



VRIJE  
UNIVERSITEIT  
AMSTERDAM

Faculty of  
Humanities

# *Knowing by Sensing*

*Course guide 2024*



Course Guide  
**Knowing by Sensing**  
L\_GAMAGES034

Academic year 2024  
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 direct observation as analytical tools in academic study, and even in daily life. Together, we will get to know and use different kinds of knowing through sensing and enhance sensory skills, to use this sensory information analytically, to enlarge our sensory vocabulary and communicate through the senses (in addition to language).

## 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, Ilja Croijmans, Frank Bloem, Cathelijne van den Berg- Denekamp

2. Schedule of meetings and locations (this may change due to availability of guest lecturers)

<b>Lecture schedule</b>		
<b>Week</b>	<b>Theme and Lecturer(s)</b>	<b>Time and Location</b>
1 (9 February)	<i>Introduction: The Hierarchy of the Senses and the Gesamtkunstwerk/</i> (Caro Verbeek)	9:00 – 12:00 HG-09A41
2 (16 February)	<i>The History of Smell in Art, Philosophy and Medicine + perfume workshop</i> (Caro Verbeek & Frank Bloem)	9:00 – 12:00 HG-09A41
3 (23 February)	Proprioception and (wine) Tasting (Caro Verbeek, Ilja Croijmans)	9:00 – 12:00 HG-09A41
4 (1 March)	Hearing and Listening (Hans Fidom)	9:00 – 12:00 Orgelpark (Gerard Brandtstraat 28 near Vondelpark)
5 (8 March)	Synaesthesia/ Senses, memories and dementia (Caro Verbeek/ Sandra Schouten)	Rijksmuseum if circumstances allow it or in HG-09A41
6 (15 March)	<i>Sensory Tour Rijksmuseum/ Blindness or the complex layers of touch</i> (Cathelijne Denekamp/ Piet Devos)	9:00 – 12:00 HG-09A41
Week 7 (22 March)	<i>Preparing for presentations</i>	
8 (28 March)	<i>Sensory presentations by students</i>	9:00 – 12:00 HG-09A41
To be announced	<b>Deadline final paper/ outlay project</b> 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 music. An inter-disciplinary team of experts will address the sense of 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 a wine tasting at VU. They will learn to present their research through multi-sensory story-telling. 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. There will be small assignments in class, and reading and sensory experiments will be carried out outside of the classroom. In week 7 students will prepare for their final presentation, which will be handed in as a written (or spoken) assignment with sensory illustrations after that (exact date to be communicated).

## 5. Evaluation, assessment and rubrics

The final grade will be determined on the basis of active participation (weekly (reading) assignments; 20%), presentation (40%) and final assignment (40%).

While grading, teachers will pay particular attention to the integration of sensory illustrations (soundtrack, scent, movements, 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 weekly assignments and active participation in class. Students are required to formulate two questions about the required reading for each week and hand these in on canvas the day before the lecture. The participation grade will be based on both these questions and active participation in class (answering questions, participating in experiments and discussions).

For the final assignment the students have two options: to write a paper or to design a sensory tour/ exhibition. 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	<b>Rubric Assignment Knowing by Sensing (2020)</b>						
2							
3	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Insufficient (40%)</b>	<b>Sufficient (60%)</b>	<b>Good (80%)</b>	<b>Excellent (100%)</b>	<b>Points max.</b>	<b>Points</b>
4							
	<p><b>Accuracy</b>   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.</p> <p><b>Sensory engagement</b>   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.</p>	<p>The factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are incorrectly identified or incomplete. Objects are incorrectly labeled.</p>	<p>The factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are generally correct and addressed in their right context.</p>	<p>The factual information, objects or sensory perceptions are all correctly described and used and understood in their correct context.</p>	<p>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.</p>	35	
5							
6	<p><b>Structure, argumentation and user-friendliness</b>   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</p>	<p>The thesis or exhibition is unconvincing or unclear. In particular, it is unclear how the senses contribute to the production of knowledge.</p>	<p>The student develops a clear thesis and there is a relation between the thesis or exhibition presented and the application of sensory knowledge.</p>	<p>The student develops a clear and convincing thesis and the senses actively contribute to supporting the main thesis or the exhibition.</p>	<p>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.</p>	40	
7							
8	<b>Total</b>					25	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 and accompanying text 400 to 1000 words.
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 or ask them to buy a simple item (food, perfume, drink, soap etc.).
7. The deadline for the paper/ tour will be announced in week 1. Upload your assignment on Canvas or send it to c.l.verbeek@vu.nl.

## 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, London, 2006
  
- Bacci, Francesca and David Melcher eds., *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 für Erziehungswissenschaft / 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. Weekly meetings (the order might change due to availability of guest speakers! Always follow announcements on Canvas)

### Week 1 – Hierarchy of the Senses

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 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk will play a key role in this.

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.

#### Biography:

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](http://www.caroverbeek.nl)

### Week 2 – Smell

Smells are part of our immaterial heritage. They shape our identity, communities, social behavior and elicit strong emotions and memories. From antiquity until the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 a mere esthetic means in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

Frank will demonstrate how to reconstruct a historical perfume mentioned in Piesse (1857) and sample some historically important ingredients with us.

! Please bring a small bowl, a grater (the ones you can use for cheese) oranges, lemons, rosemary, cinnamon, cloves and other spices and citrus fruits you find appealing !

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

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.

With the help of a scent kit Frank Bloem will demonstrate how to reconstruct a historical perfume 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](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 – 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 4 – 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'.

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.

### Week 5 – Synaesthesia/ Senses, memories and care

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 and care 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 6 – Sensory Museology: Multisensory Tour Rijksmuseum

In 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).

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 Goghmuseum.

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 7 and 8

Prepare 5 minute presentation in week 7 to be given in week 8

