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The First World War and the Senses

AHRC PhD Studentship in collaboration with Imperial War Museums (IWM) and the University of Oxford

Applications are invited for an AHRC-funded PhD at the University of Oxford: 'The First World War and the Senses'. This is offered under the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership programme. The partner institutions are the University of Oxford and the IWM. The studentship will be supervised by Dr Santanu Das and Dr Marina MacKay, Oxford, and Paul Cornish at IWM. This full-time studentship, which is funded for three years at standard AHRC rates, will begin on 1 October 2018.

The Studentship

Using material from across IWM's vast First World War collections (as well as other museums, libraries and archives, wherever relevant) as the basis of its research, this project will investigate the sensory engagement of participants with the First World War. The project will encompass 'senses' in the broadest meaning of the word.

The First World War had a seismic impact on the way in which people experienced their environment through their senses. This was made explicit in literary and artistic interpretations of the war, but is implicit in a much broader range of source material. It has become an academic convention that the war subverted the traditional, Aristotelean, hierarchy of the senses, previously accepted by most in the Western world. Hearing, and also touch and smell acquired an enhanced power and importance. The informed engagement of these senses could mean the difference between life and death. However, despite the fundamental nature of this subject, surprisingly little research has been directly focused on it.

It is clear that the war created a new and unique sense-scape. This took multiple forms: new environments like trenches and tunnels; the topsy-turvy world of the front line, where the ravages of war and the vestiges of peace were strangely mixed; the noxious and dangerous environment of armaments factories; the outdoor life which men were obliged to live at the front; the very food and drink which people consumed - not only at the front but on home fronts stricken by food shortages. This was a sensory world that could be experienced as much through smell, taste and touch as through seeing and hearing. While many of these smells, tastes and haptic sensations were unpleasant or even repellent, others were capable of invoking feelings of well-being.

The senses were also integral to the way in which different groups of individuals perceived one-another – be they their allies, the enemy or, indeed, the dead. Touch might be the only way to identify friend from foe in the dark; touch and smell the only way to locate bodies for burial at night. The attribution of a particular smell became a way of 'othering' both enemy and (sometimes) ally – a concept which even spawned pseudo-scientific theories.

The five senses provide the basic means by which humans engage with their environment and are the markers and indicators of our most basic needs, such as eating, drinking and excreting. But this project can potentially embrace another meaning of sense, as an awareness, a consciousness or an apprehension – the intangible and often fugitive 'sense' of something. Such a psychological 'sense' can be created from a combination of any or all of the physiological senses. It might take the form of a presentiment of danger, a sense of foreboding or gloom or, equally, a more enjoyable sense of comfort, nostalgia or comradeship.



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Basing their research on the collections of Imperial War Museums, among other sources, the student will investigate sensory engagement with the First World War, including (but not limited to) some of the following lines of enquiry:

- How was people's engagement with their senses impacted by their involvement in the First World War?
- How did individuals develop a personal consciousness of the war sense-scape?
- Can we draw general conclusions about reactions to the war sense-scape, or were responses purely individual?
- What were the different kinds of sense experience, depending on theatre of battle, or job involved (combatant, stretcher-bearer, nurse)?
- What is the relationship between sense experience and processes of representation (testimonial, literary, artistic)?
- What is the role of the senses in remembering First World War experience and, by extension, the cultural memory of the war?

Subject to AHRC eligibility criteria, the scholarships cover tuition fees and a grant (stipend) towards living expenses. The national minimum doctoral stipend for 2018/19 has been set by Research Councils UK as £14,777 plus £550 additional payment for Collaborative Doctoral Students. For more information visit: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/skills/phdstudents/fundingandtraining>.

The studentship is open to students from a wide-range of disciplinary backgrounds (literature, history, archaeology, anthropology, geography, material culture, gender and cultural studies, colonial and postcolonial studies). The successful candidate will be based in the Faculty of English, University of Oxford.

The student will be enrolled at Trinity College, Oxford. Trinity College's graduate students come from a wide range of international backgrounds, and are members of the very dynamic and friendly Middle Common Room. The College's historic buildings are located in beautiful grounds, in the city centre. Trinity's graduates particularly value the opportunity for interaction with the College's academics. The student will have the option of renting single-occupancy accommodation from the College for up to three years, either on the main site or in one of Trinity's graduate properties in North Oxford, depending on availability. For more details, please see Trinity College's website: <http://www.trinity.ox.ac.uk/>

Students are eligible to draw additional funding from a Student Development Fund to support the cost of training, work placements, and other development opportunities that will benefit the student's doctoral research and future career development.

In addition, the student is eligible to receive up to £1,000 a year from IWM and will be able to apply for internal funding from the University to support archival visits and the delivery of academic conference papers.

How to Apply

Applicants should have a good undergraduate degree in English or another relevant discipline, and will need to satisfy AHRC eligibility requirements including Masters-level advanced research training or equivalent.

Applicants must be a resident of the UK or European Economic Area (EEA). In general, full studentships are available to students who are settled in the UK and have been ordinarily resident for a period of at least three years before the start of postgraduate studies. Fees-only awards are generally available to



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EU nationals resident in the EEA. International applicants are normally not eligible to apply for this studentship.

Applicants should submit via email a curriculum vitae (no more than 2 pages), a sample of writing (of no more than 4,000 words), a brief letter outlining their qualification for the studentship, transcripts of undergraduate and masters qualifications, and two academic references to graduate.studies@ell.ox.ac.uk **no later than 5pm on Sunday 3 June 2018**. Please note it is the responsibility of applicants to request references from their referees and ensure that they have been received by the Department of English by this deadline. All documents should be submitted in either a MS Word or PDF format. Please ensure the subject line of your email appears as 'surname, first name – IWM/Oxford studentship.'

Interviews are scheduled to be held in London on **Monday 18 June 2018**.