History of the Senses in Britain and France, 1680 – 1830

This course will trace the evolution of European awareness of the human senses and their power by exploring the production and reception of different forms of art, music, literature, food, and sensual enjoyments. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, new theories of human understanding and sense perception ushered in a quest to define the senses as determinative of what it meant to be human. Theorists debated whether or not such capacities were linked to moral faculties, social tendencies, or constituted as good in and of themselves. With confidence in the power of reason, Europeans gradually relinquished fears relating to the power of the passions, entertaining the notion of their potential for beneficial influence. The popularity of novels, enthusiasm for travel, and the development of leisure activities in the public sphere signaled a greater value placed on contemplating an awareness of interiority and its connections to a variety of sensations. Readings will explore ideas associated with aesthetic value and the championing of taste, which worked to categorize responses to art, music, and nature. We will also examine cultural activities as they absorbed aspects of national and civic interests, exhibited in the professions of art, music, and literature.

The course will require regular attendance (absence requires consultation with the instructor; more than two will impinge on your grade), weekly participation in discussion, possible in-class writing exercises, and one class presentation (30%); one essay of six pages, due March 8, on a topic of your choice, to be drawn from any unit of the syllabus (30%); and a lengthy research paper (primary sources are required) extending the earlier essay (20 pages), due at the end of the term (40%). We will also have one required field trip to an opera performance in addition to the required museum visit during class time at the end of the term.

Textbooks available for purchase at Book Culture, 536 W. 112th St.:
Rebecca Spang, The Invention of the Restaurant.
Mary Hays, *Emma Courtney.* (Oxford UP pbk edition)

Please purchase from the Internet:


**Learning objectives, or what you can expect to learn from taking this course:**

- an appreciation for the diversity and complexity of human experience
- a critical understanding of the relationship between past events and modern life
- an ability to conduct close readings of key texts, primary and secondary
- an ability to analyze and interpret historical material
- the skill of responding constructively and critically to the views of others
- the skill of presenting arguments cogently and logically in writing and speaking

Some of you may wish to supplement your knowledge with a general text on the Enlightenment. There are several available, most notably, those you’ll use in Unit I (by Porter and Roche), another by Peter Gay, and a short student-styled text (*Enlightenment,* published in 1990) by Roy Porter. If you want to refresh your memory with a general text on European history, try the following:


Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be available on Courseworks and (in most cases) on reserve in Wollman Library on the ground floor of Lehman Hall at Barnard.

For your browsing enjoyment, here’s an anthropology website on sensory studies:  
and for research purposes, please look into:

Electronic Enlightenment (an award-winning database):  

Early modern letters online:  
[http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/](http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/)

**I. From Sinful to Satisfying: Identifying the Senses in Historical Context (January 25)**


Further (not required) Reading:


II. The Advance of Human Technos: Body or Mind? (February 1)


*John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Book 2, Chap. 1, sec. 1-2; Chap. 2, sec. 1-3; Chap. 8, sec. 8-13.; Book 4, chap. 11, sec. 1-3. [ca 15 in all] [this can also be read on line through electronic sources via CLIO]

*Julien Offray de la Mettrie, *Man a Machine* (1747) and


Further Reading:

### III. Ranking the Passions: The Senses and Taste in the Eighteenth Century (February 8)


Further Reading:

### IV. Mastering the Passions: The Construction of the Sensible Individual (February 15)


*“The Baroque Sonata,” “Modern Concert Life is Born,” “The Art of Music Reduced to Rational Principles,” “The Earliest Musical Conservatories,” “Castrato Singers,” “The Piano is Invented” and “Addison and Steele Poke Fun at Handel’s First London Opera,” in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, eds., Music in the Western World, pp. 207-12; 220-229; 238-42. [20]

Further Reading:


Anne Vincent-Buffault, The History of Tears : Sensibility and Sentimentality in France.

V. Policing the Senses: Touch and Sensuality (February 22)


*Adam Gopnik, “Feel Me,” The New Yorker, May 16, 2016:
  http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/16/what-the-science-of-touch-says-about-us

*Thomas Laqueur, Solitary Sex, Chap. 4, “The Problem with Masturbation,” pp. 185-245. [60]

*Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Chap. 1, “Repressive Hypothesis,” pp. 17-35. [18]


Further Reading:


VI. The Sense of Taste: Food and the Body (March 1)


Rebecca Spang, The Invention of the Restaurant, Intro., pp. 1-11; Chap. 2, pp. 34-63; Chap. 7, pp. 170-206; Chap. 8, pp. 207-33; Epilogue, pp. 234-45. [c. 110]


Further Reading:


VII. A Feeling for Others: The Rise of Humanitarian Projects (March 8)

*** First essay assignment due this week ***


[18]


*Mary Wollstonecraft, *Original Stories from Real Life* [1788; repr., 1796], Chaps. I-VI.


Further Reading:


VIII. “Feeling” and the Senses: Fictional Worlds and the Emotions (March 22)

Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* [1796].
Further Reading:
  Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote* [1752].
  J.-J. Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Heloise* [1761].
  Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling* [1771].
  Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* [1811].

IX. Listening in Public  (March 29)


Further Reading:
  Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin, eds., *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, esp. Parts VI and VII.

X. Exercising the Senses: Travel  (April 5)

  William Gilpin, Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of Wales . . . in the year 1770 (1800), Sections I-V:  Google for free E-Book. (link also on Canvas)
  *Tobias Smollett, *Travels through France and Italy* (1771), Letter X (Nov. 10, 1763); Letter XXXI (March 5, 1765). [15]
  *Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796), Letter V; Letter XI. [20].

Further reading:
  Chloe Chard and Helen Langdon, eds. *Transports: Travel, Pleasure, and Imaginative Geography, 1600-1830*, essays by Porter, Bechler, Chard, and Hamblyn.
  Mark Laird, *The Flowering of the Landscape Garden*.
  Gerald Creed, *Knowing Your Place*. 
A Field Trip to the Metropolitan Opera: Beethoven’s *Fidelio*
April 5th - 7:30 pm (required)

XI. The Revolt Against Reason (April 12)

Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selbourne*, Letters 1-22, 46-66. (This can be read as an ebook, though a very good edition by Oxford Univ. Press is available through the internet at a reasonable price.)

Further Reading:

XII. Professions of the Senses (April 19)


Further Reading:
Hector Berlioz, *Memoirs*.
T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois*.

XIII. Museum field trip during class time (April 26)

Final paper due on May 3rd by 5 p.m.
HOW TO GIVE YOUR ORAL PRESENTATION

Time limit: 8-10 minutes, strictly enforced.
Aim: To develop (1) an ability to synthesize historical literature and (2) a mature speaking style.

Content: What is the largest generalization you can make about the reading? As you work on the assignment for the week, keep a list of the general points you might want to make. You’ll notice that you’ll improve this skill as you go along, advancing from statements that are very close to the material (“Joseph Addison’s “Pleasures of the Imagination” talks about “greatness . . .”) to more general ones, which might apply to several readings (“This week’s readings focus on the power of the intellect to perceive natural wonders . . .”). When you try to boil down your ideas to a few statements (which is all anyone can manage in 8 to 10 minutes), try to enter into a spirit of debate.

Other things to look out for: What arguments do you see emerging from the readings? That is, what have writers of the period or historians been quarreling about when thinking about the issues in the reading? (If you’re not reading secondary sources, see if you can guess what historians have had to say about the documents you’re using.) Sometimes you need to read between the lines. Try to find one central debate in the assignments and highlight it. Simplify the issues for your classmates by identifying the issues at stake.

What linkages do you see emerging from the readings? Do the various authors or works have common concerns? Help the class make connections. This is a really important part of understanding the material, even though it may not feel that way while you read. Don’t worry so much about retaining all the “facts” of the assignment. Jot down only what appear to be the most important or striking examples of the topic of the week.

Finally, give an opinion on what you’ve read; make your report unique, drawing on your own knowledge and perspective. And end with a set of questions for discussion.

What to avoid: Please do not summarize the readings, one by one, for your classmates. If you take this approach, you will violate the time limit and (sorry to say) bore your classmates. Instead, allow your chosen themes to govern how you present examples from the readings.

Style and Presentation: Write out your opening so that you can get yourself on the proper track right away. Start with a startling or burning question, if you can. This helps your listeners get into your chosen frame of mind. Include choice quotes from the authors you’ve read. Number your points, if necessary. And practice in front of a mirror or standing on a chair, with a recorder, if you feel like it. See yourself as an instructor and try to enjoy the experience.

What to avoid: Don’t drone or use a monotone. Don’t let your voice rise at the end of statements. Try not to bury yourself in your notes. And please don’t violate the time limit! Practice giving your presentation with a stopwatch device.