

REFERENCES

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Goldstein, E.B. (Ed.) (2001). *Blackwell handbook of perception*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers. Pp 788. ISBN 0-631-20683-3. Price £85.00/\$131.95 (Hbk).

What is the life span of a handbook? This is probably the question the 31 contributors of *Blackwell Handbook of Perception* asked themselves before embarking on an attempt to summarize their individual fields in 30 pages each. "Will it be useful to students and professors alike?", "will it last?", and, most importantly, "is it worth my busy time?"

Blackwell Handbook of Perception is an up-to-date 800-page volume on basic research in the psychology of perception. Its 23 chapters cover all five human senses and are written by leading figures in their respective fields. The *Handbook* is clearly written and will be appreciated by undergraduate students taking an advance course in Perception as well as by first-year post-graduate students. Lecturers and professors will also find it useful to brush up their background knowledge and to update their lectures.

The quality of any handbook is very much dependent on its editor. In the present case, Blackwell publishers have made an excellent choice in trusting E. Bruce Goldstein. With a long experience with textbooks (his popular *Sensation and Perception* is now in its sixth edition), Goldstein has a keen sense for producing prose that is both informative and exciting to read. The quality of a handbook is, of course, also dependent on its contributors. Here again, the reader will be reassured to recognize well-known contributors and thus will be convinced that the information is correctly transcribed, although sometimes at the risk of being slightly biased towards the contributors' own research.

The *Handbook* is an excellent supplementary reference for an advance course in perception. With the possible exception of Wandell (1995), Bruce, Green, and Georgeson (1996), and Palmer (1999), most perception textbooks focus only on the most basic phenomena. In contrast, the *Handbook* provides an up-to-date coverage of the vast literature in perception, providing extensive references to the original work and highlights of other topics not covered because of space limitations. The senses other than vision are well represented, with 9 chapters dedicated exclusively to them. However, the *Handbook* is at its best in the chapters that cut across the senses, such as those on physiology and psychophysics, on multi-sensory integration, and on modularity. The reader will also certainly appreciate two fresh chapters on the interface between perception and art, on painting and music.

With a handbook limited to a single volume, the list of topics only superficially approached or missing altogether is quite understandably long. We can, however, regret the absence of contemporary issues that would interest young researchers. Amongst these issues, readers will be disappointed if they look for a critical assessment of studies in visual awareness and of the recent techniques in brain imaging. If one is to trust the judgement of high-impact journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, awareness and imaging (in particular fMRI) are by far the two most exciting contemporary perception topics.

Another chapter that would have been highly appreciated by students is a review of research methods (such as those used in psychophysics) and other methodological concepts (such as those used in computational modelling). Although some contributors take good care to describe their own specific methods (e.g., visual development), others are satisfied with a summary of the facts without providing the tools for the reader to evaluate the original literature independently. Finally, as a volume that seems primarily directed towards students, the *Handbook* is critically missing speculations on future trends.

I predict the lifetime of this handbook to be around five years. After that, the *Handbook* will face obsolescence because of new breakthroughs in perception, new techniques and improved methodologies, and, of course, new up-to-date handbooks. And this naturally answers my own personal question, which was: “What is the lifetime of a handbook review?”

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PASCAL MAMASSIAN

Psychology Department, University of Glasgow, UK