

Intersensorial translation of coughing-and-sneezing in an epidemic social context

punctum.gr

BY: George Damaskinidis

ABSTRACT

The British Ministry of Health's poster campaign Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases brought World War II to the British home front by making it personal and served as a visual call to arms for civilians. Although involving visual materials, the campaign provides a case for examining how posters engage people's extra-visual senses in responding to this call. By using the concepts of intersensoriality and synaesthetic metaphor, we discuss the possibility of enhancing the audience experience of print posters by associating verbal and visual language with the rest of the senses. Premised on the assumption that it is possible to establish an interrelation between the senses related to sneezing, we argue that, once synchronized, all associated senses may increase the perception of propaganda experienced in the poster campaign.

ARTICLE INFO:

Volume: 07

Issue: 01

Summer 2021

ISSN: 2459-2943

DOI: 10.18680/hss.2021.0006

Pages: 89-114

Lic.: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

KEYWORDS:

Intersensorial translation

Poster campaign

Transmutation

War propaganda

1. Introduction

The advent of visual culture led to a pictorial turn in the humanities and social sciences in which scholars questioned the privileging of language in their disciplines. The increasing importance of visual communication in contemporary culture has created a space for exploring not only vision but all the senses as signifying systems (Howes 2006). In this context, we examine how posters were used to rally public support in

¹ The posters are artworks created by the United Kingdom Government and are in the public domain. (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/corporate/privacy-copyright/licence>).

Great Britain during World War II. A poster is defined as “a mass-produced graphic presentation, usually a combination of text and illustration on paper, intended for public display, and designed to announce and persuade” (Terrence 2003: 70).

The posters in question belong to the British home front propaganda campaign called Coughs and Sneezes Spread Diseases (Imperial War Museums), which brought the war to the home front by making it personal and serving as a visual call to arms for civilians.¹ These campaign posters carry the same central health-related verbal message, while each conveys a social idea through different imagery. A question that arises is why the same verbal “coughs and sneezes spread diseases” is repeated for each visual idea and how it engages people’s senses in responding to the call made by the campaign.

Andri Yatmo and Atmodiwirjo (2013: 193) “propose the idea of sneezing as a manifestation of how an active body responds to its surrounding space.” They argue that sneezing in a specific space could serve as a natural indicator of the quality of that space and as an instrument to comprehend that space. Here, the notion of coughing and sneezing, two interrelated natural body reflexes against particular external stimuli, is put forward as a manifestation of how body awareness is regulated by the socio-historical context and its surrounding space. By mapping the sneezing-and-coughing effect on its socio-spatial context, the awareness of the body in society and space is not (merely) interpreted in visual but also in kinaesthetic terms.

The intersensorial translation of the phenomenological action of coughing-and-sneezing (by examining posters of the past) can give us an interesting glimpse of the current Covid-19 epidemic. While modern technology provides a variety of multimodal, digital means to illustrate the transmission of the virus, back in the WWII period, a poster campaign was deployed to convey the same message. Just as Domino, Pierce, and Hubbard (2021) introduced spatial and temporal elements into their digital modeling, the print posters were expected (or aspired) to present in a multisensorial way the risks of exposure depending on separation distance, exposure duration, and environmental conditions.

There are some distinct ways in which the different senses are interconnected to produce a sensed environment. Briefly speaking, these ways include cooperation between the senses, the hierarchy between different senses, sequencing of one sense from another, the effect of a particular sense that makes operative another sense, and reciprocal relations of a sense with the object that seems to afford it an appropriate response (Rodaway 1994). Howes (2005) uses the concept of intersensoriality to refer to such interrelations and/or transmutations of the senses. According to intersensoriality, the senses may be arranged and deployed along a continuum of dyads: the synergetic dyad along the cooperation/opposition continuum; the hierarchical along the hierarchy/equality continuum; the interconnected along the fusion/separation continuum; and the sequential dyad along the simultaneity/sequentiality continuum.

The senses have become an object of study and means of inquiry in the humanities and social sciences. However, Proulx et al. (2012) point to the gap in the existing bibliography of the examination of visual, auditory, and multisensory perceptual learning over the past 50 years, as it concerns the ability to bring together all senses under the same theoretical structure. In an attempt to bridge this gap, in this paper, I also consider the significance of expanding the five-sense sensorium by examining the meanings and uses attributed to the kinaesthetic senses in British culture during the historical period of World War II. Ultimately, the notion of a sensorium is further extended and enriched by recognizing that the sensorium is a social fact.

I further intend to discuss poster design for war propaganda and stimulate the discussion about the possibility of enhancing visual-verbal communication utilizing all the senses. Considering the likelihood of an associative process, I explore the association between the senses using verbal language as a mediator.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Intersensoriality: transcreation and transmutation of the senses

According to Howes (2006), sensory studies offer a new way to study the senses and sensory perception by foregrounding the sociality of sensation. Social science has long suffered from verbocentrism and textualism to the extent of being characterized as a discipline of words (Grimshaw 2001), relying mainly on verbal or visual data. However, we make sense of the world not just through language or vision but also through all our senses and their extensions in the form of diverse media. This sensory approach does not entail shutting one's eyes but rather turning them to various directions and focusing them differently. Additionally, the senses and sense-based media have access to research areas and fields that words do not. As early as the 18th century, French intellectuals tried:

to complete an encyclopaedia on world languages, [and] claimed that all the senses can be expressed in language. A painter only reproduces visual perception, a musician is limited to the auditory, but language, even if it does not represent vision, touch, or audition directly, can reflect these by offering different descriptions referring to a multiplicity of sensory feelings. (Coessens 2012: 328)

Although these attempts were not successful, their premise keeps on inspiring several researchers. Wathelet (2011: 371) considers the invitation to researchers to "go concrete [as] one of the great contributions of the senses to the social sciences." He refers to a series of studies that approach sounds as sensory materials (i.e., the quality

behind objects or things, matter itself). In other words, sounds could become mediators between humans and their environment that reveal how music builds intimacy and power by literally creating spaces made of these materials.

Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk (2011: 15) argue that “as we sense, we also make sense” (i.e., find or attribute meaning). At the same time, if we endorse Stahl’s (2008) approach to sensoriality, we could go even further and start thinking of “meaning” as “sensing.” This would release “meaning” from its logocentric chains, in the sense that meaning is understood as linguistic signification, enabling us to embrace more “bodily ways of knowing” from a cognition point of view. However, if we think of meaning as sensing and release it from logocentrism, we must accept that we never truly know what anyone means when they describe sensing something since they do this through the filter of language. For example, to allow sight to occur without visual input through the eyes, visual information can be transformed by a sensory substitution to see through the ears or tongue (Proulx et al. 2012). For example, a plaster cast tactile version of a painting could be seen through touch; by allowing the visual sense to occur without its sensorial input (i.e., the eyes), sensory information is transformed by a sensory substitution through the sense of touch.

People may use a sensory system to evaluate the perceptual qualities of a stimulus through receptors that are not sensitive to these qualities. Empirical research has shown that participants use the olfactory sensory system (i.e., nose) to qualify the odor of vanilla as sweet, despite sweetness being typically associated with stimulating the sense of taste (Stevenson and Boakes 2004). Perception is not solely a mental or physiological phenomenon. According to Bull et al. (2006: 5), “[t]he perceptual is cultural and political [and] [t]he senses are everywhere.” They mediate the relationship between idea and object, mind and body, self and society, culture and environment. This relationship should consider the differentiation of the senses by factors such as gender, class, and ethnicity.

If *ekphrasis* is a “poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art” (Spitzer 1962: 72), an intersensorial description that aspires to suggest rather than explicate might be an alternative to the verbal-based description. Coessens (2012: 333) argues that “looking at a painting, humans can have the experience of walking around in the painting, of hearing noises coming from the painting, experiencing the feeling of the brushstrokes, and so on.” From this perspective, color may have important implications for our understanding of the role of the senses. Elliot (2007) describes color’s influence on the perception of consumables, such as alterations in food taste or the olfaction of beverages. She also describes color as “a mark of individuality” (ibid. 46) which could be seen as a reflection of someone’s values and interests.

An analogous way to enrich the experience of viewing multisemiotic documents (i.e., texts consisting of various semiotic signs) is to find alternative means of accessing them. Smith (2003: 222), for example, describes such an experience (in the first person) as “[u]sing vivid description, and engaging my senses of touch, hearing, and smell, they can give me a greater level of access than they would to many researchers with sight.” This approach to sensory studies would emphasize the dynamic, relational (intersensory, multimodal, multimedia), and often conflicted nature of our everyday engagement with the sensuous world.

The reflections about the multiple modes of sensory interconnection highlighting the relations among the senses, above and beyond their informational content, relate to intersensoriality. Intersensoriality refers to the senses’ interrelation and/or transmutation, which may take many forms: cooperation/opposition, hierarchy/equality, fusion/separation, and simultaneity/sequentiality (Howes 2013). These forms suggest that the senses are not simply passive receptors but are interactive, both with the world and with each other. This intersensoriality could be discussed in terms of people who cough and sneeze and the senses involved in this physical activity.

2.2. Sneezing as a way of exploring intersensorial experience

Sneezing is a personal matter in which an individual develops a tendency to react against external stimuli (for example, environmental conditions and animals) and/or internal stimuli (for example, an allergy or a pathogenic cause, such as flu). It is hard to control sneezing, and any attempts to block it (by pressing the nose or closing the mouth) would only make it worse. Usually, an instance of sneezing is physiologically signaled by a slight backward tilt of the head, eyes shut tight, the mouth opening, and a deep inhale.

If the sign of someone sneezing in a public space can be expressed through words, then we must find ways to convey the feelings and sensations of the people close to the sneezer that are only invoked or raised through feelings. This expression should also be seen from the perspective of those people who do not sneeze. In this case, sneezing is experienced by people in a multi-sensorial way, depending on the surrounding space and their distance from the sneezers; that is, visually (by actually watching both the sneezer and the germs in the form of a cloud of droplets, in certain lighting conditions), olfactorily (by smelling the unpleasant odor emitting from the mouth), gustatorily (by tasting the cloud of droplets sprayed inside their mouth), somatically (by feeling the cloud of droplets on their skin) and auditorily (by hearing the distinctive sound). Therefore, sneezing is an internal body process that is further materialized into an external physical action that may trigger several responses in the affected people. In this respect, the sneezing body should be seen in terms of the space surrounding it.

Sneezing is a vocal signal that is usually excluded from paralinguistics. Crystal (1969: 131) defines such signals as ‘vocal reflexes’ because they are typically uncontrolled and physiologically determined. The noise produced is the distinctive sound and reverberation coming out of the mouth and the nose. However, sound has largely been neglected as a paralinguistic object of study, though it offers a fundamentally different world knowledge than vision (Smith 2002). According to Puwar (2011: 332-33), “[n]oise is whatever the signifying system, in a particular situation, is not intended to transmit – be the system a poem, a piece of music, a novel, or an entire society” [emphasis in original]. Noise interferes in information communication as a disturbance that cannot be placed in a recognizable pattern. It is a relative term – a disorder (Attali 1985).

Human acoustic communication beyond paralanguage (and, of course, music) includes some other phenomena that have not yet been (and perhaps will never be) recognized as a sub-discipline of semiotic study. So far, only Wescott (1996) has proposed studying this “communicative body noise” area under the designation of strepistics. His examples of “strepitative behavior” are hand-clapping, foot-stamping, face slapping, tooth gnashing, whistling, and spitting. According to Wathelet (2011), sounds are described as mediators between humans and their environment, revealing how music builds intimacy and power by literally creating personal spaces made of sonic materials. If sensory activity were based on materiality, it would be relevant to assess and describe its agency and ability to act on human bodies and selves as a key dimension of sensory experiences, activities, and structures (ibid). For what Wescott (1996) calls *strepistics*, this sensory material, the quality related to the object or thing, its concrete substance has yet to attract the interest of the social sciences. A related issue is how to transcribe senses on paper without relying solely on the verbal element. O’Dell and William (2013: 317) have demonstrated “manners in which transcriptions can be rethought as sensory experiences geared to move and engage different audiences,” such as leaving a space between words to emphasize issues of distance and disjuncture.

While language is of no great help in describing sensory perceptions, at times, it may also be a real barrier (as in the case of Chinese for Europeans) or may risk dampening or trivializing cultural subtleties. By privileging the verbal in our analyses and descriptions, significant and seemingly obvious embodied, perceptual, and kinetic aspects of human experiences remain hidden for discourse and science. Exploring how the opposite pole of sound, silence, can be put into play in a series of associations would make it possible to sense the agent of silence (for example, a poster) beyond the verbal and visual interactions. This leads us to consider sneezing as a sensorial metaphor.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 5), “[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another [but] metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words.” Forceville (2008: 463-476) argues that visual and multimodal metaphors, especially in opposition to verbal ones, have a high degree of specificity resulting from their perceptual immediacy. They are more easily recognized across languages and cultures since they do not rely on language codes. They have medium-determined ways of cueing the similarity between target and source, and they have a more substantial emotional impact. Moreover, human thought processes are largely metaphorical. In other words, “[m]etaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system” (ibid). The interrelation of the senses points to the importance of human synaesthetic possibilities and how these could be integrated into a broader account of semiotic theory. Such a theory, according to Kress (1998: 76), would “acknowledge and [...] account for the process of synaesthesia, the transduction of meaning from one semiotic mode in meaning into another semiotic mode, an activity constantly performed by the brain.”

Ullmann (1964) assumes that the movement of synaesthetic metaphors is not haphazard but conforms to a basic pattern. For example, the pattern vision > hearing might be read as vision will evolve towards being discussed in terms of hearing. This transduction of the senses would involve:

the process of moving meaning-making from one mode to another – from speech to image, from writing to film. As each mode has its specific materiality – sound, movement, graphic ‘stuff,’ stone – and has a different history of social uses, it also has different entities. Speech, for instance, has words, the image does not. That process entails a (usually total) re-articulation of meaning from the entities of one mode into the entities of the new mode. (Kress 2010: 125, emphasis in original)

An example of such transduction could be seen in several kinds of movement other than the actual physical motion. Oittinen (2008) speaks of objects that move (such as a car on the road) or human minds that make the object move. For instance, if we take a picture of someone who is about to sneeze, we have a specific memory of what the act of sneezing will look like. We are tempted to see motion where there is none, and we can add the missing details with our imaginations, such as the sound of breathing in just before expelling the gust of air. The transduction of meaning from one semiotic element (here, the vision of a picture) to a different semiotic element (here, the multisensory action of sneezing) is a kind of intersemiotic translation, as already pointed out by Jakobson (2004[1959]).

2.3. The sensorial power of war propaganda

During WWII, there were two major British propaganda campaigns, the Home Front and Allied Unity (Finch 2011). The first campaign was overtly intended to influence the minds of Britain's citizens, while the second one was to covertly convince the citizens of the United States to join the Allied cause. The British Ministry of Health needed to change its citizens' civic thoughts and actions into appropriate wartime behavior pertaining to their hygiene. Governments are aware of the power of the civilian population and that civilians' actions or beliefs in a conflict can significantly determine the outcome (Sun Tzu 2005). For that reason, countries need propaganda to convince their people to endure hardships and acts of sacrifice for their nation (Finch 2011).

The overarching strategy of this home front campaign was to use "white propaganda" (Finch 2011). The campaign can be considered white propaganda because the recipients (the British people) knew its primary source (Ministry of Health), and the goal was communicated (use a handkerchief when coughing and sneezing to avoid spreading diseases). The explicit purpose was to remind and influence the British people to remain healthy and avoid spreading diseases to other people. And this type of propaganda is best for communicating a clear message to people. For that reason, posters with short snappy texts and powerful images were designed. The poster is a democratic medium as it is not site-specific and can be put anywhere. Thus, any Briton could be exposed to a poster no matter their social class. The creators of the campaign's posters knew what they were trying to achieve and intentionally used such media affordances to their advantage.

The home front campaign involved direct use of the tool of "social-psychological adaptation" (Lee 1945). This approach capitalizes on the overpowering core emotions all human beings have: fear, hope, love, and hate. Emotionally charged messages were a regular tactic in Britain, such as Winston Churchill's patriotic speech "We Shall Fight on the Beaches," which intended to deliver a message of hope to the British nation. Witkowski (2003: 69) argues that "[g]overnment institutions and political actors have used media, rhetoric and visual representation of their time to reach citizens with messages about what were considered desirable, as well undesirable, consumption practices." To this purpose, audiovisual technologies have historically become central to war coverage (Sontag 2003) and facilitate emotional propaganda. Such a type of propaganda targets a society's unique, emotionally patriotic elements that arouse in people overwhelming feelings of loyalty while quashing reason. This tactic calls upon the source (for example, a film, a poster, or a radio broadcast) to use people's emotions, like fear, hate, love, and hope, as a vehicle for the message to impact the recipient effectively.

Therefore, it is not enough to see propaganda; one also has to experience it. For that reason, *Coughs and Sneezes* offers an opportunity to explore propagandistic experiences beyond the visual. It is possible to measure the effect of coughing and sneezing on

the home front by mapping how the poster's message is written-seen-heard-felt-tasted. Also, the reciprocal relationship between the poster and the home front is realized through the experience of not coughing and sneezing. This alternative experience is realized by the poster's message that is unwritten-unseen-unheard-unfelt-untasted. In other words, all of the senses need to be employed to appreciate the campaign's message fully.

The Ministry of Health launched its propaganda campaign using posters as a communication medium. The message was unambiguous: "Coughs and sneezes spread diseases." Health during the war was a big worry for Britain. The public needed to keep fit and healthy to work and keep up production in the factories and farms. In the case of the Ministry of Health's campaign, the posters drew on the emotional ties of the citizens by referring to their sense of civilian duty in times of war. The message, therefore, is shaped around the unique social and mental makeup of British culture. From this perspective, this home front campaign provides a good case for an intersensorial study.

3. Methodological considerations

3.1. Research design

To experience the senses in the "Cough and Sneezes" campaign, I discuss and analyze the posters qualitatively through the lens of the Intersensory Redundancy Theory (Bahrlick et al. 2004). This theory refers to "the spatially coordinated and temporally synchronous presentation of the same information across two or more senses and is therefore possible only for amodal properties (e.g., tempo, rhythm, duration, intensity)" (ibid. 100). This is an approach used to help explain how selective attention is achieved and how it guides the development of perception and cognition. Additionally, it is intended to facilitate the analysis of a broader range of phenomena and a more concrete inscription of the senses into the regime of social sciences (Wathelet 2011). This research design will be applied to examine if exposure to print posters could be considered as a form of multisensory experience.

3.2. The posters as data-texts

The British Ministry of Health and Central Council for Health Education sponsored the WWII home front campaign posters,¹ appropriating or remediating artworks created by commissioned military artists during their active service duties in World War I. The collection consists of fifty-four posters, of which only twenty are today available for viewing (at the collection section of the Imperial War Museums). In general, the posters' images and text are set against a colored background. The main title "The Ministry of Health says: COUGHS AND SNEEZES SPREAD DISEASES," the subtitle "trap the germs in your handkerchief," and the authorship line "ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

AND THE CENTRAL COUNCIL FOR HEALTH EDUCATION," are also positioned in various parts of the poster (capitals in original). The same applies to further text that is integrated and located in multiple sections. As far as their materiality is concerned, these posters are lithographs printed on paper with an average 100 x 50 cm dimension.

In the corpus of this research, all poster artists are unknown save for humorous artist and cartoonist Henry Mayo (H.M.) Bateman (1887-1970, England), to whom are attributed Figures 2b, 3a, 3b, and 4a. For inclusion into this research, each poster meets two criteria: first, it verbally denotes the campaign's central message, "Coughs and sneezes spread diseases"; and, second, it is complemented with at least one visual element, such as a graphic representation of reality, photograph, sketch, etc. We excluded four posters because they repeated the same theme. Finally, the fourteen selected posters have been grouped into main themes to keep the qualitative analysis concise. The bracketed number below each poster indicates the collection number.

3.3. Method of analysis

This analysis of the posters focuses on how a sensory substitution transforms the campaign's operational goals to realize the broader strategic objective. Referring broadly to visual phenomena, De Coster and Muhleis (2007: 193) state that "one can give an idea of visual ambiguity [...] if a comparable ambiguity exists in another sensorial field (touch, hearing)." Considering that the posters' verbal messages are repetitive and uncomplicated, we will examine the sensorial substitution in the posters in terms of the concept of "synaesthetic metaphor" (Ullmann 1964). This examination involves re-articulating the meaning of all the semiotic elements and entities of the posters that transduce the senses.

It will also be examined how the posters' sensory stimuli are substituted so that the senses: a) keep their individual qualities of sensation, b) form a new sensation (where the components of the senses would lose their individual qualities of sensation), or c) form a single percept that could be perceived as a whole but remains analyzable when we specifically attend to each component (Auvray and Spence 2008). Given that a poster's verbal reading elicits only part of the story and assuming that the visual's bi-dimensionality binds its sensing, I use four elements that lend themselves to poster multisensorial translation: vivid details, reference to other senses, explanation of intangible concepts, and information on the social context (De Coster and Muhleis 2007).

For this study, we will complement the five ordinary senses (touch, sight, smell, taste, and hearing) with a sixth sense (kinaesthesia) to account for intersensorial cases where the perception of movement is also involved. This division is entirely arbitrary and heavily reflects cultural biases. Non-Western cultures conceptualize differently modes of perception and have other counts and divisions for those perceptions.

4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1. Experiencing the posters

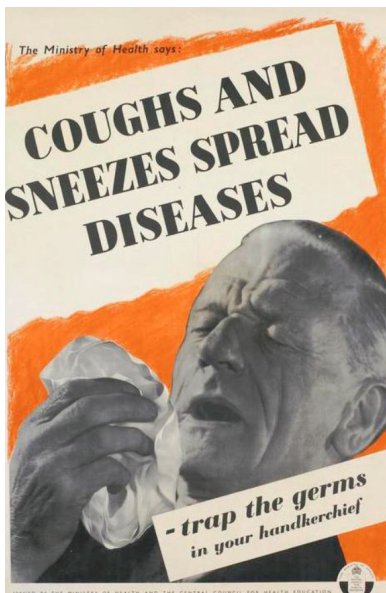
For the purposes of this study, the fourteen posters have been grouped under five themes that connote issued warnings which in military terms could be translated into operational goals: protective measures (Fig. 1), proper behavior (Fig. 2), unprofessional conduct (Fig. 3), public danger (Fig. 4) and the cost of sneezing (Fig. 5). In this way, the posters are presented as issued warnings that constitute a sensory experience. Since all the people depicted spreading diseases have their eyes shut tight, we can assume that they are sneezing rather than coughing, and for this reason, they are called sneezers here (rather than sneezers and coughers).

The Ministry of Health intended the posters to be read both by the agents of the action (the sneezers) and the people affected (that is, those sprayed with the germs). The campaign's title "coughs and sneezes spread diseases" rhymes, creating a distinct sound effect that is easily recalled by the readership. The subtitle "trap the germs in your handkerchief" is a second-person motivation and direct use of social-psychological adaptation. The synaesthetic metaphors and their related sensory substitutions discussed in Figures 1-5 and summarized in Table 1 are based on the researcher's analysis.

Table 1. Synaesthetic metaphors

Metaphor		
FIGURE	NAME	SENSORY SUBSTITUTION
1	a armed breath	keeps individual qualities
	b red/green/yellow sneeze	single percept
	c sneezing defence	forms new sensation
2	a cloud-attack/sneeze-defence	single percept
	b happy sneeze	forms new sensation
3	a armed sneeze	forms new sensation
	b unproductive sneeze	keeps individual qualities
	c food trap	single percept
4	a viral shopping	keeps individual qualities
	b hovering commute	forms new sensation
	c germ chamber	single percept
5	a fratricide sneeze	single percept
	b armed handkerchief	single percept
	c outlaw sneezer	forms new sensation

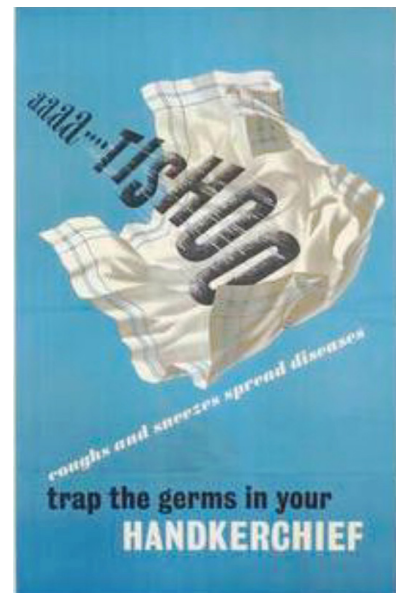
Figure 1 depicts three posters that deliver a central message: using a handkerchief to protect against sneezing. The older man (Fig. 1a) is about to sneeze and is holding a handkerchief to his face. Figure 1b shows another older man who is also about to sneeze (upper image) and then actually sneezing while holding a handkerchief up to his face (lower image). The central image is a handkerchief. All three images in Figure 1b are integrated into a traffic light style design. Figure 1c illustrates a sneeze captured in a crumpled handkerchief set against a blue background. It transcribes a symbolic representation of the sound effect through the verbal “aaaa...TISHOO.” The lower-case letters and small font of the former in the background and the bigger font and capital letters of the latter in the foreground suggest an auditory sequentiality of “aaaa” followed by “TISHOO.”



1a



1b



1c

Figure 1. Protective measures

Figure 1a is an armed breath stimulus, a sound (breath) placed in terms of the tactile arm (touch). The word arm describes the action of making a weapon ready to fire; the backward tilt of the older adult’s head resembles the cocking of a gun (pulling the hammer back) before pulling the trigger. This sensory stimulus keeps its individual qualities, showing what the handkerchief looks like (visual) and how to hold it properly (touch). Figure 1b constitutes a red sneeze stimulus (how to control sneezing), a yellow sneeze stimulus (what the protection looks like), and a green sneeze stimulus (how to sneeze safely). The single percept red/yellow/green (visual) describes the sneeze (kinaesthetic) in that the latter involves a sound, vision, and movement. Figure 1c is

a sneezing defense, protection (tactile) against the sneeze (sound), where sneezing is presented here as a sound. The space (in the form of dots) between the word “aaaa” and the word “TISHOO” is an instance of sensorial transcription of sound that forms a new sensation.

In Figure 2a, the two upper images are a portrait of a man, in profile, sneezing without restriction, and a plate illustrating the bacteria released in his sneeze. The two lower images are portraits of the same man, again in profile, sneezing into a handkerchief and a plate illustrating the resultant lack of bacteria. The plates (illegible in the figure) read, “There are 19,000 colonies of living germs ... See the cloud of germ-laden droplets broadcast into the air by a careless sneeze” (Top plate), and “Only one colony of germs got past when the sneezer used his handkerchief” (Lower plate). Figure 2b shows a portrait of a sneezing man, holding a handkerchief up to his face. The smaller images are smiling pictures of various male and female military and civilian personnel.

Figure 2a visualizes the single percept cloud attack – sneeze defense. While the upper image is a visual (cloud of droplets) put in terms of the tactile “attack,” the lower image is a visual sound that describes protection against sneezing. To deter people from spreading diseases, the poster designers and producers present sneezing as lethal as firing at people. Additionally, the poster viewer is drawn into a laboratory setting to acquire a scientific experience of the effect of sneezing by examining it through a microscope. Figure 2b forms the new sensation of a happy sneeze, a visual sound (sneeze) visually reflected in the nine smiling people. Practicing safe sneezing allows other people (here professionals) to keep on doing their daily tasks.



2a



2b

Figure 2.
Effects of proper behaviour

Figure 3 shows people in the workplace: a female munitions worker standing behind a factory work surface covered in artillery shells (3a), a woman standing in an office (3b), and a man waiting in a queue in a cafeteria (3c). The three sneezers expel an exaggerated gust of air without using a handkerchief, while their colleagues are standing close by recoil in disgust.

Figure 3a forms the new sensation armed sneeze, a graphic representation of the expelled gust of air (visual-sound) put in the form of the tactile artillery shell (touch). Figure 3b keeps the individual qualities of an unproductive sneeze, a gust (visual-sound) put in the form of dropping several sheets of paper (visual-sound-touch). Figure 3c shows the single percept food trap, the tactile (germ)



Figure 3. Unprofessional conduct

trap (touch) put in the form of tactile food (taste). The onlookers experiencing the sneeze effect have the same disapproving look on their faces that unavoidably creates an unpleasant working environment. While in 3a and 3b, the sneezer's colleagues experience the sneeze both visually and auditorily, in 3c, the worker that is to "be sneezed at" receives just an auditory warning and turns around for a visual contact only upon hearing the sneeze, and potentially upon sensing the cloud of germs on his skin. Therefore, sneezing becomes to the bystander as lethal as an artillery shell, makes workers careless, reduces their productivity, and sneaks up on unsuspecting people.

Figure 4 shows three sneezers, two older women and a man, standing in a fabric shop, in an elevator, and on the underground, respectively. One woman (4a) and the man (4b) jump slightly in the air as they expel an exaggerated sneeze, while the onlookers (customers, staff, commuters) recoil in disgust. For this research, these posters are considered to illustrate public spaces.

Figure 4a keeps the individual qualities of viral shopping, a commercial activity (kinaesthetic) put in terms of the cause of the disease (visual-sound). Figure 4b forms the new sensation hovering commute that refers to an everyday activity (kinaesthetic) where the force of the sneeze makes the commuter jump and unable to hold on to the handle grip (kinaesthetic) in a moving train. Figure 4c is the single percept



Figure 4. Public danger

germ chamber, a space (touch) hosting the effect of sneezing (visual-sound). Thus, shopping sets a(n) (bad) example of buying behavior that has adverse consequences (similarly to shopping therapy), public transportation is a risky endeavor, and a lifting device is turned into a deadly trap full of germs.

Figure 5a shows the consequences of improper sneezing behavior: fewer workers, a lost war. Three civilians sneeze on those around them Today while those sneezed at are illustrated as a white outline Tomorrow, indicating their absence. The three images on the right are photographic depictions of a military facility, an industrial workplace, and a secretarial pool. Absent workers are shown as a white silhouette.

In Figure 5b, the upper image is the profile of a man sneezing, and below it is a handkerchief. The text in the colored insets directly relates the effects of sneezing (colds and flu) on defense industry production. The text-inset in the form of an arrow pointing to the handkerchief connotes its relation to the sneeze effect. Figure 5c shows a human figure on a wall of bricks with a warning that he is wanted for sneezing. The subtitle below the word "DANGER" reads "...and coughing without due care and [probably] attention"; as such, the man is a danger to the public. The curved lines around the sneezer's head suggest a sneeze-induced trembling of the head.



Figure 5. The cost of sneezing

Figure 5a forms the single percept 'fratricide sneeze,' a biological reaction where the graphic representation of the gust of droplets falling on people (touch) is put in terms of a civil war act 'fratricide.' Here, the cost of spraying people is represented as civilians (rather than military) missing in action (kinaesthetic). Figure 5b form the single percept armed handkerchief, a means of health protection (touch) that minimizes the cost for the military industry, presented here in the form of verbal information (visual). Figure 5c forms the new sensation outlaw sneezer, a graphic representation of the head's movement and the gust of droplets (touch), put in terms of the social cost of holding up the sneezer to public ridicule.

4.2. Translating the campaign's intersensoriality

This analysis of the posters was influenced by Jay's (2002: 88) argument that it is "necessary to focus on how [posters] work and what they do, rather than move past them too quickly to the ideas they represent or the reality they purport to depict." In the posters, we can identify various triggers in the spatial surroundings that may cause people to sneeze or particular spatial situations where sneezing occurs.

Coughing and sneezing is an alternative way of mapping Britain's home front and becomes a trigger for further action. People's scornful looks directed at the sneezers and the happy faces (only in Figure 2b) are examples of the emotional propaganda tool of exaggeration. This is known as a 'hot potato' technique (Bernays and Miller 2005). The wrongdoing draws the viewers' attention to the negative aspect of the enemy (that is, sneezing Britons) to make them look good by comparison. This technique was combined with "emotional propaganda" (Lee 2011) to capitalize on two core overpowering human emotions. The campaign's title is an emotionally charged message of fear, for the consequences of this act are therein labeled as unpatriotic and hate towards the perpetrators.

In recent empirical research of public attitudes to Covid-19, many participants described strong reactions to others' coughs and sneezes in public spaces. For example, a participant told how "we have gone from being polite and saying 'bless you' to now having to defend people's coughs and sneezes. If somebody does cough, it draws a powerful negative reaction towards them" (Williams, Armitage, Tampe and Dienes 2020).

The campaign used the archetype as a propaganda tool. This tactic focused on simplifying characteristics of people into two clearly stated roles: the "sneezer" and the "eyewitness." These archetypes were made to deliver a clear message about how (irresponsible) British people act and how responsible citizens should demonstrate their contempt. This is one way to demonstrate how patriotism is measured by the way sneezers act during their day-to-day tasks. Thus, posters were essential in making every citizen a soldier and connecting people to the war effort.

The posters illustrate the contextual location where coughing and sneezing took place and the social and societal consequences of this act. More important for us today is that they highlight the potential of coughing and sneezing as an alternative way of comprehending the sensorium. They become a representation of how senses and sensorial qualities are expressed through verbal and visual elements. The analysis records sensory substitution and suggests an alternative way of conducting 'sensory-oriented research' (Wathelet 2011: 368) in the social sciences. This type of simulation is now enhanced with computer models, which allow for a more sophisticated, scientifically driven, and multi-sensorial experience of the social effects of coughing and sneezing in the Covid-19 period (DOE/Sandia National Laboratories 2021).

The reciprocal relationship between seeing and experiencing propaganda is also realized through the act of not sneezing, not responding to the surrounding environment. The experience of not sneezing can be seen in the rest of the people in the posters who look down scornfully on the sneezer. This behavioral attitude is a second-level, connotative type of white propaganda that sets the example of a responsible code of conduct. The campaign posters positioned the British people as not just citizens but soldiers, militarizing public spaces while seemingly maintaining a public/democratic way of everyday life. Through these posters, the citizenry's democratic duty is reduced to a single action, in which the only meaningful choice equated to selecting only one protective measure is nothing short of a patriotic act: your handkerchief is your weapon.

The posters produce what Gordon (2008: 20) calls a "tangled exchange of noisy silences and seething absences," a type of multi-sensory dialogue hinged on the impossibilities of hearing via a visual channel and of seeing with naked eyes. This missing exchange is recovered by reversing the role and function of the mediums and channels realizing it. That is, the posters visualize the sneezing action graphically. They give voice to the people on whom the germs were inflicted through their defensive postures and scornful looks, while the spread of germs becomes visible by resorting to a medium (staged photography) to which the affected people have no visual access.

Further, the posters demonstrate the human body's capacity to act as an instrument for comprehending the importance of the social environment. This is an active process through which the poster viewer makes sense of the society it represents. The agents in the posters are both passively and actively involved in this social practice. On the one hand, the sneezers receive the stimuli from a given social context and, on the other hand, exercise an impact by spreading germs in this environment. Reciprocally, the British people respond to this sound effect and feeling of touch (germ particles on their bodies) and possibly of taste (through breathing) visually, by giving scornful looks, and kinaesthetically, by distancing themselves from the germ carrier. This is an intersensorial way of describing social exclusion as an instance of grey propaganda.

The negative connotations of the word spread can also be found in the abstract idea of tyranny and evil spreading (Bernays and Miller 2005). Issued to the American people as a warning of the imminent danger and aspiring to convince them to join the Allies, the verbal spread, commonly used to allude to fascism, as in "fascism spreading" (ibid.), becomes a substitute for the sensation of fear. Such a sensory substitution device is similar to translating images into formats that the blind or blindfolded can process with sensory modalities other than vision (Proulx 2012).

The Health Ministry's campaign also has several similar allusions that make it highly cohesive in its intertextual and intratextual references (Kristeva 1980). While in intertextuality, each text exists in relation to others, a related kind of allusion called intratextuality involves internal relations within the text. This relation occurs on "a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text, and a vertical axis connecting the text to other texts" (ibid. 69). These two types of reference are essential to intersensoriality so that the senses present in the posters are not left unattended by the reader. Thus, a fuller reading will be realized across biographical, historical, or socio-economic injections within the posters campaign.

An intertextual reference can be seen in Figure 6, which shows barrage balloons over London in WWII. They are giant balloons tethered with metal cables, used to defend against aircraft attacks by damaging the aircraft in collision with the wires, making the attacker's approach more difficult. Figure 1c evokes a similar defensive posture, where we can see the collision of an attacker (the sound effect of a sneeze) on the means of protection (handkerchief). The angle of view (from below) and the background (blue sky) puts the poster's viewer in the position of the Londoner looking up in the sky for air attacks.



Figure 6. Barrage balloons (Crown copyright)



Figure 7. Gas chamber (Wikimedia, Creative Commons)

Another intertextual reference is made visible in Figure 7, where we see a gas chamber in the Dachau concentration camp in WWII. Such chambers were disguised as shower facilities, where SS officers told the prisoners to undress to take a shower and undergo delousing. Instead of this, poisonous gas was dumped on the victims through vents in the roof or holes in the side of the chamber. All victims were dead within 20 minutes. Figure 4c illustrates a similar dangerous chamber. A British civilian delivers an infectious gust of droplets, discharged through her mouth, and dumped on her fellow British people, who have no escape route.

The third intertextual instance appears in Figure 8, which shows a wanted poster, a poster distributed to let the public (in this instance, a newspaper) know of an alleged criminal (here Hitler) whom the authorities are looking for. They generally include a picture of the alleged criminal or a facial composite image produced by the police or a government body for display in a public space. Figure 5c alludes to a similar poster that illustrates a careless sneezer and the consequences of this action (wanted as a public danger). Thus, sneezing violates social, wartime norms measured by a public health (rather than law enforcing) authority.

In addition to these intertextual references, the campaign is characterized by intratextuality. Taking as a point of reference the traffic light style design of Figure

1b, there are ten instances of a red sneeze (2a (top photo), 3a-3c, 4a-4c, and 5a-5c), and three green sneezes (1c, 2a (bottom photo) and 2b). Also, a yellow sneeze is suggested by illustrating the form, rather than the use, of a handkerchief (3c, 4c and 5b), while an orange sneeze (1a, red + yellow) shows a semi-safe sneeze, the very moment between a red and a green sneeze. Thus, the campaign focuses on exemplifying bad sneezing practices to keep the infection rates as low as possible. Here, we should note that the intertextual and intratextual references derive from the author's intuitive knowledge. No matter how plausible they seem to be, they remain highly subjective and not generalizable.

Finally, print posters are transformed into cultural products reflecting the British government's practices and perspectives during WWII, conveying culturally coded meanings to its citizens. The synergy that takes place in the viewer's experience, in the exchange between the British people and their environment, as a multi-modal input and stimulus, is what makes the posters so moving, the sound of sneezing so emotive, and the stories so tactile and visual (Coessens 2009). On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that despite the various assumptions made about how the 1940s audience would have seen these posters, no substantiated findings are provided if indeed there was a kind of sensory response.



Figure 8. Wanted poster
(Copyright: John Frost Newspapers)

5. Concluding remark

This research has shown that the British Ministry of Health used a poster campaign to reach British citizens with a health-related message about what was considered desirable and undesirable social practices when coughing and sneezing. The occurrences of sneezing in the posters suggest the importance of understanding various aspects of propaganda beyond those gathered by the visual senses. When senses such as touch (here, the feeling of a cloud of droplets on people's bodies) and hearing (here, the sound of sneezing) are present in a printed medium but are unattended by the reader, a fuller reading is missed — an experience similar to missing allusions and intertextuality within a work (here, a series of posters).

The home front campaign brought a new set of feelings into play that brought the front to British people's homes by generating a dialogue between the posters and their beholders. Through these posters, the act of sneezing became a way for people to sensorially experience and actively respond to patriotism. It was a means to get people committed to the cause of defense and of supporting the war itself. The posters can be considered a multisensorial experience because they vividly invoke mental images of touch, hearing, and smell. Whereas tri-dimensional art, such as sculpture, lends itself readily for multi-sensory experiences (e.g., through touching), bi-dimensional works of art, such as posters, pose a real challenge for multi-sensory communication (Neves 2012). On the other hand, the multisensory action of sneezing is phenomenological, not semiotic. Its representation, in this case, is visual and verbal, and it leaps to make them prove the intersemiotic translation is happening.

Following this work, a promising line of research is related to a body of research called haptic visuality, a kind of seeing that uses the eye as an organ of touch. As the curators of Anteros Museum put it, "to know how to [...] touch with the eyes means [...] that preconceptions cease to be an issue to freely learn about the real beauty of things" (cited in Neves 2012: 282). However, this statement highlights a pedagogical implication, as it concerns training in using synaesthetic senses.

The campaign's objective to give a plain and clear message about health protection is not successful. The intersensorial description demonstrates that the interpretation, explication, and meaning-making of the posters are ambiguous. On the other hand, the posters are a testimony of war and manipulate the multisensory properties of sneezing by turning an involuntary / reflexive action into an irresponsible / deliberate act of hostility by Britons against Britons. This transformation ties into the larger reality of war and domestic social life, where all citizens could contribute to the war effort.

Partitions, masks, social distancing, and staying home when feeling unwell are still essential to help cut down transmission (Domino, Pierce, and Hubbard 2021). The ability to employ all senses in identifying the semiotic means that illustrate these measures could help people have a more comprehensive understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the context of a health-related situation (i.e., Covid-19), the relatively innocuous behavior of coughing and sneezing is (re)experienced (just like the WWII health campaign) as a significant, dramatic and anxiety-provoking event (Williams et al. 2020).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Devon Schiller, Member of Academic Staff, Department of Image Science, Danube University, Austria, for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

References

- Andri, Yatmo Y. and Paramita Atmodiwirjo 2013. Sneezing as a form of transaction between active body and space. *The Senses and Society* 8(2): 193-207.
- Attali, Jacques 1985. *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.
- Auvray, Malika and Charles Spence 2008. The multisensory perception of flavor. *Consciousness and Cognition* 17: 1016–1031.
- Bahrick, Lorraine. E., Robert Lickliter, and Ross Flom 2004. Intersensory redundancy guides the development of selective attention, perception, and cognition in infancy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13: 99–102.
- Bernays, Edward L. and Mark Crispin Miller 2005. *Propaganda*. Brooklyn, New York: Ig Publishing.
- Bull, Michael, Paul Gilroy, David Howes, and Douglas Kahn 2006. Introducing sensory studies. *The Senses and Society* 1(1): 5-7.
- Coessens, Kathleen 2012. Semiotics of art reception: In: *Between Semiotic Translation and Synesthetic Response. Proceedings of the 10th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS)* Universidade da Coruña (España / Spain), 327-336.
- Crystal, David 1969. *Prosodic Systems and Intonation in English*. Cambridge: University Press.

- De Coster, Karin, and Volkmar Muhleis 2007. Intersensorial translation: visual art made up of words. In: Cintas Diaz.Jorge, Orero Pilar, and Aline Remael (eds.) *Media for all. Subtitling for the Deaf, Audiodescription, and Sign Language*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 189-200.
- DOE/Sandia National Laboratories 2021. Simulating sneezes and coughs to show how COVID-19 spreads: Scientists publish studies of how spray droplets can spread disease. *ScienceDaily*, May 11. Retrieved July 10, 2021, from www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2021/05/210511123708.htm
- Domino, Stefan.P., FlintPierce, and JoshuaHubbard 2021. A multi-physics computational investigation of droplet pathogen transport emanating from synthetic coughs and breathing. *Atomization and Sprays* 31(9): 1-23.
- Elliot, Charlene 2007. Regimes of vision and products of color. *Senses and Society* 2(1): 41-58.
- Finch, L. 2011. Propaganda. *Armed Forces and Society* 26(3): 312-367.
- Forceville, Charles 2008. Metaphors in pictures and multimodal representations. In: Raymond W. Gibbs (ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 462-482.
- Gordon, Avery F. 2008. *Ghostly Matters*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grimshaw, Anna 2001. *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Modern Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howes, David (ed.) 2005. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg.
- Howes, David 2006. Charting the sensorial revolution. *The Senses and Society* 1(1): 113-128.
- Howes, David 2013. *The Expanding Field of Sensory Studies*. Montreal: Centre for Sensory Studies, Concordia University. Available at: <http://www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/the-expanding-field-of-sensory-studies/> (accessed December 30, 2016).
- Imperial War Museums. *Coughs and sneezes spread diseases. Posters of conflict - The visual culture of public information and counter information*. Available at: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search?query=coughs+and+sneezes> (accessed June 1, 2016).
- Jakobson, Roman 2004 [1959]. On linguistic aspects of translation. In: Lawrence Venuti (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*. New York and London: Routledge, 138-143.
- Jay, Martin 2002. That visual turn: The advent of visual culture. *Journal of Visual Culture* 1(1): 87-92.
- Kress, Gunther 1998. Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: The potentials of new forms of text. In: Ilana Snyder and Joyce Michael (eds.) *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*. London: Routledge, 53-79.
- Kress, Gunther 2010. *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Kristeva, Julia 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson 1980. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, Alfred McClung 1945. The Analysis of propaganda: A clinical summary. *The American Journal of Sociology* 51(2): 126-135.
- Negro, Isabel 2017. The role of visual metaphor in visual genres. In: C.Vargas-Sierra (ed.) *AESLA, EPiC Series in Language and Linguistics* 2: 119-126.
- Neves, Josélia 2012. Multi-sensory approaches to (audio) describing the visual arts. *MonTI* 4: 277-293.
- Oittinen, Riitta 2008. Audiences and influences: Multisensory translations of picture-books. In: Maria González-Davies and Ritt Oittinen (eds.) *Whose Story? Translating the Verbal and the Visual in Literature for Young Readers*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 3-18.
- O'Dell, Thomas and Robert William 2013. Transcription and the senses: Cultural analysis when it entails more than words. *The Senses and Society* 8(3): 314-334.
- Proulx, Michael J., David J. Brown, Achille Pasqualotto, and Peter Meijer 2012. *Multisensory Perceptual Learning and Sensory Substitution*. Neurosci. Biobehav.
- Puwar, Nirmal 2011. Noise of the past. *Senses and Society* 6(3): 325-345.
- Rodaway, Paul 1994. *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense and Place*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Bruce L. 2002. How sound is sound history? A response to Mark Smith. *The Journal of the Historical Society* II 3-4: 307-315.
- Smith, Richard Donald 2003. Museums and verbal description. In: Elisabeth S. Axel and Nina S. Levent (eds.) *Art Beyond Sight: A Resource Guide to Art, Creativity, and Visual Impairment*. New York: AFB Press, 220-223.
- Sontag, Susan 2003. *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Spitzer, Leo 1962. The 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' or content vs. metagrammar. In: Anna Hatcher (ed.) *Essays on English and American literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 67-97.
- Stahl, Anna B. 2008. Colonial entanglements and the practices of taste: an alternative to logocentric approaches. *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 827-845.
- Stevenson, Richard J., and Robert A. Boakes 2004. Sweet and sour smells: Learned synaesthesia between the senses of taste and smell. In: Gemma A. Calvert, Charles Spence, and Barry E. Stein (eds.) *The Handbook of Multisensory Processing*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 69-83.
- Sun Tzu. 2005. *The Art of War* (Trans. Thomas Cleary). Boston: Shambala.
- Terrence, Witkowski H. (2003). World War II poster campaigns. *Journal of Advertising* 32(1): 69-82.

- Ullmann, Stephen 1964. *Language and Style*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Vannini, Phillip, Dennis Waskul, and Simon Gottschalk 2012. *The Senses in Self, Society and Culture: A Sociology of the Senses*. London: Routledge.
- Wathelet, Olivier 2011. Sensory meetings. *The Senses and Society* 6(3): 368-371.
- Wescott, Roger W. 1966. Introducing coenetics. *American Scholar* 35: 342-356.
- Williams, Simon, Christopher J. Armitage, Tova Tampe, and Kimberly Dienes 2020. Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: a UK-based focus group study. *BMJ Open*; 10:e039334. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2020-039334
- Witkowski, Terrence H. 2003. World War II poster campaigns - Preaching frugality to American consumers. *Journal of Advertising* 32(1): 69-82.

AUTHOR

George Damaskinidis Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Language and Intercultural Studies, University of Thessaly and Research Fellow at the Semiotics Lab (SemioLab), Faculty of Philosophy, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece.

