

SENSATION!

Sensory cultures and their representation in France and the Francophone world (1840–1900)

a symposium exploring the senses and sensation in
nineteenth-century French/Francophone studies

Friday 23 October and Saturday 24 October 2026

Venue: St Peter's Hall, 119 Eaton Square, London SW1W 9AL

11am–5pm

organisers: Susan Harrow and Ye Xu

Where and how do we 'sense' – and make sense of – the world both through the classic five senses and through today's understanding of an expanded sensorium that includes breathing, proprioception, vestibularity, nociception, and kinaesthesia? How did writers and artists, historians and scientists of the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century explore the sentient body? How did technological advances and posthuman inventions assist or hamper sentient experience? How did social class, gender, age, ethnicity, and physicality affect and inflect cultural representations of senses from the novel and poetry to medical treatises, marketing/advertising, legal frameworks, and the full range of visual cultures in the period 1840–1900.

Friday 23 October

Welcome to 'Sensation!' (Susan Harrow and Ye Xu)

Panel 1: *Sensing the Body / Les sens du corps*

chair: Danlu Chen

11–11.20: Margaret MINER (University of Illinois at Chicago), 'From Colonel Chabert to Olivier Bécaille: A Stroll through Sensory (Dis)Integration'

11.20–11.40: Ye XU (Royal Holloway University of London), 'Audition colorée: entre maladie dégénérative et poétique transcendante'

11.40–12.00: Samira FATTOUHY (Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry), '*Les Emmurés* (1894) de Lucien Descaves: le roman des sensations ou comment représenter le réel sans le voir'

12.00–12.20: Discussion

Lunch (12.30–1.15)

1.15–2.15: Plenary: Cheryl Krueger, ‘Une sensation étrange: Zola's Fragrant Grotesque’ (University of Virginia, USA)

chair: Susan Harrow

Tea break: 2.15–3.00

Panel 2: Sensation across the arts / La sensation à travers les arts

Chair: Chantal Morel

3.00–3.20: Isabelle LE PAPE (conservatrice du patrimoine, Min. de la Culture), ‘Vertiges au musée, de Frenhofer à Bergotte’

3.20–3.40: Marie-Astrid CHARLIER (Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry / Institut universitaire de France), ‘Le naturalisme, une écriture à sensation’

3.40–4.00: Victor SAINSOT (Sciences Po, Paris), ‘L’œil infecté : sensation chromatique et anxiété bactériologique dans la critique d’art française à la fin du XIXe siècle’

4.00–4.20: Terézia GUIMARD (Institut de la littérature mondiale, l’Académie Solvaque), ‘Les scènes de repas dans les romans d’Émile Zola, une métonymie de la vie sociale’.

4.20–4.45: Discussion

Saturday 24 October

Panel 3: Sensuality and perversity / Sensualité et perversité

Chair: Sati McKenzie

11.00–11.20: Danlu CHEN (University of Bristol), ‘The Sadomasochistic Body and Multi-sensory Experience in Zola’s “Pour une nuit d’amour”’

11.20–11.40: Hestia ZHANG (University of Oxford), ‘Sensation Overload: Hothouse Fantasies and Sensory Excess in Zola’s *La Curée*’

Discussion 11.40–11.55

12.00–1.00 plenary Hervé Mazurel (Université de Bourgogne-Dijon, France)

Chair: Ye Xu

1.00–1.45 lunch

Panel 4: In search of sensory poetics / En quête de poétiques sensibles

Chair: *Susan Harrow*

1.50 -2.10 : Coraline REFORT (Technological University Dublin), ‘Expériences acoustiques, phonoscènes et cultures sensorielles du premier cinéma (1895-1910)’

2.10–2.30: Chloé BERR (University of Virginia), ‘Les sens dans *Spirite* de Théophile Gautier: vers un fantastique olfactif?’

2.30-2.50: Elise CANTIRAN (CNRS, Equipe Zola), ‘Corps absents, sensations écrites, poétiques, épistolaires de l’altérité chez Zola, Dreiser et Crane’

2.50–3.10: Discussion

3.10–3.40 Break for tea

3.40-4.40 plenary Hannah Thompson (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK), ‘Sensations in the Museum’

Chair: William Greenslade

4.45–5.20: Drinks reception