

Design + Research + Society  
**Future-Focused Thinking**

## Proposed Workshop Title: Being relational: entering the world of sensory & embodied communication design

**Keywords:** Senses, embodiment, intangibles, experience

### 1. Workshop Organiser/s

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### 2. Context of Workshop

The workshop will explore how design research can be used as a creative and active force for rethinking ephemeral phenomena, such as smell. The event will offer participants the opportunity to engage and interact with the intangible, considering the potential for sensory communication beyond language, and engage interactive objects as mechanisms for materialising the intangible. These explorations aim to broaden the understanding of participants on how the intangible can shape our lives in more meaningful and open ways. It is a probe into the possibilities of Communication Design for individuals and society.

Our design research shares common themes of embodiment and sensory methods of knowing, and our proposed workshop reflects this. As three practitioners who mediate relationships between materiality and immateriality, the tangible and the intangible, our interests are the communication of smell (KM), the transmission of culture and mechanisms of change (CVR), and mediating human-machine intimate relations (CZ).

Our workshop experience includes:

- **Conference workshops:** Awake in the World (SOAS, University of London, 2013).
- **International smellwalks:** (over 100 walks with up to 30 people per walk in France, Singapore, Spain, USA, UK, Netherlands).
- **Academic field trip workshops:** Go-Go-Gozo (Interdisciplinary field trip, 3-day, 2015); Smellscape modelling (DSAA Marseille, 4-day, 2015).
- **Public workshops:** Consider Smell (Being Human 2015); Smells in the Library (Amsterdam Public Library, 2014); Coming to your Senses (London, Spain, France 2013-2015); Seeing Things as They Are (London, Spain France, 2013-2015); The Creative Process (London, 2014); The Power of Display (France, 2013, 2015); Landscape & Smellscape (ALSO Festival, 2015); The Art of Everyday Life (France, 2013, 2015).
- Continued professional development workshops: Creative Pedagogy / Education and Creativity (UK and South Africa).

### 3. Planned Activities and Expected Outcomes

**The workshop will consist of three parts:**

Initially indoors in a workshop studio, we will open a discussion on the role of the senses and the body in social and environmental awareness, facilitating an exploration of perception and embodiment of social interaction. This will take place through a series of group activities and exercises, which will lead on to an introduction to the interactive objects and their aim (see 2. below). The participants will then be led on a smell walk around the local area to engage in a sensory exploration of an urban landscape. Some of the participants will be requested to wear

the interactive objects as part of their outdoor investigation. On returning to the studio space, we will conclude with a plenary discussion of participant experiences and draw together the threads across the elements of the workshop.

### 1. Sensory and embodied awareness warm up exercises:

An exploration concerned with the transmission of culture and mechanisms of change in social settings. This workshop element will explore the role of sensory aesthetic transmission: a process of embodied transmission and sensory recognition of culture. Sensing & action is in a constant interchange (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007).

- a. 'Party Game': An illustration of sensory communication beyond language during social engagement.  
OUTCOMES: This exercise provides an opportunity to experience the contrast between verbal and non-verbal communication.
- b. Movement interactions, including group circle observation / line to line interchange / object interaction.  
OUTCOMES: To move beyond individual sensory experience to shared experience and interaction; To engage with the sensory experience of interacting with objects in a controlled setting.
- c. Introduce interactive objects (see description 2.) as an extension and mediation for materialising sensory experience.  
OUTCOMES: To introduce participants to the notion of technologically mediated interactions with intangible phenomena.

### 2. The Interactive objects:

Interaction design and smart materials offer tempting opportunities to give perceivable qualities to the invisible force that influence us. Materiality act also as the extended mind (Clark & Chalmers 1998) and self, enabling extended sensory capability.

- a. The objects are in the form of wearable attachment to the body (e.g. pin, bracelet, fashion accessories). They are made of programmable textile and smart material, which responds to environmental data by changing shape or colour. The objects will be tested out in the controlled environment of the workshop studio, and then be worn out during the smellwalk. The aim of the interactive objects are to materialise, in an aesthetic way, the influence of invisible environmental elements on the body.

OUTCOMES: Participants will have opportunity to discuss their experience of the wearables in terms of three different relationships: human-object relation (for those direct wearer); non-wearer towards the wearer; non-wearer towards the object that other people wearing.

### 3. The Smellwalk:

The sociocultural dimensions of 'smell' are places where we can off-load our prejudices about heritage in a local environment (Corbin 1986; Henshaw 2013, Rhys-Taylor 2013). This workshop element seeks alternate options for the communication of the olfactory in urban environments.

- a. Foreground an alternate sensory modality during a city neighbourhood walk  
OUTCOME: Discover the number of individual smells comprising the landscape, discover the smell tone of the neighbourhood, explore personal experience and bias based on smells perceived
- b. Explore the local environment 'nose-first'  
OUTCOME: Strategies for collecting, assessing and communicating odours in the wild; smell-catching, smell-hunting
- c. Sharing of smell information; each pair will be tasked to communicate smell in a different way with their 'smell-buddy'  
OUTCOME: Compare a variety of communication methods; follow--me, metaphor, intensity, duration, hedonic, association, shape, colour etc.

### 4. Intended Audience

Enrolled participants: between 12 and 18 people in total

The workshop hopes to draw participants from a range of design and research backgrounds. Whilst the activities of the workshop are united through a common strand, the themes could appeal to participants interested in Communication Design, HCI (Human Computer Interaction), Design for sensory differences, Transition and Service design, as well as a number of the DRS SiGs (eg. OPENSIG, SigWELL, TENTSiG, BehaviourChangeSig and EKSiG).

As the workshop activities will, in part, take place within the local community it will provide an opportunity for DRS conference participants to explore spaces surrounding the conference venue. The smellwalk will include input from local shopkeepers and business owners, with an opportunity for research activities 'in the wild'. It is hoped that the workshop and resulting discussions will stimulate potential collaboration between interested parties.

## 5. Length of Workshop

The workshop is split into 3 time periods: opening with a session on embodiment and perception (inside), a smellwalk (outside) and a plenary (inside). Each section will last approximately 45 minutes. Allowing for transition-times and restroom breaks a half day (3 hours) is our preferred timing.

The preferred workshop date will be during the conference, as the organisers hope to attend the PhD by Design event on 27 June.

## 6. Space and Equipment Required

The workshop will make use of both indoor and outdoor spaces: initially we will require a clear studio space for 15 people (in which participants can move around as a group), two tables, and chairs for those who cannot sit on the floor. The workshop then moves outside to the local area with a smellwalk of 2km maximum distance around the immediate vicinity including the Pavillion Gardens and The Lanes. For this reason we would need to situate the workshop in town itself, preferably in the Pavillion. We will conduct a plenary back in the studio space and it would be helpful if we could lock the studio space when we are outside. We have no A/V requirements. Participants will need to bring water or have access to drinking water.

## 7. Potential Outputs

The legacy of the workshop will take the form of publicly available blog post on the Royal College of Art, Information Experience Design microsite <http://ied.rca.ac.uk/>

We anticipate that the main impact of the workshop will be that participants leave with:

- a greater awareness and knowledge of how they experience and interact with the intangible;
- the role of design research in these explorations;
- possible methods for researching such findings.

We are happy to invite local media to participate and engage with them. The indoor exercises and Smellwalk will make for great photo opportunities for conference publicity and media. It is hoped that the workshop will create opportunities for networking and collaboration with interested parties through facilitated activities and discussion.

## About the Organisers:

**Organiser 1** Caroline Y. Zheng is a designer and researcher, currently doing a PhD at Royal College of Art. She designs body-interfaces and relational objects employing artificial intelligence, textiles and smart materials to facilitate reflection on human-machine emotional relations. Her work exhibits internationally.

**Organiser 2** Claire van Rhyn is a designer & educationalist, currently a PhD candidate at the Royal College of Art. Her practice explores sensory aesthetic embodiment during rapid socio-cultural transitions. She teaches internationally on perception & the senses, from the perspective of eastern philosophy.

**Organiser 3** Kate McLean is a Senior Lecturer in Graphic Design at CCCU and PhD candidate at the RCA. A mapper of urban smellscapes, interested in the fine-grained, human-centred olfactory perception of the city her work and smellwalks exhibit & take place internationally.