

The Centre for Sensory Studies, in association with Hexagram's Distinguished Speakers Series, is pleased to present

A Seminar with Charles Spence, Director of the Crossmodal Research Laboratory, Oxford University

“Crossmodal correspondences and the aesthetic imagination: Looking for links between sound symbolism and synaesthesia”

“Are lemons fast or slow?”; “Is carbonated water round or angular?”; Most people agree on their answers to these questions. These are examples of correspondences, that is, the tendency for a feature in one sensory modality, either physically present or merely imagined, to be matched (or associated) with a feature, either physically present or merely imagined, in another modality. Crossmodal correspondences appear to exist between all pairings of senses, and have been shown to affect everything from people's speeded responses to their performance in unspeeded psychophysical tasks. While some correspondences are culture-specific (e.g., the correspondence between angularity and bitterness), others are likely to be universal (e.g., the correspondence between auditory pitch and visual or haptic size). Intriguingly, some animals, such as chimpanzees, as well as young infants, appear to be especially sensitive to certain crossmodal correspondences. In this talk, I will discuss a number of the explanations that have been put forward to account for the existence of crossmodal correspondences. I will also examine the relationship between crossmodal correspondences and sound symbolism, and tackle the thorny question of whether crossmodal correspondences should be thought of as a kind of synaesthesia that is common to us all. Finally, I will invite the audience to ponder the implications of this experimental research for our understanding of synaesthesia in the arts (e.g. Baudelaire's poem “Correspondences,” or the paintings of Francis Bacon, Wassily Kandinsky, or possibly even those of Arthur Dove).

Professor Charles Spence directs the Crossmodal Research Laboratory at Oxford University's Department of Experimental Psychology. He is an expert in the field of multisensory perception and neuroscience-inspired design, and has also worked with a number of the world's top chefs, including Heston Blumenthal (The Fat Duck) and Ferran Adrià's research kitchen at Rosales, Spain. Over the last decade, he has published more than 600 articles as well as editing or authoring 8 books, most notably *The Perfect Meal*, together with Betina Piqueras-Fiszman.

When: Morning of Saturday, 17 October, 11:00-12:30

Where: Room EV 11.705, 1515 Ste-Catherine Street West
(Metro Guy-Concordia)

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