



VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
AMSTERDAM

Faculty of
Humanities

Knowing by Sensing

Course guide 2021



Course Guide
Knowing by Sensing
L_GAMAGES034

Academic year 2021
Master History, Track Medical and Health Humanities

Coordinator:

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Cover image: Isaac Blessing Jacob

Govert Flinck, c. 1638

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Introduction

Welcome to Knowing by Sensing, where you will use the senses and as analytical tools in academic study, and even in daily life. Together, we will learn to use different kinds of knowing through sensing and enhance sensory skills, to use this sensory information analytically, to enlarge our sensory vocabulary and to(re)construct sensory objects.

Course description

1. General information

<i>Course code</i>	L_GAMAGES034
<i>Term</i>	4
<i>Credits</i>	6.0
<i>Language of tuition</i>	English
<i>Faculty</i>	Faculty of Humanities
<i>Coordinator</i>	Caro Verbeek
<i>Main teacher</i>	Caro Verbeek

Guest teachers Sandra Schouten, Hans Fidom/ Michiel Huijsman, Piet Devos, Ilja Croijmans, Frank Bloem, Cathelijne van de Berg

2. Schedule of meetings and locations

Lecture schedule		
Week	Theme and Lecturer(s)	Time and Location
1 (5 February)	<i>Introduction: The Hierarchy of the Senses and the Gesamtkunstwerk/ Epistemologies of Sight</i> (Caro Verbeek/ Wouter de Vries)	13:30-17:15 HG-11A36
2 (12 February)	<i>The History of Smell in Art, Philosophy and Medicine + perfume workshop</i> (Caro Verbeek & Frank Bloem)	13:30 – 17:15 Mediamatic: Dijksgrecht 6, Amsterdam
3 (19 February)	<i>Hearing</i> (Hans Fidom & Michiel Huijsman)	13:30-17:15 Orgelpark Gerard Brandtstraat 26
4 (26 February)	<i>Synaesthesia/ Senses, memories and dementia</i> (Caro Verbeek/ Sandra Schouten)	13:30 – 17:15 HG-11A36
5 (5 March)	<i>Sensory Tour Rijksmuseum/ Blindness or the complex layers of touch</i> (Cathelijne Denekamp/ Piet Devos)	Rijksmuseum
6 (12 March)	<i>Proprioception and (wine) Tasting</i> (Caro Verbeek, Ilja Croijmans)	13:30 – 17:15 HG-11A36
7 (19 march)	<i>Preparation for sensory presentations</i>	
8 (26 March)	<i>Sensory presentations by students</i>	13:30-17:15 HG-11A36
To be announced	Deadline final paper Upload on Canvas	

3. Course orientation

The senses offer scholars intriguing topics that transcend disciplinary, chronologic and geographic boundaries. But beyond this the senses are valuable methodological tools, that provide us with different types of knowledge than text and image alone can provide. In our digital and visually oriented age of social media and the internet, the senses and the body are undervalued and underestimated – especially in academia. Even when scholars study the senses, they are hesitant to engage with them: they remain the object of study, but aren't considered informative in themselves.

This course teaches students to include the different senses in the production of knowledge, to train their sensory gaze, and to be able to describe sensory phenomena. The course addresses disciplines such as medicine, medical history, archaeology, (art-)history and non-academic

topics such as gastronomy, art and dance. An inter-disciplinary team of experts will address the sense of touch, smell, sight, taste, hearing, synesthesia and even our interoceptive senses (balance, weight, etc.). It challenges the classical hierarchy of the senses in which only sight and hearing are considered aesthetic and informative tools. Senses, body and mind will work together to fundamentally transform the way in which we know, study and understand.

Students will participate in a wide variety of lectures, workshops and experiments offered by specialists, including visits to the Rijksmuseum and Mediamatic, and a wine tasting at VU. They will keep track of their experiences and progress in a multi-sensory 'sense-log', and learn to present their research in a multi-sensory presentation. This course is part of the specialist Master Track in Medical and Health Humanities. Students who wish to complete the full track are also required to take the course Introduction to Medical and Health Humanities (Block 4), Objects of Knowledge (Block 5) and Research Seminar: Medicine in Society (Block 5). It is also possible to take just one, two, or three courses. This course is open to all interested MA or MSc students. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, students of history, art-history, medical history, literature, anthropology or psychology.

4. Organisation and working method

The course consists of lectures, experiments, excursions and workshops, including visits to relevant institutions and laboratories. During the course, students will keep a 'sense log' in which they record their experiences.

5. Evaluation, assessment and rubrics

The final grade will be determined on the basis of active participation (tracked in the sense-log and monitored by observation of weekly assignments; 20%), presentation (40%) and final assignment (40%).

While grading, teachers will pay particular attention to the integration of sensory illustrations (soundtrack, scent, etc.) in the presentation and in the final assignment, as well as the historical component of the course – requiring students to use concepts from the literature and the lectures. Students are required to pass the final assignment in order to pass the course. Insufficient marks on the presentation, however, can be compensated with a higher mark on the final assignment.

Active participation will be measured through the sense-log and weekly assignments.

Students are required to formulate two questions about the required reading for that week and hand them on canvas before the lecture. The participation grade will be based on both the questions and filling in the sense-log.

For the final assignment the students have two options: to write a paper or to design a sensory tour. In weeks three and five, students will hand in either a research proposal for their final essay or a proposal for their sensory tour.

Option 1: The student can choose to write a paper (min. 3000 – max 4000) with one (or more) of the senses or synaesthesia as a topic. This could apply to any domain (philosophy, aesthetics, art, art history, music, cuisine, medicine, heritage, dance), time and place. The student will be evaluated on the special attention paid to knowledge production by means of sensory involvement. Did reconstructing a sensory impulse/ object help in better understanding the object of research? An excellent student will be able to make an argument he or she could not have made without sensory involvement. Make sure to include at least one sensory illustration.

Option 2: The student will design a (fictional) sensory tour or exhibition (minimum amount of objects 3, maximum 6). These objects/ phenomena can be chosen from any heritage institution or site (they don't necessarily have to be in the same place). The aim is to choose one or more senses as an approach to these objects and to create tactile, gustatory, auditory and/ or olfactory illustrations in order to mediate between the object/ phenomena and the 'viewer'. Document the tour in a sensory catalogue with textual descriptions focusing on the senses, and descriptions of the sensory medium. Indicate who is your target group (other abilities, people suffering from dementia, etc.).

To introduce your exhibition, write a short historiography (1000 – 1500 words) about what has been done in your selected domain and contextualize by referring to existing tours/ exhibitions and/ or papers.

Rubrics:

Sensory presentation

Content relevance	Good analysis of chosen case including description and theoretical contextualisation	20 %	
Structure	Clear structure/ Sets out research topic and method/ thorough analysis in line with research focus/	20 %	
Argumentation	distinguishing between one's own judgment and empirically founded insights or other people's statements	10 %	
Integration of sensory information	Sensory illustration sets in well with the narrative/ sensory illustration helps to prove a point that otherwise couldn't have been made	30 %	
Presentation style	Interaction/ clear voice/ appealing introduction/ strong closing statement	20 %	
Room for individual remarks (tops & tips)		100 %	

Rubric for paper or exhibition

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Rubric Assignment Knowing by Sensing (2020)						
2							
3	Criteria	Insufficient (40%)	Sufficient (60%)	Good (80%)	Excellent (100%)	Points max.	Points
4	Accuracy the paper or exhibition should be factually correct and discuss the subject in its correct context. This includes correctly addressing and labeling the different sensory perceptions, for instance by making clear distinction between what is perceived with what sense.	The factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are incorrectly identified or incomplete. Objects are incorrectly labeled.	The factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are generally correct and addressed in their right context.	The factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are all correctly described and used and understood in their correct context.	The essay is correct in a factual sense: the factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are all correctly described. The essay engages with scholarly developments and themes.		
5	Sensory engagement the paper should make clear which senses will be employed and in what way. Excellent papers can support the idea that the usage of this or these sense(s) is essential for making the point of this paper or experiencing the exhibition.	The thesis or exhibition is unconvincing or unclear. In particular, it is unclear how the senses contribute to the production of knowledge.	The student develops a clear thesis and there is a relation between the thesis or exhibition presented and the application of sensory knowledge.	The student develops a clear and convincing thesis and the senses actively contribute to supporting the main thesis or the exhibition.	The student develops an authentic, fresh insight that challenges the reader's thinking and sensing. It is clear that without the use of different senses, the thesis could not have been put forward or the exhibition could not have been understood.	35	
6	Structure, argumentation and user-friendliness In the case of a paper, it should be written in a clear style and understandable structure. In the case of a virtual exhibition, it should aptly describe what the exhibition looks like and make evident that it would be accessible and navigable for visitors, and is	The structure is unclear and does not offer effective support or explanation of the student's ideas.	Structured in a way that generally supports the thesis and purpose. The sequence of ideas is coherent.	Structured in a way that competently supports the thesis and purpose. The sequence of ideas is effective, given the student's thesis and purpose.	Structured in a way that fully and imaginatively supports the thesis and purpose. The sequence of ideas is effective and the subpoints serve to open up and explore the student's insight in the most productive way.	40	
7						25	
8	Total					100	

6. General requirements for the final assignment

1. State your name, student number, date and title on the cover page/slide.
2. For the text of your argument and the annotation, follow the recommendations and rules as explained in Jeannette Kamp, Susan Legêne, Matthias van Rossum and Sebas Rümke, *Writing History – a companion for historians* (Amsterdam, 2018).
3. There is a margin of +/- 10% on the length. Length for a paper: between 3000 and 4000 words. For a sensory tour: between 3 and 6 objects.
4. Papers where annotation and the Dutch or English (spelling, punctuation and grammar) are not sufficient will not be considered and will be regarded as Unsatisfactory.
5. Plagiarism is strictly forbidden, and if it is detected by the lecturer (whether automatically by the Canvas system or in another way), it will be punished by the Examination Board! Plagiarism is deemed to have occurred if in papers, theses and other written tests of expertise, texts have been copied partially or wholly from other authors without referencing the source (book, magazine article, report, Internet site, etc.). Copying text is taken to include quoting or paraphrasing without this being indicated clearly in the text. It is also forbidden to reproduce own texts from previously submitted assignments (self-plagiarism). A submitted assignment can only yield ECTS once, otherwise it is considered fraud.
6. Include at least one sensory illustration. In case of a tactile, olfactory or gustatory impression, please bring it to class or send it to Caro Verbeek and your class mates.
7. The deadline for the paper/ tour will be announced in week 1. Upload your assignment on Canvas.

7. List of required and recommended literature

The handbook used for this course is: David Howes, *Empire of the Senses* (Oxford, 2005).

For the required literature for every lecture, see Weekly Meetings (pages 8-13)

Recommended literature:

- Hammer, G. (2018), "You Can Learn Merely by Listening to the Way a Patient Walks through the Door": The Transmission of Sensory Medical Knowledge", in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, (32: 1), pp. 138–154.

<https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/maq.12366>

- Ashbrook Harvey, S. (2006), *Scenting Salvation - Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Londen, 2006
- Bacci, Francesca and David Melcher edss, *Art and the Senses* (Oxford, 2011).
- Bello, P. de, Koureas, G. (eds), *Art, History and the Senses - 1830 to the Present*, Ashgate
- Classen, C. et al (1994), *Aroma: A cultural history of smell*, London.
- Classen, C. (ed). (2012), *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch*, University of Illinois Press.
- Classen, C. *Other Ways to Wisdom: Learning through the Senses across Cultures*
In: International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift
fürErziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l'Education, Vol. 45, No. 3/4,
Learning, Knowledge and Cultural Context (1999), pp. 269-280. Springer.
- Corbin, A., *The Foul and the Fragrant*, Parijs, 1986
- Hunt, John Dixon, David Lomas and Michael Corris eds., *Art, Word and image – Two Thousand Years of Visual/Textual Interaction*, London, 2010.
- Levant, N., *The Multisensory Museum*, Rowman & Littlefield: Plymouth, 2014.
- Smith, M. (2007), “Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History”, in *Journal of Social History* (40: 4), pp. 841-58.

- Verbeek, C. (2015), *Es liegt was in der Luft – Duft in der Kunst/ Something in the Air – Scent in Art*, Dathe.
- Verbeek, C. Campen, C. van (2013), “Inhaling Memories: Smell and Taste Memories in Art, Science and Practice”, in *The Senses & Society* (8:2), pp. 133-148.

8. Course objectives

- Students are familiar with the most important concepts and elements in the history of the senses in modern and early modern Europe (1500-now).
- Students will learn to enlarge their sensory vocabulary and reflect on the sensory perception by means of a sense-log.
- Students will learn to use their senses as analytical tools in academic study by learning to use different kinds of knowing through sensing and enhance sensory skills.

9. Course evaluation

This course will be evaluated digitally, through VUnet. Participation is voluntary, but greatly appreciated by the staff as it helps us improve the course where necessary.

10. Links to Senselogs (don't mind the numbering in the url, this is due to last year's different order of lessons !!)

<https://fd20.formdesk.com/vuamsterdam/senso-lesson3>

week 1: tiny.cc/Senso-lesson1

week 2: tiny.cc/Senso-lesson2

week 3: <https://fd20.formdesk.com/vuamsterdam/senso-lesson3>

week 4: <https://fd20.formdesk.com/vuamsterdam/senso-lesson5>

week 5: <https://fd20.formdesk.com/vuamsterdam/senso-lesson6>

week 6: <https://fd20.formdesk.com/vuamsterdam/senso-lesson4>

11. Weekly meetings

Week 1 – Introduction

During this first session students will be introduced to the topic by a discussion of the changing hierarchy of the senses in philosophy, aesthetics and medicine. The 19th century concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk will play a key role in this. In the second part of the session Wouter de Vries will discuss epistemologies of seeing. What is the difference between a text and an image? What does the term imagination imply in a historical context. In addition, we will discuss historical conceptions of the senses, including their relation to knowledge, emotions and the workings of the mind.

Small assignment 1: The students will already start using their sense of smell and take a sample of historical perfume and investigate what it might be by simply smelling it, asking other people to smell it, and write down their own and other people's associations. Try to describe the smell with as many words as possible in the sense-log, based on these experiences.

During class we will also learn to discern between the three chemical senses: trigeminal perception, taste and smell in order to prepare for week 2.

Biographies:

Caro Verbeek (1980) is an art and sense historian and a curator with a focus on the lower senses. She teaches the preliminary course 'The Other Senses' at the Royal Academy of Arts (The Hague) and is specialised in olfactory tours and interventions for museums. Furthermore Verbeek is head curator of 'odorama' at Mediamatic. She is currently working on her PhD on art historical smells at VU University, with IFF (International Flavours & Fragrances) and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

www.caroverbeek.nl

Week 2 – Smell: Mediamatic Amsterdam

Smells are part of our immaterial heritage. They shape our identity, communities, social behavior and elicit strong emotions and memories. From antiquity until the 19th century intentional smell compositions played an important role in displaying status, in knowledge production, healing practices and in religious experience and rituals, until finally being reduced to an mere esthetic means in the 20th and 21st century. Because of the volatile nature of scent, a lack of proper vocabulary and devices to register olfactory phenomena, our history has become ‘inodorate’. During this class students will learn about the role of historical scents, how to describe them, and how to present and preserve smells as heritage objects in cultural institutions, by working with real odorants and reconstructing historical recipes for medicinal fragrances.

In the second part of this class we will handle some olfactory artefacts such as censors and pomanders and try to find out how they were used.

In the AromaLab of Mediamatic Frank Bloem will demonstrate how to reconstruct a couple of historical perfumes mentioned in Piesse (1857).

Small assignment 2: Describe the reconstructed smells as elaborately as possible by answering the questions on synaesthetic descriptions in the sense-log.

Read in advance:

Verbeek, C. (2017), “Presenting volatile heritage: Two case studies on olfactory reconstructions in the museum”, In : *Future Anterior* (13: 2), pp. 33-42.

Neill, C. (2019), “Perspectives on Smell in Medical Culture”, in *Routledge Handbook of the Medical Humanities*.

Browse through Piesse, S. (1857), *The Art of Perfumery*

https://books.google.nl/books/about/The_Art_of_Perfumery.html?id=szCdfz6nYTgC&redir_esc=y

Biography:

Frank Bloem is an autonomous artist, graduated from the Rietveld Academy. He is a self trained perfumer and olfactory artist, leading his own company The Snifferoo and the AromaLab at Mediamatic. Since 2018 he is co-curator of the scent culture program ‘odorama’ at Mediamatic.

<https://www.snifferoo.nl/>

Week 3 – Hearing

For twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible.' Said Jacques Attali, four decades ago. His text on 'Noise' became one of the keystones of the discipline now known as Sound Studies. Yet, 'Western knowledge' still suffers from a strong tendency to neglect sound, most probably because it is performative: it introduces (taking) time (to listen) as an essential condition for successfully applying, if not maturing, our 'sensory gaze'.

On February 21st, the 'Knowing by Sensing' class will introduce us to this complex and demanding task. It will partly take place on the streets, where Michiel Huijsman from SoundTrackCity will make us listen to the city, and partly in the Orgelpark (a concert venue next to the Vondelpark), where VU-professor Hans Fidom will make us listen to specific sounds, introduce the concept of sound heritage, and discuss some relevant thinkers and sources.

Read in advance:

Ihde, D. (2012), "The Auditory Dimension", in *The Sound Studies Reader*.

Small assignment 3 during class: Make a soundtrack of the part of the city.

Biographies:

Hans Fidom is Professor of Organ Studies at VU University Amsterdam, Leader of the Orgelpark Research Program, and an internationally active Organ Expert/Organist. ... He was chief editor of the magazine Het Orgel from 1996 until 2006. In 1997 he initiated the National Improvisation Competition for Organist in Zwolle.

Michiel Huijsman is an artist and independent curator. He is the founder of Soundtrackcity.

<https://soundtrackcity.net/michiel-huijsman/>

Week 4 – Synaesthesia/ Senses, memories and dementia

How does blue sound? What is a red smell? In the first part of this session we will learn more about the extraordinary condition called synaesthesia and about cross-modality by doing small experiments and looking at synaesthetic works of art.

In the second part we will learn about senses, memories and dementia by guest speaker Sandra Schouten who runs 'Huisvanproeven'.

The senses are excellent keys to open doors and hatches in our memory. Even for people with dementia, scents can trigger youth memories.

Read in advance: Campen, C. van (2014) "Uplifting musical memories People with depression, dementia, and care for older people", .in *The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories*. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199685875.003.0010

Republished in: Campen, C. van (2018) *The Proust Effect: Uplifting Musical Memories and Sensory Reminiscence in Older People*. In: D. Howes (ed.) *Senses and Sensation: Critical and Primary Sources*. Volume 2: History and Sociology, Part II: Key Domains and Concepts, chapter 10. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Biography: Sandra Schouten is the artist behind Het Huis van Proeven. Her work moves between Social Design, Community Art and Food Art. The food and smell is no end in itself, but a means of interaction. The theatrical setting leads towards an intense experience, new conversations and discoveries.

Week 5 – Multisensory Tour Rijksmuseum/ Blindness or the complex layers of touch

In the first part of this session we will be taken on a tour that is originally designed for people of different abilities. We will touch an artefact under the guidance of Cathelijne Denekamp, and smell the scents created especially for the Rijksmuseum as translations of the collection (Caro Verbeek, I.F.F., Rijksmuseum).

In the second part of the session we will stay near the Rijksmuseum (de Ateliergebouw), and learn more about blindness and the complex layers of touch by Piet Devos.

It is often believed that a sensory disability like blindness leads to a compensatory sharpening of the remaining senses. I would rather speak of a creative reorganization of the entire sensorium, resulting in a whole set of uncommon, multisensory practices. To illustrate this 'blind knowledge', I will draw on my own experience as a blind person but also on examples from literature and art. I will thereby mainly focus on the complex uses of touch – often interacting with hearing - in e.g. tactile reading, 'facial vision' and 'echolocation' in spatial navigation.

Read in advance:

- ‘Blindness, a new seeing of the world’, an essay by the French blind author Jacques Lusseyran (1924-1971)
- Piet Devos, ‘Missing child in the mirror’ or the Dutch original ‘Vermist spiegelkind’.

To get even closer to the multisensory knowledge of blindness, you might also like to listen to some binaural recordings of Piet Devos’ daily commutes in Montreal. Please visit the following Vimeo page and make sure to listen with headphones:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/4120513>

Biographies:

Cathelijne Denekamp is manager accessibility and inclusion at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Before she worked as a communication advisor at the Van Gogh museum. Piet Devos (Kortrijk, 1983) is a Belgian writer and literary theorist. He himself went blind at the age of five, an experience which triggered his interest in sensory perception. He has a PhD in Modern Romance Literature from the University of Groningen. He was also a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Sensory Studies of Concordia University in Montreal (Canada). Home page: <https://pietdevos.be>

Week 6 – Kinaesthesia/ Taste

During the first part of this session we will talk about proprioception and kinaesthesia. These are two of the so-called interoceptive senses which are fundamentally different from the much better known. Kinaesthesia is a fundamental sense for anytime we move, but especially for dancers. How does this sense collaborate with the sense of sight? How is kinaesthesia related to aesthetics when there is no clear object of contemplation?

During the second part of the session we will learn more about taste. Wine provides an extraordinary medium to investigate language for smells: first, people talk about wine seemingly more than about other smells, and second, this means that some people have more experience with describing wine smells than others (e.g., sommeliers). In this lecture, I will first introduce some of the findings on cross-cultural differences in odor language, and next discuss findings on wine language. Finally, the relationship between expertise, language and thought will be explored briefly, before experiencing first-hand what might be said about wine in a practical tasting session.

Read in advance:

Montero, B. (2006), “Proprioception as an Aesthetic Sense”, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (64:2).

Croijmans, I., Majid, A. (2016), “Not All Flavor Expertise Is Equal: The Language of Wine and Coffee Experts”, in *PlosOne*, available online:

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0155845>

Browse the blog futuristscents: “Talking Wine and Making Sense of Scents with Dr. Ilja Croijmans”, online on:

<https://futuristscents.com/2018/12/11/talking-wine-and-making-sense-of-scents-with-dr-ilja-croijmans/>

Small assignment 4 during class: Bring a (small) mirror for a proprioceptive experiment.

Small assignment 5 during class: Describe the wines as elaborately as possible at the beginning of class, and again at the end of the class making use of the synaesthetic vocabulary you learned in week 2 and the vocabulary taught by Croijmans. Compare the difference and write down how you reflect on your new vocabulary.

Biography:

Ilja currently works as a post-doctoral researcher at Utrecht University in Monique Smeets lab. He focuses on how people can communicate emotions using chemosignals, using psychological methods.

Before this, Ilja studied how experience can shape how people talk and think about smells and flavors. Together with his promotor Asifa Majid and co-supervisors Artin Arshamian and Laura Speed, he investigated whether wine experts, having years of practice with perceiving and describing their olfactory experiences, can consistently describe wines. This contrasts the struggle novices often display when trying to name smells and tastes. In addition, memory and imagery for smells were studied, revealing wine experts are better at remembering smells of wine, and have more vivid imagery for wine, than novices. In February 2018, he obtained his Ph.D. at Radboud University.

Week 7 and 8

Prepare presentation in week 7 to be given in week 8

