



# Senses and Society

## THEMATIC GROUP NEWSLETTER



Joana Vasconcelos, 'I'll Be Your Mirror' (2018)

Editorial Note

PAGES 2-3



PAGES 3-4

Senses  
on the BBC

PAGE 4



PUBLICATION  
HIGHLIGHTS  
PAGES 5-8

## Editorial Note

World events have swept us up, but there are the myriad alterations and accommodations we have been doing relentlessly for month after month, at home and at work, with students, colleagues, family members, children. Habits have shifted and been remade. The once-familiar now seems distant and inaccessible. But there does seem to be some light at the end of the tunnel at the time of writing.

This does not negate the loss so far, the fact that so many of us know of people either directly or indirectly who have contracted the virus, fallen ill, or worse. Over this time we have become used to sensory loss. Personally, I have not been able to see or hug my father, who has dementia and who has been protected from visitors under lockdown for many months. Visits have been from outside the building, looking through glass, like a prison visitor, speaking through a phone. And no hugs, no familiar smell, for almost a year. Many of us have similar stories. But our habits of writing about the senses, even if conceived in their everydayness, were premised on a different social and sensory world, one of relative — if unequally distributed — freedom of movement and interaction. Something over the past eleven months has shifted, that world seems at one remove, and while technology platforms have cemented their positions and we have become used to new working habits, this has involved far too much screen time, trapped again behind glass, seeing and interacting with the world at one remove.

There has been a longer gap than usual between issues of this newsletter. You're not going to read excuses. You are yourselves experts in changing habits and routines, delivering classes online, dealing with more stresses than ever before. But, as in so many areas of our personal and professional lives, we *will* be back on track.

***Trapped behind  
glass...***



Too much screen, too little  
time (not enough touch...)

Unsubtle metaphor of the  
light at the end of the tunnel



Some of you may be interested in some recent radio documentaries on the senses courtesy of the BBC, and these are discussed in the 'News' section below.

Don't forget, there are some active links (clickable URLs) on this Newsletter, especially useful for the 'Publication Highlights' section (pp.6-8).

As usual, do feel free to email me ([paterson@pitt.edu](mailto:paterson@pitt.edu)) with any relevant news, publications, or calls for papers that fellow members could benefit from.

**Mark Paterson**

**Vice-President & Newsletter Editor of TG07**

**Department of Sociology, University of Pittsburgh**

## News

A note on events and conferences now and in the future. The very day I am writing this is the first day of the rescheduled virtual version of the **ISA Forum of Sociology (Feb 23-28)**. Previous newsletters have mentioned the large number of panels and papers members of the group and the mailing list were involved in organizing and presenting when it was initially scheduled, July 2020. There is a tinge of regret because our Thematic Group decided we wouldn't participate in the rescheduled version, as timezones would have made the logistics difficult, and a virtual conference is suboptimal. The next ISA meeting in Melbourne, July 24-30, 2022, and undoubtedly some of us will meet there. There is further light at the end of the tunnel. **The Uncommon Senses III: Back to the Future of the Senses** conference has been rescheduled from May 2020 to a virtual conference 6-9 May, 2021. [Click here](#) for a flyer and see p.5 for more information.



## The senses on BBC Radio

As a long-time listener to BBC radio, I delight in finding programmes that deal with the senses. Usually years go by between them, but recently there have been two series on the senses. They are both currently available for streaming on the BBC Sounds website and app, and links to them are provided.



A five-part series simply called 'The Senses' is presented by the neuroscientist Guy Leschziner, who takes the familiar route of asking what neurological damage and genetic abnormalities can reveal about the sensory worlds we live in. The sound design is top notch, by the way, and one episode sonically recreates what happens in the case of someone whose inner ear is damaged and their inner

organs and movements drown out the sound of the outside world. Sounds amazing through headphones. Episodes include touch, hearing, smell & taste, vision, and the last one is synaesthesia.

'Anatomy of Touch' is a 5-part series in the wake of a large-scale online 'touch test' conducted during the first lockdown by a team including Michael Banissy and Alice Gregory at Goldsmiths and Aikaterini Fotopoulou at UCL. The final programme in that series, 'Digital Touch', features one of our mailing list members, Professor Carey Jewitt from UCL, who has been leading the fabulous



In\_Touch project and is one of the editors for the recently launched Sage journal *Multimodality and Society*. More on that publication later (p.8).

# Uncommon Senses Conference, May 6-9 2021

**A Zoom conference based in Montreal: information for participants. For PDF flyer [click here](#).**

Uncommon Senses III will open with a 90-minute plenary session at 1:00 pm (Montreal time) on Thursday May 6. The plenary speaker will be Ellen Lupton of the Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, New York. Her talk is entitled “Touchy Feely Manifesto: Design for the Senses.” Ellen will speak for 50 minutes followed by a 40 minute Q&A, moderated by one of the conference organizers. The plenary will be followed by a Virtual Get Together (or Virtual Consensus), on which more below. Two other plenaries will follow the same format.

The schedule otherwise consists of 2-3 concurrent 90-minute sessions spread over the ensuing three days – that is, there will be a total of between ten and fifteen 90-minute sessions per day, and between 30 and 45 sessions total. The conference program will list all of the presentations (name, title, abstract, timeslot) and will be posted on-line.

Tentative Session Times. 9:30-11:00 am, 1:30-1:00 pm, 1:30-3:00 pm, 3:30-5:00 pm.

Individual paper. If you proposed an individual paper, your presentation will be grouped with two other presentations on analogous topics. You will have 20 minutes to present your talk, followed by a 10-minute Q&A, moderated by one of the conference organizers. Please respect the time-limit! We expect that many of you will have a PowerPoint to accompany your talk, and we will be pleased to accommodate this.

Panel. If you proposed a panel, the three presentations in your panel will be allocated 30 minutes each: 20 minutes for the presenter to deliver their paper followed by a 10-minute Q&A, moderated by the panel organizer.

Video or Artwork. If you proposed a video or artwork, you will have up to 20 minutes to show your video or present your artwork followed by a 10-minute Q&A. Videos and/or artworks will also be grouped in threes, to fill a 90-minute session.

Workshop or Roundtable. If you proposed a workshop or roundtable, you will have a full 90 minutes in which to stage it. The organization of the session is entirely up to you. If there are any special requirements for your workshop (e.g. you would like the participants to have certain items on hand, such as scents or victuals or particular devices), please include this information in your abstract.

You are welcome and indeed encouraged to pre-record your 20-minute presentation and send it to us in advance, then make yourself available live online at the appointed time for the Q&A. You are not required to submit a copy of your paper in advance, and we are not planning to publish the proceedings of the conference. However, we would like to entertain the possibility of creating a Highlights Reel of the conference featuring select presentations, to be posted on the Sensory Studies website. To this end, all presentations will be audio-recorded, with your permission, and the accompanying powerpoint will be keyed to it. The presentations to be featured on the Highlights Reel will be selected by the members of the Organizing Committee.

Virtual Get Together. There will be a 90-minute Virtual Get Together, or Consensus, following each plenary for those interested, and a 30-minute Virtual Get Together between each session.

Portal. A portal will be created in mid-February through which you can securely pay the registration fee: \$60 regular participant or \$30 student participant.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at [senses@concordia.ca](mailto:senses@concordia.ca)

# Publication Highlights

‘The Senses in Social Interaction’. Special Issue of Symbolic Interaction 44(1), February 2021.

Edited by Will Gibson & Dirk vom Lehn.

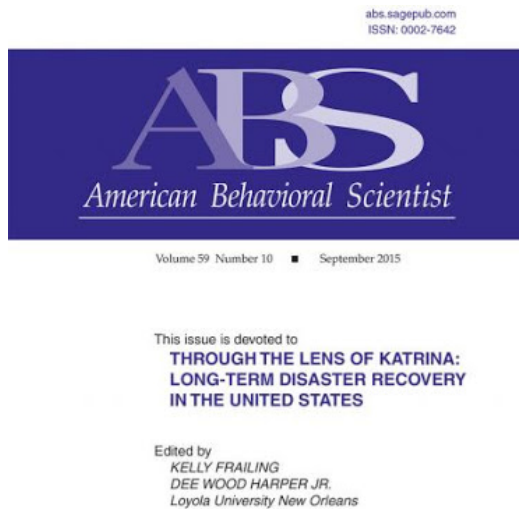
There are six interrelated concepts/themes that are found across these diverse papers and contexts: (1) *intersection*—the ways that different categories of sense overlap with one another; (2) *entwinement*—the interplay of sensory experience with diverse cultural and contextual resources, which, in turn, inform and play on people's sensory experiences; (3) *multimodal*—the wide range of resources other than spoken language (including gesture, gaze, pointing, facial expressions, and objects themselves) to make the senses accountable; (4) *contextually embedded*—people's production of accounts about the senses are a part of and have implications for other social practices and actions; (5) *structured*—there are observable structural preferences for how the senses are enacted and accounted for; (6) *serendipitous*—alongside such structural preferences there is an ad-hoc or improvised character to how people describe to others and make use of the senses in their actions.



A dark brew: coffee, COVID and colonialism have left millions struggling to make a living

Emma Felton, in *The Conversation*.

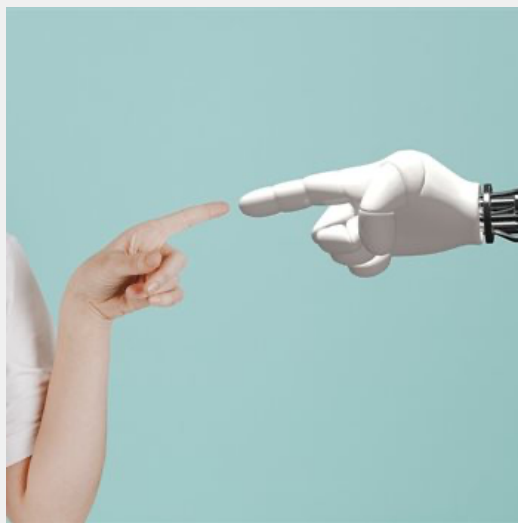
Low-paid workers at both ends of the supply chain – the small farmers who grow most of the crop and the casual staff who serve you at the cafe – weren't well off even before the pandemic hit.



### ‘Senses as Mobile Actants: Sketching Conceptual and Comparative Possibilities’

Kelvin E.Y. Low and Noorman Abdullah, *American Behavioral Scientist* 2020, Vol. 64(10) 1430–1443.

The senses and their concomitant practices have historically and contemporaneously traversed borders and boundaries and in effect, acquire different meanings. Sensory modalities and ways of knowing become reconfigured as a result of cross-cultural sensory encounters in everyday life. Drawing from colonial and contemporary ethnographic encounters in Singapore, we make a case to extend sociocultural analyses of the character of the sensory - in particular, sound and smell - to consider its agentic potential to permeate and traverse boundaries. We employ the sensory as a lens to capture intimations of connectedness and disconnectedness; and to more broadly unravel alternative and comparative understandings of mobility and movement through time and space.



### CALL FOR PAPERS: ‘Designing the Robot Body: Critical Perspectives on Affective Embodied Interaction’, *Transactions in Human-Robot Interaction*

Guest Editors: Mark Paterson, Caroline Yan Zheng, Guy Hoffman

Designing and evaluating the affectivity of the robot body has become a frontier topic in Human-Robot Interaction (HRI). In particular, there is growing interest in how sensory properties elicit users’ affective and emotional states, as well as morphological considerations. How do the tactile properties of materials influence user interaction? Why do certain morphologies and materials prompt more empathetic interactions than others? This recognition of the fostering of affect within machinic corporeality has been of interest to a number of academic communities of late, including designers and engineers.

We want to see cross-disciplinary dialogues, so if interested [see the full CFP here](#).

# New Journal Announcement

## Multimodality & Society

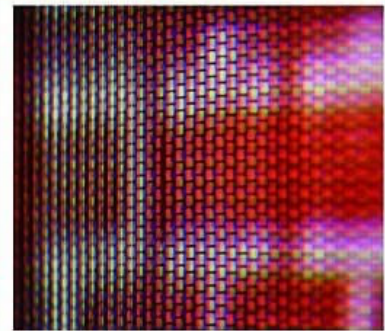
*Multimodality & Society* consolidates and advances the development of multimodal research theory, methodologies, and contributes to empirical understanding of how multimodality shapes the social landscape of interaction and communication. Mutimodality provides concepts, methods and a framework for the collection and analysis of visual, aural, embodied, material, and spatial aspects of interaction and environments, and the relationships between these.

The journal engages with the social landscape of interaction and communication, drawing on multimodal work undertaken within a range of fields of application (e.g. health and well-being, work, formal and informal learning, leisure, governance and politics), and with respect to a range of topics (e.g. identity, social justice). Multimodal theory has significant international reach and the journal focuses on the international social landscape of interaction and communication.

The journal welcomes high-quality research with a commitment to multimodality, with a scope that emphasizes:

- Accounting for a full range of modes, moving beyond the visual and language
- Foregrounding multimodal interaction and texts-in-action, rather than texts or objects
- Interrogating the digital, and how its use reshapes multimodality
- Investigating the role of material, social and cultural resources in multimodal interaction and Communication
- Critiquing, mapping, consolidating, and advancing multimodal theory, concepts and methods
- Exploring the potentials of interdisciplinary innovative multimodal research

The Routledge Handbook of  
Multimodal Analysis



Editor Prof Carey Jewitt, UCL