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Between Destruction and Development: The Dynamics of Transformation in the Sensory Landscapes of the Apocalypse of St John

Między destrukcją a rozwojem.
Dynamika przemian krajobrazów
sensorycznych w Apokalipsie św. Jana

Abstract

This article examines the dynamics of the transformation of sensory landscapes in the Book of Revelation, seeking to demonstrate that – contrary to the prevailing view – the transformations of space are not confined solely to progressive destruction but also encompass development. The source material is the text of Revelation in Koine Greek, studied with attention to the Hebrew roots of the apocalyptic genre. The study is situated within interdisciplinary research, bordering on Biblical Performance Criticism, affect theory, sensory anthropology, and orality studies. Its point of departure is a synchronic analysis of the text combined with elements of exegesis, supplemented by the tools of ethnography and sensory anthropology. In accordance with the Semitic conception of the seven senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, movement, and speech), the article

investigates the sensoriality and the direction of transformation within each space, while also taking into account the euphonic and performative layer of the text. It identifies the direction of these transformational dynamics, the principle that orders them, and their persuasive dimensions.

Keywords: Apocalypse, senses, change, destruction, development, persuasion.

Abstrakt

Artykuł podejmuje analizę dynamiki przemian krajobrazów sensorycznych w Apokalipsie św. Jana, dążąc do wykazania, że – wbrew rozpowszechnionej opinii – przemiany przestrzeni nie sprowadzają się wyłącznie do postępującej destrukcji, lecz obejmują również rozwój. Materiałem źródłowym jest tekst Apokalipsy w grece koine, badany z uwzględnieniem hebrajskich korzeni gatunku apokaliptycznego. Praca sytuje się w nurcie badań interdyscyplinarnych, granicząc z Biblical Performance Criticism, teorią afektu oraz antropologią sensoryczną i badaniami nad oralnością. Metodą wyjściową jest synchroniczna analiza tekstu z elementami egzegezy, uzupełniona o narzędzia etnografii i antropologii sensorycznej. Zgodnie z semicką koncepcją siedmiu zmysłów (wzrok, słuch, smak, węch, dotyk, ruch i mowa) przebadano sensualność i kierunek przemian w każdej przestrzeni, uwzględniając także warstwę eufoniczną i performatywną tekstu. Wskazano kierunek dynamiki transformacji, zasadę je porządkującą oraz aspekty perswazyjne.

Słowa kluczowe: Apokalipsa, zmysły, przemiana, destrukcja, rozwój, perswazja.

The Book of Revelation is filled with transformations. The prevailing assessment links these exclusively with the advance of destruction; exegesis, however, allows us also to discern development, which proceeds in parallel with a dynamic of movement reflected in the choice of verbs. The setting is not merely the human interior or ethical decisions, but also space – both physical territory and the space distinguished in religious language, that is, space connected with the dwelling of God and of spirits.

The perception of the protagonist of the Apocalypse of St John, and thereby the perception of the audience, is subjected to more than a dozen spaces, among which are, inter alia: heaven, the islands, the earth and the forms distinguished within it such as deserts, mountains and rivers, the sea, the city, the temple, the abyss, the lake of fire and brimstone, and the air – also as a space of phenomena. They are introduced at times several times over, in a sequence amounting across the whole

text to roughly fifty entries/shots. Perceived in the order in which they are positioned within the text, they create an impression of expansion, from the small island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea (Rev 1) to the Holy City descending from heaven, possessing no boundaries (Rev 21).

In examining the transformation of space within the Apocalypse of St John, account must be taken of the Hebrew roots of the apocalyptic genre,¹ which condition the manner of presenting events and interpersonal relations, and thereby also transformations in space, with a very strong and characteristic multisensory cast.² At the foundation of the choice of literary devices in Semitic rhetoric lies the intention of drawing the audience into an experience of encounter and confrontation. For this reason one may legitimately speak of the presence of sensory landscapes in the final book of the Bible.³ What distinguishes them from the notion of space as such is their mode of organisation, which is laid out by the senses. The ancient Semite distinguishes seven of them, including – alongside the sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch recognised in Europe – also movement and speech (the production of sound and its interpretation).⁴ The dynamic characteristic of these underlies both perception and the specificity of spatial transformation. Although in the Apocalypse sensory landscapes are most frequently filled with a multitude of stimuli, perceived by several senses operating in synergy, in the majority of them one may distinguish a dominant sense and, on the basis of an analysis of the description, assess the direction of transformation. A characteristic feature of Semitic linguistic formulations is the construction of an image in a manner derived from the observation of phenomena in everyday life. What is thus marked here is a sequence of sensual reactions, together with a predilection for enumerating elements/components rather than offering definitions. An example may be the presentation of the thunderbolt in the Apocalypse, which is described not by a single word but by a chain of expressions conveying the stages of this phenomenon and its dynamic of descent – flashes of lightning (apprehensible against the screen of the sky), voices and peals of thunder (apprehensible in the space between heaven and earth), and

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- 1 Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, "Apokaliptyka u progu ery chrześcijańskiej," *Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny* 1 (1988): 55–56.
 - 2 Joanna Nowińska, "The Presence and the Role of Senses in Proto-Apocalyptic Book of Joel," *The Biblical Annals* 16/1 (2026): 28.
 - 3 Hanre Janse van Rensburg, "All the Apocalypse a stage: The ritual function of apocalyptic literature," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 75/4 (2019): a5822.
 - 4 Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2012), 67–77.

an earthquake. The Apocalypse of St John, despite being recorded in Koine, reflects – in both its linguistic and its semantic constructions – Hebrew modes of thought, theologically enriched by the New Testament message, of which it likewise constitutes the culmination. For this reason, one of the constructional elements of the descriptions of the transformation of sensory landscapes is the play of sounds, apprehensible during a vocal reading of the text and thus operating within the space of the text's reception, bound up with its performativity. This will make it possible to verify the mood of a given scene and its shifts. In the oral culture from which the Apocalypse springs, this level of the content's impact was of great importance. For this reason the treatment of the subject proceeds from an analysis of the text in a synchronic perspective with elements of exegesis, so as subsequently to incorporate into it elements of ethnography, sensory anthropology and the study of orality, in order to demonstrate the specific character and the sequence of the transformations of sensory landscapes within the Apocalypse of St John, together with the message that issues from them.

The Introduction of Sensual Landscapes in the Apocalypse of St John

The Apocalypse of St John possesses a construction that combines narrative with elements of drama, songs, letters, maxims and blessings. Similarly, in the arrangement of its content it reflects a diversity of experiences and emotions of great intensity, at times extremely difficult, which were the lot of the community of the early Church within which it arose. The individual sensory landscapes are introduced in this book in several ways. Some of them are announced, and the attention of the audience is shifted towards them – as in Rev 1:7 or Rev 3:20. This is accomplished by means of the imperative *ἰδοὺ* (from the verb *εἶδον*), which functions as a particle while at the same time placing a temporal accent on this moment, this instant, thereby enabling the apprehension of the landscape. This expression underscores the becoming of the sensory landscape *now*, and thus also suggests the dynamic contained within it, as is especially evident in Rev 5:5, which introduces the space of a victory already accomplished.

Other sensory landscapes are opened before the protagonist, and thereby also before the audience, and are preceded by the verb *ἀνοίγω*, whose subject is God. So it is, for instance, in the case of Rev 4:1, which introduces the landscape of God's dwelling – and, more than that, the

very heart of His identity – or in the space of the temple in heaven in Rev 5. There the visual perception begins with the apprehension of the effect of opening (*Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ θύρα ἠνεωγμένη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ* – Rev 4:1). Such an introduction presupposes the natural inaccessibility of these spaces to the protagonist.

Many sensory landscapes in the Apocalypse are apprehended by means of a visual stimulus, as marked by the formula *καὶ εἶδον* and *μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον*. So it is, for instance, in the case of the space of the whole earth (the four corners of the earth) in Rev 7:1 and the mountain in Rev 14:1. Visual perception is here described in accordance with the dynamic of that reception: first the large elements, situated nearer or giving such an impression by reason of their size, and only then the subsequent ones. Thus in Rev 7:1 the angels are mentioned first as standing, and only afterwards the fact of their location at the four corners of the earth, while in Rev 14:1 the Lamb is mentioned first, in the same posture as the angels, and then the place. In this way the weight of perception in the process of understanding the content conveyed within the landscape is sanctioned, and its laws – in accordance with which conclusions are likewise drawn – are honoured. In parallel, the agents of the dynamic that will shortly animate the landscape are thereby marked.

Equally often, spaces are delineated by sound/voice, such as the space between heaven and earth in Rev 8:7 or heaven in Rev 9:1. The sound of the trumpet (Rev 8:7; 9:1) here signals both place and change/dynamic. Rev 9:13, by contrast, introduces – after the sound of the trumpet – a voice from the four horns of the altar, which is before God and which serves as a mediation of the Person of YHWH. Sound likewise delineates the space of Babylon: it is opened by the voice of an angel announcing the fall of the city (Rev 18:2) and closed by the proclamation of an absence of voice, which stands as a synonym for the absence of communication and of the flourishing of life (Rev 18:23).

The movement of figures within the indicated spaces is at times employed to mark the boundaries of a space and at the same time to suggest dominion over a given portion of it – as in the case of the angel presented as standing with one foot on the sea and the other on the land in Rev 10:1-2, or the falling star that gains access to the shaft of the abyss in Rev 9:1. A sensory landscape delineated by the synergy of kinesis and touch is the temple in Rev 11:1-2.

Some sensory landscapes are introduced by way of recollection from memory, as known to the audience and experienced in the present. So it is in the case of the place of dwelling of the recipients of the letter to the Church in Pergamum – a place defined by the throne of Satan (Rev

2:13) – or the landscape of Thyatira (Rev 2:24) and Sardis (Rev 3:4), described in the key of interpersonal relations. There are also in the Apocalypse landscapes burdened with history, such as Har-Magedon (Rev 16:16), that is, the mountain and the city of Megiddo situated upon it, a place that is a paradigm of battle and defeat, of extreme exertion and onslaught, whose introduction requires no commentary – or Babylon (Rev 14:8; 18:2-19), the place of deportation and of Israel's experience of trauma following the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the exile from the Promised Land. There are also spaces known previously but shown towards the end of the Apocalypse in a new guise, full of unearthly beauty – such as the Jerusalem of Rev 21:2, 10-25.

One may also observe a division of space within sensory landscapes whose threshold is delineated by an experience constituting a synergy of the senses. This occurs in the case of the New Jerusalem, where those who wash their robes may enter (Rev 22:14), while that which is unclean has no admittance into the interior of the city (Rev 21:27; 22:15). The terms employed here – *κοινός, βδέλυγμα* and *ψεύδος* – evoke the Hebrew *תועבת*, a multisensory expression describing things that arouse revulsion, that have nothing in common with God, and that are opposed to life. Likewise, entry into the sensory landscape around the Person of the One seated on the throne (Rev 4:2-5:14) or into the space around the Harlot (Rev 17:3-18) is not possible without standing in the Spirit (Rev 4:2; 17:3).

Types of Sensory Landscape in the Apocalypse of St John

An analysis of the sensory landscapes in the Apocalypse of St John makes it possible to identify spaces marked distinctly by one of the senses, as well as those in which a synergy of the senses occurs. Some of them are a kind of 'room' within some larger space, retaining their distinctiveness. Noticing them is significant from the standpoint of the theme of the dynamic within them, since it allows the force and specific character of destruction or development to be better recognised and defined.

A space marked distinctly by the sense of sight is the New Jerusalem, although its perception comes about as a result of kinesis as a physical experience, or of a dynamic experienced in the spirit (*καὶ ἀπήνεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι ἐπὶ ὄρος* – Rev 21:10). The description of this sensory landscape likewise closes within the bounds of the sense of sight, with a shift of attention to light – divine light – which renders superfluous the radiance of the sun and the moon (Rev 22:5). The sense of sight also

delineates heaven, shown as a screen in Rev 12:1-4, which constitutes the landscape for the presentation of the pregnant Woman and her identity, and of the Dragon. It is striking that in this presentation day and night occur as if simultaneously (*a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars* – Rev 12:1 – and the Dragon, whose *tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth* – Rev 12:4).

Spaces marked by the sense of speech are the seven churches of Rev 2-3. Announced by Jesus in the command to address writings to them, and closed in turn by promises to the one who conquers, they take shape within a first-person delivery, in interpersonal communication.

A markedly sonic landscape may be found in Rev 19:1-7. It is constituted by an arrangement of voices, which serve as different media of a single message: the truth about God, the worth of God. It is accompanied solely by movement. Within the content of these sounds a visual and olfactory experience is evoked (smoke – Rev 19:3), as well as a tactile one (blood – Rev 19:2). A similarly sonic landscape, though less saturated with sound, is the space before the throne of God described in Rev 7:9-17, where the remaining senses (the touch of robes – Rev 7:9, 14; of palms – Rev 7:9; and of blood – Rev 7:14; the experience of the touch of the sun – Rev 7:16; of the eyes – Rev 7:17; and of movement – Rev 7:15-17) are merely woven into the main current by way of reminder. Marked exclusively by sound is the space of heaven in Rev 9:13-14 and in Rev 11:15-19 (here a mention of movement still appears – Rev 11:16, 19).

Through reference to the sense of taste, the space of the interior of the human body is presented in Rev 10:10. It is filled by the little scroll that is consumed, yielding an experience of bitterness and sweetness, and at the same time depicting the interiorisation of the content delivered by God.⁵ This constitutes a preparation for entry into the space of the temple, the measuring of its parts, and the further prophesying in the Holy City; it anticipates the conditions under which this will be accomplished.

The sense of touch, by contrast, comes exceptionally to the fore in the space of the temple in Rev 11:1-2. It is experienced in the act of measuring and of trampling, alongside which a mention of movement appears. A particularly tactile landscape is the space of the pouring out of the bowls, which might be located between heaven and earth, and of the sea, including the throne of the Beast, in Rev 16:1-12. Here a reaction in

5 Meredith J.C. Warren, "Tasting the Little Scroll: A Sensory Analysis of Divine Interaction in Revelation 10.8-10," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40/1(2017): 113-114.

the form of humanity's turning towards God is expected, but it does not occur. Touch also very strongly marks the space of the harvest and the treading of the grapes in Rev 14:14-20, where it combines with kinesis; analogous sensual accents are found in the space where Satan is bound – Rev 20:1-2.

The designation olfactory landscape may be applied to the space of heaven in Rev 8:3-4 and to the shaft of the Abyss in Rev 9:2-3. The first is filled with incense, the second with smoke. They offer, in the key of Semitic imagery, an experience of the nearness of God (Rev 8:3-4) and of a stifling closeness, an inability to discern reality accurately (Rev 9:2-3).

The sense of kinesis is characteristic of the whole Apocalypse, which likewise confirms its orientation towards life, but it dominates especially in the landscape uncovered after the opening of the sixth seal (Rev 6:12-17). Here the constitutive elements of nature, of the created world – humans included – are in motion. Its avalanche-like quality, the abruptness of its shifting between them, produces an extraordinarily powerful impression. Analogously marked by movement is the space around the Harlot, designated 'the mystery of her and of the Beast' (cf. Rev 17:8-14), supplemented by a gustatory and olfactory landscape (Rev 17:15-18).

The remaining spaces of the Apocalypse are distinctly multisensory. These include: the space of heaven (Rev 1:7), Patmos (Rev 1:9-20), heaven (Rev 4:2-5:14), the spaces emerging after the opening of the first five seals (Rev 6:1-13), the space of the halting of life and of sealing (Rev 7:1-8), in heaven (Rev 8:1-5), in nature after the successive soundings of the first four trumpets (Rev 8:6-12), between heaven and earth (Rev 8:13), on the earth during the locust invasion (Rev 9:3-10), the action of the angels from beyond the Euphrates (Rev 9:15-21), the space of the earth (Rev 10:1-10); the city (Rev 11:3-13), heaven (Rev 12:7-12 – touch, movement, speech), the earth (Rev 12:6, 13-13:17), the mountain (Rev 14:1-5), between earth and heaven (Rev 14:6-13), heaven (15:1-8), the Euphrates (Rev 16:12-14), Har-Magedon (Rev 16:16), the space encompassing heaven and earth (Rev 16:17-21), Patmos (Rev 17:1-2), the desert (Rev 17:3-6), between heaven and earth (Rev 18:1), Babylon (Rev 18:2-19), the sea (Rev 18:21), the landscape of the disappearance of sensual experiences (Rev 18:22-24), the space arising around the One seated on the horse (Rev 19:11-21), the space with thrones and around them (Rev 20:4), the space around the Holy City including it (Rev 20:9), the space with the assembled dead (*νεκροὶ* – Rev 20:12-13), the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev 20:14; 21:8), the space of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1-8), and an unnamed space (Rev 22:6-13). The enumeration presented makes it possible to discern the principal spatial/physical places as well as the

relational and spiritual spaces. In each of them several sensual experiences appear. In some, the unfolding of destruction may be discerned, and in certain others, transformations in the direction of development.

Changes within Sensory Landscapes: Destruction

The Apocalypse of St John depicts both fragmentary, lasting destructions within space and visions of total destructions, whose realisation it neither states nor situates in time (and so it does not establish the certainty of their occurrence). Rich and varied sensual experiences nevertheless render them strongly evocative, and thereby persuasive.⁶

The apparently tranquil island of Patmos (Rev 1:9), through the act of exiling Christians upon it on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus, becomes a prison.⁷ Washed about by the sea, which makes flight impossible, it kills off any impulse towards liberation, while the successive transports of prisoners arriving by sea (as may be surmised from the context of the Apocalypse's composition and from the suggestive image of Rev 13:1) transform it into a space devoid of hope. There, however, God's communication with humanity – supplying auditory stimuli (the voice – Rev 1:10-12, 15, 17-20), visual stimuli (the image of one like the Son of Man – Rev 1:12-17) and tactile stimuli (the touch of Jesus' hand) – will bring animation and stimulate movement (the act of writing – Rev 1:20), affording a foretaste of development.

A similar impression of an apparently tranquil space is created by the territory distinguished by the four angels restraining the four winds of the earth in Rev 7:1-8. The removal of the movement of air from it makes the dispersal of plants impossible, and thereby blocks vegetation. This is therefore a highly destructive transformation. It is described in a tactile register – the angels hold (*κρατοῦντες* – Rev 7:1) the four winds of the earth. Movement apprehensible through touch is halted by the use of the same sense. The scene nevertheless ends with a vision of destruction, ultimately without stating that it has occurred.

Destruction also takes place in the space of the temple in Rev 11:1-2, and is felt with particular keenness by reason of an almost monolithic haptic-kinetic image. The reality of the experience, underscored by the

6 Knut Backhaue, "Inspiration and Truth in the Book of Revelation. An Exegetical Comment on the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Document *Ispirazione e verità della Sacra Scrittura* (2014)," *The Biblical Annals* 8/1(2018): 84.

7 See more: Adam Ryszard Sikora, *Patmos – wyspa św. Jana. Miejsca na Patmos związane z Apostołem znane z tradycji spisanych i ustnych* (Rzeszów: Bonus Liber, 2022).

Semitic colouring of the act of measuring,⁸ and its traumatic quality – for the sacrum of the place of God's dwelling, of the human encounter with God, is destroyed – heighten the evocativeness of this image.

Spectacular changes take place within the landscape of Rev 6:12-17 and Rev 16:1-12. In the first of these texts, destruction is begun and, in a sense, also closed by the multisensory experience of an earthquake (6:12 and 6:14 – the moving of the mountains), and after it follows a change in cosmic space: the discolouration of the sun and moon (possibly an eclipse). The subsequent transformations are the disturbance of the position of the stars and their falling to the earth (Rev 6:13) and the rolling up of heaven (Rev 6:14). The senses of movement and of sight dominate here. The mention of the change of the sun's colour to black and the moon's to blood-red (Rev 6:12) inspires dread on a first reading, but, when confronted with the results of everyday observation of the world, it evokes the experience of a solar eclipse and a lunar eclipse. Similarly, the impression of a rolled-up heaven arises as a result of the configuration of the clouds. These are therefore not transformations drawn from the world of fantasy, and their decoding requires simply active observation of the created world. People who have no contact with God⁹ nevertheless read them as an announcement of destruction (Rev 6:16-17).

Within Rev 16:1-12, the foregrounding of the sense of touch renders the impression of destruction acutely oppressive. As a result of the pouring out of the first bowl, a painful and malignant sore appears on the people subject to the Beast (Rev 16:2), suggesting a visual and olfactory experience. Similar sensations are implied by the sea, which through the touch of the bowl's contents becomes as it were the blood of a dead man (Rev 16:3), or the rivers and springs of water turned to blood (Rev 16:4), reinforced still further by the mention of drinking, of gustatory stimuli. The last of these transformations evokes the phenomenon of the proliferation of algae in the Nile during its annual floods, which implies an olfactory experience – the stench spreading around from the decomposing fish that did not survive the disturbed oxygen economy.¹⁰ The tactile experience that comes about after the pouring out of the fourth bowl, encompassing the perception of the heat of fire and of scorching (Rev 16:9), will pass, under the influence of the next bowl, into

8 Matthijs Den Dulk, "Measuring the Temple of God: Revelation 11.1-2 and the Destruction of Jerusalem," *New Testament Studies* 54(2008): 438.

9 Wojciech Popielewski, „Rozgniewały się narody (Ap 11,18),” *Verbum Vitae* 10 (2006): 140.

10 Filip Taterka, „Plagi egipskie w świetle badań egiptologicznych,” *Interlinie* 5 (2012): 1, 54.

a haptic-gustatory experience – the gnawing of tongues (Rev 16:10) – and a sonic one – blasphemous speech (Rev 16:11). The darkness introduced into the kingdom of the Beast transforms this space; it does not inspire people to move towards the light (Rev 16:10ff.). The destruction on various levels, partial, that comes about as a result of the pouring out of these five bowls is not the goal. The sensory landscapes created were, through their transformations and their impact upon the audience, to lead people to turn towards God. Yet this does not happen.

The destruction of part of a space comes about after the sounding of the first four trumpets (Rev 8:6-12) and in the space of the city where the Two Witnesses are killed (Rev 11:13). These images are extraordinarily saturated with sensation. The first contains auditory stimuli (the trumpeting – Rev 8:7, 8, 10, 12), olfactory ones (the earth, the trees and the grass burn – Rev 8:7), gustatory ones (the waters become wormwood – Rev 8:11), tactile ones (hail falls – Rev 8:7), tactile and olfactory ones (and fire – Rev 8:7; a mountain belching fire – Rev 8:8; a blazing star – Rev 8:10) and visual ones (fire – Rev 8:7-10; blood – Rev 8:7-8; the eclipse of sun and moon – Rev 8:12). The second contains auditory, visual, tactile and kinetic stimuli, perceived when the collapse of the city and the earthquake occur (Rev 11:13). By reason of the force with which these elements act upon the audience, the fact very often escapes notice that in the first landscape only a third of the space and a third of its components are destroyed, and in the second only a tenth of the city. This suggests a hope of regeneration, which in the case of Rev 11:13 is dispelled only by the fact of the death of seven thousand people. An analogous impression is conveyed by the breaking apart of the great city into three parts in Rev 16:19, without any statement of total destruction. This landscape is strongly sonic, visual, tactile and kinetic – it is constituted by flashes of lightning and voices and peals of thunder and a great earthquake (Rev 16:18), the cities falling into ruin (Rev 16:19), the tasting of God's disapproval (Rev 16:19), the fleeing of the islands (Rev 16:20) and hail (Rev 16:21). The whole sensual experience is multiplied by blasphemous speech (Rev 16:21).

The vision of the total destruction of the city, by contrast, is presented in Rev 18:2-19. Here all the senses come to the fore: hearing (weeping – Rev 18:9, 11, 15, 19; lament – Rev 18:9; speech full of fear – Rev 18:10; mourning – Rev 18:11, 15, 19; crying out – Rev 18:18-19), sight (the detailed description of riches that find no buyer – Rev 18:12-13; and of those lost – 18:16-17; the mention of smoke – Rev 18:9), smell (the smoke of the fire – Rev 18:9, 18; cinnamon, fragrant ointment, perfumes, oils, incense – Rev 18:13), taste (wine – Rev 18:6, 13; oil, flour and wheat – Rev

18:13; the experience of famine – Rev 18:8), and the tactile senses (burning in fire – Rev 18:8; gold and silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, scarlet, wood, ivory, bronze, iron, marble – Rev 18:12, 16; the casting of dust upon the head – Rev 18:19). This image is set alongside the landscape of an absence of sensual experiences, such as sound and movement (Rev 18:22-23), where only one olfactory and visual experience remains – the blood of prophets and saints and of all who were slain on the earth (Rev 18:24). This duplication enlarges the perception of destruction and reinforces its vision.

A landscape exceptionally saturated with sensation is likewise presented in Rev 9:3-10. It is constituted by an invasion of locusts. The stench of smoke, the terrifying sound of wings like the din of many-horsed chariots rushing into battle (Rev 9:9), create the atmosphere of a battlefield where destruction takes place in the present moment. The touch of stings as of scorpions, and teeth as of lions, arouse pain, even if the deadliness – whose target is the people who do not have the seal of God upon their foreheads – is in this scene halted by Him.¹¹ Destruction seems to threaten from every side.

At the antipodes of this sensory landscape lie the visions of destruction contained in Rev 14:6-13. Three prophetic images are to communicate to the inhabitants of the earth the destruction of evil and in this way to restrain them from continuing to yield to the influence of the devil. They are to act upon the senses in such a way as to mobilise the audience to reflection, to a re-examination of their decisions, and to a return to God. Each of the images is heavily saturated with sensation. The first kinetically invites movement in response to the movement of God (Rev 14:7); the second adds to this a gustatory experience (wine – Rev 14:8). The third furnishes an auditory experience (the loud voice of the envoy – Rev 14:9), a haptic one (a mark on the forehead or hand – Rev 14:9), a tactile and olfactory one (fire and brimstone – Rev 14:10), a gustatory one (wine, undiluted – Rev 14:10), and underscores how oppressive these are by pointing to their duration, without rest (Rev 14:11). The effect of this warning, delivered through a threefold suggesting of a change in the sensory landscape, is nevertheless not made known.

Gustatory, olfactory and kinetic stimuli are contained in the image of the destruction of the Harlot – her being devoured and burned with

11 More: Joanna Nowińska, „Bóg Panem czasu i wydarzeń. Studium nad czasownikiem ἐδόθη w Apokalipsie św. Jana,” in *Pan moją mocą i pieśnią (Ps 118,14). Prace dedykowane Księdzu Profesorowi Tadeuszowi Brzegowemu w 65. Rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Stanisław Hałas (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, 2006), 159–168.

fire (Rev 17:15-18). Beneath this personal cipher lies a description of dispositions.¹² The motif of the destruction of the Harlot's body is preceded by her being made a desert (*ἐρημόω*) and made naked, which contains a measure of haptic and visual stimuli. The threefold destruction (Rev 17:16) suggests, in accordance with the Semitic mentality, the fullness/maximum of destruction.

The space around the One seated on the horse likewise contains a destructive element. This consists of the birds (Rev 19:17-21) summoned to devour the corpses of people and horses (Rev 19:18). A gustatory and haptic experience is here combined with a mention of their movement (Rev 19:17). There is, however, no statement that the action to which they are summoned has been accomplished, although the horror of the lack of burial, of being cut off from one's kin after death,¹³ renders this vision strongly evocative.

In Rev 20:9 the destruction of evil in the space around the Holy City is described. Curiously, the space becomes a stage for the destroying fire falling from heaven – and thus for the experiencing of tactile, olfactory, visual and sonic stimuli – but it does not itself undergo destruction. Those annihilated here are all who were drawn together by the devil (Rev 20:8).

It is a truism that there is destruction in the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev 19:20; 20:10; 21:8) – it need not be stated, for the construction of this landscape speaks for itself. The multiplied sensual experience – olfactory (brimstone, fire) and tactile (fire, hot brimstone) – becomes the lot of the Beast and the False Prophet (Rev 19:20) and of the devil (Rev 20:10), and either a vision of destruction or a statement of partial destruction already in the making – for the cowardly, the unfaithful, the abominable, murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars (Rev 21:8). Almost synonymous with it is the image of the lake of fire, with an olfactory and tactile and visual experience, into which Death and Hades are cast (Rev 20:14), and anyone not found written in the book of life (Rev 20:15). The existence of two such closely similar spaces gives pause. The designation second death (*ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος* – Rev 21:8) is, however, attached by the inspired author to the victims of the lake of fire and to the people of Rev 21:8. This permits the conclusion that the Beast, the False Prophet and the devil undergo total, irreversible destruction,

12 Stanisław Witkowski, *Wielki Babilon w Janowej Apokalipsie jako kryptonim imperialnego Rzymu oraz wrogię Bogu świata* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo La Salette, 2012), 46–54.

13 Stephen L. Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," *Religion Compass* 6/1 (2007): 668.

to nothing, whereas death and Hades (Sheol) and the people indicated undergo merely burning. It turns out, then, that in the second case there is no annihilation.

The sensory landscape of the Euphrates basin in the Apocalypse has two manifestations. In the first, contained in Rev 9:15-21, destruction takes place; in the second, in Rev 16:12-14, there is a demonstration intended to announce it. These are presented with the use of visual and olfactory stimuli together with kinesis in the image of the horses breathing fire, smoke and brimstone (Rev 9:17-18) and of riders with breastplates the colour of hyacinth, fire and brimstone (Rev 9:17), and of haptic stimuli (the horses' tails, like serpents, suppose a movement of constriction – Rev 9:19), to which are added tactile stimuli in the image of the frogs (Rev 16:13) and the drying-up water (Rev 16:12), as well as those from the domain of kinesis (the possible movement of the kings – Rev 16:12 – and the active movement of the demons – the frogs – Rev 16:14). These categories are reinforced by an experience from the past, associated with the Babylonian exile (cf. Ezek 1:1-2; 2 Kgs 24-25), which makes them akin to the vision of destruction introduced by the name Har-Magedon (Rev 16:16), which evokes, *inter alia*, the defeat of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:29). The dynamic of the gathering of armies, mentioned in Rev 16:16, revives these associations and activates a fear long present. Curiously, there is no mention in the Apocalypse of St John of the destruction of any of these places.

The Apocalypse also contains an image of destruction averted. This takes place within the earth, where the Serpent, depicting evil, pours out of its gullet water like a river after the Woman, in order to sweep her away (Rev 12:15). Touch is here to prove deadly. The earth, however, swallows the water (Rev 12:16), likewise opening its gullet, which points to a haptic and gustatory experience. A transformation towards development, or at least towards deliverance, is suggested by the mention from the sphere of kinesis of a standing still, that is, of the halting of this force of evil at the edge of the sea (Rev 12:18).

Changes within Sensory Landscapes: Development

A cursory reading of the Apocalypse may imply the impression that there is nothing in it but destruction. As the foregoing analyses have shown, however, even total destruction within individual sensory landscapes in the Apocalypse is not so frequent. Progress, by contrast, does take place here.

The communities of the churches of the Apocalypse in Rev 2-3 are led towards development. Each letter contains a proposal for emerging from the impasse, and therefore stimulates the space of hearing (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 23) and refers to taste (Rev 2:7, 14, 17, 20; 3:16, 20) or smell (Rev 3:18) or touch (Rev 2:27; 3:3, 5, 10, 11, 18), stirring kinesis (Rev 2:5, 16, 23, 25; 3:4, 7, 9, 12) and at the same time introducing the movement of God (Rev 2:16, 25; 3:3, 7-8, 11, 20, 21).

A transformation of the space itself in the direction of development – or rather, of the offering of development to those who enter it – may be observed in Rev 4:2-5:12, where the human being is invited to enter the space of God's dwelling and beholds His greatness, is able to recognise His identity and glory, rendered by creation, and the Lord's engagement in the human situation. Progress is reflected first by the dynamic of communication, accomplished in the language of theophany (flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder issuing from the throne towards those surrounding it – Rev 4:4), the movement of the figures of the elders casting their crowns before the One seated on the throne (Rev 4:10; 5:8) or the movement of the living creatures (Rev 5:8), and the blazing of the lamps of fire (Rev 4:5). It is intensified by sound, mounting – beginning with the four living creatures (Rev 4:8), through the twenty-four elders (Rev 4:11), the common song of both groups, to the voices of myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands of angels (Rev 5:11-12) and the whole of creation in all the spaces (Rev 5:13-15). This harmonised multi-sonority shows the possibility of coexistence and of creativity; it affords a space of development and authenticity.¹⁴

A different, though equally original, provenance belongs to the space on the mountain in Rev 14:1-5, where the Lamb is present and with Him the 144,000 sealed with His name and the name of His Father on their foreheads (Rev 14:1). This space is filled – and, from the semantic side, constituted – by a sound that eludes any unequivocal definition, described in a multiplicity of comparative elements as a voice from heaven, a voice like the voice of many waters and like the voice of a great peal of thunder. And the voice that I heard was like harpists striking their harps. And they sing as it were a new song... (Rev 14:2-3). This conveys the singularity of the auditory experience, which reflects the lightness proper to creative work. In the mentality of the ancient Semites, only the experience of freedom/liberation made creation possible (cf. Ps 137).

14 This is a highly dynamic and picturesque space, where the description – subordinated to the well-known Hebrew rhetorical device of concentric structure – becomes legible only once a schema of the arrangement of all its elements has been drawn out.

For this reason no one is able to learn the new song except those who experience it (Rev 14:3). It cannot be taken over, it cannot be imitated or simulated. It is not a repeated experience but a present one, and for this reason it may be classed as an aspect of development. The elements of kinesis in this image (the standing posture – Rev 14:1; accompaniment, walking – Rev 14:4) confirm the context/climate/aura of progress.

A space in which development may be observed is the earth, within which the harvest and the vintage take place in Rev 14:14-20. In these sensory landscapes the dominant sense of touch, together with elements of kinesis, guarantees the verifiability of development, its apprehensibility to the human being. The gathering of the crops itself suggests, of its own accord, their transformation, and so anticipates further action. Similarly, the vegetation mentioned by the river of the water of life in the Holy City (Rev 22:2) heralds development within this space. The change will yield a multiplication of sensory experiences, not only through the movement of people, but also through the appearance of fruits, changes of scent, the offering of new gustatory and tactile stimuli, and a therapeutic effect towards the nations (Rev 22:2).¹⁵

An analysis of the descriptions of space in the Apocalypse, with account taken of their multisensoriness, brings to light the contrast that arises between the staticity of the space of the Holy City and the dynamic of the landscapes where destruction takes place. In the New Jerusalem, as a space, no change occurs apart from the entry of the nations and the kings of the earth (Rev 21:24-25) and the transformation resulting from the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2). This is an enormous contrast with the City called Sodom and Egypt, where the Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8), which collapsed in its tenth part (Rev 11:13), or with Babylon, whose destruction is described in Rev 16:19-20 and its effects in Rev 18. This does not, however, signify an absence of sensory experiences. The landscape of the Holy City is created by a multitude of visual elements glittering in the light of God, such as precious stones (Rev 21:19-20), pearls, gold (Rev 22), glass, acquiring various formats through their shapes (Rev 21:16) and the dynamic of light (Rev 21:23; 22:1). It is also a space strongly marked by kinesis – in its light the nations walk (Rev 21:24), their treasures are brought into it (Rev 21:26), and the kings of the earth themselves bring in their wealth (Rev 21:24).

15 More: Joanna Nowińska, „Leczenie narodów w rzeczywistości Nowego Jeruzalem – obraz liści z Ap 22,2” in *Życie wieczne*, eds. G. Baran et al. (Tarnów: Biblos, 2017), 69–86.

Reassurance or Terror? The Oral Features of the Descriptions of Sensory Landscapes and Their Orientation

The transformations of sensory landscapes in the Apocalypse possess one further sensual level, beyond those indicated. This is the sonic impact upon the recipient of a text read aloud.¹⁶ It grows out of the oral provenance of the culture of the ancient Semites, which lies at the foundation of the text of the Apocalypse of St John. The euphonic level intensifies or sublimates the mood created by the semantics. The development that takes place within the sensory landscape of Rev 14:1-5 acquires a cast of lightness, fantasy and delicacy through the euphony of the phrase *ὡς κιθαρῳδῶν κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν* (as if harpists were striking their harps – Rev 14:2). The recurrence of references to voice in the analysed spaces affords an awareness of, and a grounding in, a single source of this voice, which emerges from its many media.¹⁷

The voices of the individual trumpets enumerated in numerical order (Rev 8:6-12) shape and reinforce the conviction that regeneration has a chance of coming about, since the destruction announced after each of them is only partial. By means of this method of ordering the material, proper to oral cultures, the recipient is assured that the impression of total destruction is not the truth. The repeated schema *Καὶ ὁ (...) ἐσάλπισεν καὶ ...* (Rev 8:7) operates colometrically.¹⁸ Within this sensory landscape the recipient is drawn into a steady rhythm which, when the semantics are followed attentively, reassures. So it is likewise in Rev 16:1-12, where there is added to this the repeatability of the reaction of humanity's closing itself against God in the face of harm, trauma and toil. This colophon of the entire set of phrases after each bowl intensifies the impression of people's obstinate persistence in their own views, and encloses the whole sensory landscape in a rhythm of slamming-shut, with a sense of a blockade against change. This structure nevertheless allows the recipient to enter without hesitation into the sensory landscape drawn here and, through the space of various impressions created within it, to experience on the skin of the protagonists decisions that

16 More: Lourdes García Ureña, "The Book of Revelation: A Written Text Towards the Oral Performance," in *Between Orality and Literacy: Communication and Adaptation in Antiquity*, ed. Ruth Scodel (Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2014), 309–330.

17 Joanna Nowińska, *Co słyszysz poza słowem? Sound design Apokalipsy św. Jana* (Warszawa: Vocatio, 2016), 170.

18 Kayle B. de Waal, *An Aural-Performance Analysis of Revelation 1 and 11* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2015), 14–15.

they themselves often make – and which are not constructive – and to see their consequences, so as to draw conclusions.

Landscapes saturated with olfactory stimuli abolish the distance between the recipient and the person or force represented by the scent, and so intensify the reaction – inviting into relationship or repelling. The incense offered before God in Rev 8:1 affords an experience of His nearness, whereas the acrid smoke of burning brimstone (inter alia in Rev 9:17) makes breathing impossible and repels. In this way the recipient also gains a more vivid access to recognising the values being conveyed in a given landscape, and thereby finds it easier afterwards to decide in which direction to go.

The combining of haptic-kinaesthetic elements – such as proskynesis or the holding of a palm – with phonic elements such as short invocations of the *Amen* type or rhythmicised utterances such as ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ (Rev 7:10) renders the sensual landscapes performative, strongly affecting and inviting to action, which makes the recipient a participant in the content, thereby ensuring its comprehension and interiorisation. It is worth noting that in the Apocalypse this always occurs in reference to God, His power, and the salvation offered by Him (cf. Rev 4:2-5:14; Rev 15:1-8; or Rev 19:1-7).

The richness of sensory landscapes, drawn for instance through the enumeration of many referents with differing sensory profiles, as is the case with the wealth of Babylon (Rev 18:11-19), builds in the ear of the recipient a mounting, cumulative sensory effect. Its disintegration shows that support is created neither by place nor by sensual experience, but by God, who encompasses each of these spaces as their ruler and is present in each. The sensory landscapes, with the dynamic of their transformations, are situated within a construction whose sequence – the experience of God, and then entry into the spaces of human experience – makes it possible to order well in one's mind the hierarchy of points of reference, while at the same time assuring that no element – and no sensory landscape either – is self-governing, so that there is no spectre of automatic destruction or of changes over which no one would have any influence.

Conclusion

The transformation of every space within the Apocalypse has a persuasive role. The action upon the senses plays a key part here, for it implies a natural reaction on the part of both the protagonists and the audience. That reaction may be fruitful and impelling towards development, or

sobering, compelling reflection. The remarkably interesting and rich changes within the spaces outlined in the Apocalypse are not chaotic. All of them are subject to the dominion of God. Entering into them, engaging with them, discovering the parallels or transfers from the present day, allows one to discover that in everyday life the human being does not confront them alone and may, in their face, choose God as guide and defender. And with Him, the direction is nearness in relationship, certainty, and always the possibility of perceiving a way out of the situation.

The arrangement of sensory landscapes in the Apocalypse is closed by the Holy City, with its stability, its richness and its therapeutic space for the nations. It offers nearness to God and the certainty of knowledge (light, entry through the heritage of Israel, a grounding upon the foundations of the Apostles) and excludes destruction (Rev 22:15). Such a finale pours in the hope that makes it possible to pass through the earlier spaces and not to give up.

The treatment of the sensory landscapes of the Apocalypse undertaken in the present article – concise, yet comprehensive – with respect to the changes occurring within them, is the first of its kind in the scholarly literature worldwide. It is located within the current of interdisciplinary research on the biblical text, bordering both on Biblical Performance Criticism and on affect theory. Yet the analysis of sensory landscapes affords, in confrontation with these directions, the possibility of recognising the point of departure – the sensual reactions out of which affect, and then emotions, only subsequently grow¹⁹. Taking account of this order makes it possible to gain a better view of changes in the text and in reality, as well as to discover the possibility of influencing one's own reactions to them through the use of the senses. It thus becomes useful not only scholarly but also for everyday existence.

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