



a.a. 2025-2026

Seminario Interclasse

“Perspective on Sensory Studies. Sensorial Investigations”

Prof. David Howes

Centre for Sensory Studies – Concordia University - Montréal

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Abstract

This course of lectures presents an introduction to the field of sensory studies. The term ‘sensory studies’ was coined in 2006 to denote the confluence of a range of social science and humanities disciplines (e.g. anthropology, history) on the senses as object of study. This disrupted the monopoly that the discipline of psychology formerly exercised over the study of the senses and sensation. It is now recognized that perceiving is a social activity, it does not just go on in some secret grotto in the head.

This course is divided into 8 sessions. These sessions will address such questions as: How are our senses formed by culture? What is the world like to societies that emphasize smell or touch over sight? What has capitalism done to our senses? Must museums be such hands-off spaces? What is the role of the senses in sickness and in healing? How can a sensory studies approach help inform critical research in disability studies? Finally, it would appear that, to counter the growing polarization of society and try to avert climate catastrophe, we need to come to our senses and forge a new common sense. What are the prospects?

Lecture preparatorie

1) Introduction to sensory studies

David Howes, "Introduction to Multisensory Ethnography." *The Senses and Society* (2025) 20,2

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17458927.2025.2520100>

2) Sensory worlds of traditional (oral) societies

David Howes, "Melanesian Sensory Formations: A Comparative Case Study." In *The Sensory Studies Manifesto*, pp. 125-139. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022 [pdf]

3) Sensory order of contemporary (literate, postliterate) society

David Howes, *Make It New* In David Howes (ed.) *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Modern Age, 1920-2000*, pp. 1-30. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014 [pdf]

4) Sensing the environment

Please watch the video "An Ecology of Mind" from the Millennium series **prior to class**

https://www.google.com/search?q=Steps+to+an+Ecology+of+Mind+Millennium&aq=chrome..69i57j33i160l2.11425j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:f070ee4c,vid:2_ND2qioagE
{Only minutes 28:35-53:48 [on the Macuna]}

Keep the following questions in mind while you watch (we will discuss them in class): 1) How does the Roman Catholic priest conceptualize our relationship to nature? 2) How do the Macuna conceive of the relationship between human beings and nature (read: Fish people)? 3) How do the Macuna conceptualize their relationship with white people? 4) What do the Macuna make of the Christian notions of Heaven and Hell, God and the devil? 5) What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom, according to Macuna? 6) What does the river by which the Macuna live mean to them? Excerpts from Nikolaus Geyrhalter, "Unser täglich Brot" [Our Daily Bread]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onpwSxT4IYY> will also be shown in class

5) Sensory museology

David Howes, "Introduction to Sensory Museology." *The Senses and Society* (2014) 9,2

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2752/174589314X14023847039917>



6) Sensual healing

David Howes and Constance Classen, "Sensuous Healing: The Sensory Practice of Medicine." In *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society*, pp. 37-62. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014 [pdf]

7) Sensing differently

Gili Hammer, "Intersensory Communication in a Deaf-Blind Theatre: Ethnography of Sensory Diversity." *The Senses and Society* (2025) 20,2:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17458927.2025.2503091#abstract>

8) Toward a new common sense

Excerpt from a grant application entitled "Toward a New Common Sense" (For internal use only: not for sharing or distribution) [pdf]

Le letture preparatorie in PDF sono condivise nel canale Teams della Scuola di Studi Superiori "Giacomo Leopardi".