

Haptics and the Senses (Issue 7, 2016)



Preface by Mariana Lopez and Imogene Newland

As a vehicle of communication and perception, the term 'haptics' refers to the awakening of skin responses experienced whenever we come into direct contact with a physical object. Derived from the Greek word ἅπτω, meaning 'I fasten onto, I touch', haptics has become a word most commonly associated with the sciences and the development of new technologies. However, as this issue of HARTS & Minds demonstrates, haptics is key to the arts and humanities by offering fresh insights into our own lived experiences. This collection of articles, creative pieces and reviews reflects on the senses of 'touch', 'hearing' and 'vision', as well as the less commonly recognised senses of 'pain' and 'kinesis'. In each of the following contributions, these senses are mapped as traces of stimuli that mark themselves upon the brain and nervous system in order to relate important information to us about ourselves and our surroundings.

The pieces in this issue grapple with the subject of sensory perception as a kind of shared corporeality – a co-mingling of the senses in which our perceptual and emotional experiences not only converge, but also collide. We learn that sensing is not about experiencing one physical response individually, but rather, sensing incurs within a place in which our responses have the potential to dislodge and complicate our relationship with the world.

In 'Touching-Feeling-Thinking-Seeing: From Making to Viewing and Back', Marina Kassianidou examines Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'haptic space', in which touch is understood to be inextricably connected to vision and hearing, helping us to form a central view of our embodied spatial perception. Kassianidou opens up this concept by problematising the communion between self and other as a meeting between two disparate materials that not only overlap and intertwine, but also fold inwards onto themselves, as iterated in her own fabric series *Faulty Samples*. This distinction between self and other in relation to the tactile is elaborated upon in Jessica Barnfield's 'Being is an Octopus: Exploring Octopuses, Organs and Outsides'. Barnfield invites us to sense the slithering surfaces of the octopus in Painlevé's *Les Amours de la pieuvre* (*The Love Life of the Octopus*) and Warnell's

Outlandish, two films that delve into the kinesthetic state of the observer and the troubling of distinctions between the inside and outside of the body. Continuing this aquatic thread, Hannah Rogers' poem 'Sea Star' gives us a moving glimpse into life underwater and the touch of a starfish. Linda Zajac's review of Kate Smith's monograph *Material Goods, Moving Hands: Perceiving Production in England, 1700-1830*, explores and extends this relationship between visibility and tactility through a historic examination of how ceramic production may be conceived of as a multisensory experience.

Centred upon the interdependence of visual and tactile sensation, Charlotte Healy's article "'Through One's Own Fingertips'?: Haptic Perception in the Art and Thinking of Josef and Anni Albers' investigates the centrality of touch to the works on paper by Josef and Anni Albers. Healy examines different modes in which Bauhaus artists sought to challenge the decreasing opportunity for tangible interaction with pieces housed within public museums and galleries. Cláudia Martins' review provides a further angle on this topic in her discussion of the accessibility of the exhibits for visually impaired people visiting the Museum of Batalha in Portugal.

Defining or even shifting the relationship among audience, creator and artwork has been a major theme emerging from all of the contributions in this collection. This broadens to a consideration of what it means for an audience to experience sensory deprivation. This is a topic explored in Zoe Kemp's article on the cinematic work of Iñárritu, where she interrogates the notion of a temporary 'blind spot' as an existential blindness, connecting it to Iñárritu's desire to avert an imperialistic gaze. This concept is also adopted in Tyler Keevil's short story 'Defamiliarised', a narrative depicting the experience of temporary snow blindness and the willingness to embrace challenges and new adventures triggered by a temporary sensory loss.

Continuing an analysis of the senses in the public domain, Patrick Brodie's article 'The Acousmètre in the Museum: Authorship, The Essay Film, and Installation Practice' draws us into the realm of auditory perception. Brodie revisits Chion's concept of acousmètre, a disembodied voice within cinematic pieces whose lack of visibility imbues it with God-like powers. Moving further into the realms of spiritual sensing, Michelle Foot's 'The Medium and Her Spirit Guide' outlines the artist's desire to convince viewers of the presence of the spirit world. The author argues for a validation of séance practices as epitomised in a sculpture of the same name by Paulin. This discussion of the psychical extends the focus of our issue to examine the mysteriously named and oft shunned 'sixth sense' typified by the postponed auditory signals of the medium guide as she listens to her informant spirits and relays their messages back to a captive audience. Jess Rose also explores the connection between the sensorial and the spiritual through a combination of cognitive, performative and sensory studies in her review of Michael Bull and Jon Mitchell's book *Ritual, Performance and the Senses*.

As well as the aforementioned, our reviews section offers a range of insights into the latest academic publications in the field: Anna Katila discusses Joanna Bourke's *The Story of Pain*, a newly released monograph that tackles the difficulties of expressing experiences of injury and discomfort. A further articulation of touch is elucidated in Oliver Neto's review of Abbie Garrington's book *Haptic Modernism: Touch and the Tactile in Modernist Writing*. Finally our creative writing section is also enriched by pieces such as 'Conqueress' Franziska Ruprecht's poem, which guides us through a whirlwind of fleeting, often ambiguous sensations. In 'Ballet & Spanish & Rain' Luis Lopez-Maldonado takes us on a riptide of sensual arousal, a theme very much in contrast to his second poetic piece 'Untitled 7', which invites us into the heady world of viscera and deathly decay.

We invite you to immerse yourself in this collection by experiencing the power of sensorial events. Through the realms of the tactile, auditory, visual and kinetic, we hope that the contributions within this issue will broaden your understanding of the integral role haptics and the senses play in the arts and humanities, leaving behind an invisible but nevertheless fully present embodied trace.