiritual connection between humankind and God as well as the downfall of the soul into hell represented a dilemma for the Catholic Church. Representations depicting the dangers associated with the Five Senses therefore served as powerful tools for the Church.

A certain instructional, educational and moralizing characteristic was ascribed to each of these religious concepts. And, by way of visual representation and artistic interpretation, the concepts as well as their moral and ideological connotations were disseminated amongst the public at the time. The paper has shown that the woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee figured amongst the most popular and only surviving examples of this practice. As demonstrated in the confession scene on the Tegernsee woodcut, the depiction of religious rites delineating the ideal lifestyle of piety, as expected and dictated by the Church, was common in medieval art. In addition to communicating the devout and rigid lifestyle that all good Christians should aspire to, these representations also had a strong educational and moral undertone. The Five
Senses were therefore often illustrated as some sort of behavioral manual to a God-fearing life.

While the paper has shown that the Five Senses were a constant topic in medieval culture, it has also raised several other questions that invite for further research: Are the Five Senses automatically included in the understanding of moral representations dealing with the Vices and the Virtues without having to visually articulate them? If so, does this mean that the dangers that the senses pose to the eternal soul are part of the medieval self-consciousness? And, were the Five Senses as well as their potential beneficial use or dangerous impact considered common knowledge? Medieval art put a strong emphasis on conveying messages, knowledge and other doctrines to its audience. Yet, did this hold true for the Five Senses as well? In medieval representations of Heaven and Hell, the Virtues and the Vices, the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins, was the viewer himself the representative of the Five Senses? Considering that the Five Senses connect the body to the soul and enable the soul to achieve spiritual purity and, hopefully, access to heaven, is it safe to assume that the sensory experience of the beholder of such a piece of art includes the Five Senses in this concept? It is true that this question touches upon the study of sensory perception and experience in the Middle Ages and opens up into a new category of research that is not only limited to art. However, sensory perception can not be excluded when dealing with representations of the Five Senses.

The reception and appraisal of art was different in the Middle Ages than it is today, since the interaction with art was essentially a tactile experience. Different from the modern-day museum culture, art was experienced with all the senses in the Middle Ages. This was especially true for religious art, which was displayed in churches and was often accompanied by sensory triggers that shaped the specific encounter. Smells, sounds, the lighting and various other factors influenced the perception of a piece of art. The assumption that the audience was meant to be included in an artwork by their mere presence is therefore likely, since the spectator is on some level always included in the general idea of creating and exhibiting a piece of art. This theory seems increasingly plausible when considering the medieval setting of disseminating knowledge and ensuring the religious indoctrination of the public by means of the artistic visualization of theological messages. Even books of hours bore no representations depicting the Five Senses. While books of hours were often decorated with rich illuminations depending
on the social standing of their owner and usually consisted of a collection of devotional
texts, prayers, and psalms, they were mostly used for personal reflection and prayer. In
this context, the theory of an individual physically embodying the Five Senses seemed
plausible, as the viewer could engage with a certain piece of art through the use of his or
her own senses.

While a definite explanation for the general lack of artistic representations of the
Five Senses in religious settings during the Middle Ages remains to be found, this paper
has shown why only few of these medieval representations depict the potential dangers
associated with the Five Senses. Namely, the senses did not exclusively epitomize a
certain threat or temptation, thus condemning spiritually weakened individuals to
eternal damnation. After all, the senses bridged the gap between the individual and their
natural as well as spiritual environment. This meant that while the dangers prevailed,
the possibility of achieving purity and, in that way, also proximity to God existed as
well.

The single-sheet woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee represented all the
appeals to the aspects that were preached by the Church. The question as to why
historians and art collectors have not been able to locate more copies of the woodcut
from the Abbey of Tegernsee might be explained by the mere fact that a high number of
woodcuts were circulating during the Middle Ages and rather than treasure them, they
would be hung in private spaces and become part of everyday religious life. Rather, the
question becomes as to why the woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee is one of the
only surviving woodcuts that deals with the dangers associated with the Five Senses?
The illustrated interrelatedness between the Five Senses, the Ten Commandments and
the Seven Deadly Sins as well as their overall conceptualization within the context of
penance are designed and represented so logically and meticulously that it seems almost
inconceivable that this print was the only one to broach this issue. This paper has
demonstrated by means of several examples that the Five Senses were a popular method
in the Middle Ages for the Catholic Church to teach and indoctrinate the public by way
of visual representations. And, while an answer to the question as to why the Five
Senses were so rarely depicted in medieval art could not be fully determined, the
research suggests that ecclesiastical representations of the Five Senses should have been
more common in medieval art, especially when considering the existence of an
elaborate iconographical imagery tradition, the indisputable motives of the Catholic
Church to commission such prints, the available means of production and an audience that was readily open to receive and be influenced by their moral teachings. And, similar to the single-sheet woodcut from the Abbey of Tegernsee, which was hidden in plain sight for over three hundred years, only time will tell how many more of these invaluable windows into medieval ecclesiastical teaching practices will be unearthed in the future.
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