

THE CENTRE FOR CRITICAL THEORY



WELCOMES YOU TO

SENSING CHANGE

University of Nottingham, 27-28 March 2013

Our perception of change and of changing times is, irreducibly, sensory; we often anticipate change wordlessly: with a sense of dread or excitement or world-weariness. We may also register change belatedly, aligning our senses with events retroactively. Social, political and cultural transitions thus communicate themselves as much through dispersed sensory experiences as they do via messages and cognitive processes. Such sensory experiences are diffuse and hard to attribute, constituting intensities, moods, rhythms, atmospheres, stutterings, disruptions, banalities and frustrations. We notice change, frequently, through subtle alterations to our environments that escape straightforward rational apprehensions. Social, political and cultural transformations, then, are felt as much as they are understood. This conference will seek to investigate the question 'what does it mean to live through change?' by foregrounding sensory approaches.

As pioneering studies in touch, smell, taste and sound, as well as vision, have made clear, the senses play a vital role in shaping the way we interact with and attune ourselves to cultural and social environments. Theories of sense experience have long placed the human sensorium at the heart of the story of modernity.

The idea of sensory overload, bombardment and enervation has come to dominate accounts of the changes brought about by the experience of modern times. Yet accounts that differentiate the sensory experiences of modernity have been few and far between, at least until recently. The notion of a homogenous sensorium bludgeoned by modernity needs to be revisited, especially in the context of the changes now being wrought by digital technologies. Equally, our understanding of the postmodern age of networks, information economies and new media requires sensory analysis.

Sensing Change offers an opportunity to reconsider the role of the senses in the grand narratives of modernity and postmodernity and to elevate sensory approaches in investigating questions of social, political and cultural change.

We hope you enjoy your time with us and look forward to your contribution.