

**It's amazing, and embarrassing, to discover what influences our decisions**

**A shower, the distance at which a person talks to us, or his height—the book *Sensation: The New Science of Physical Intelligence* describes how our consciousness is unable to function divorced from the physical world.**

*Sensation: The New Science of Physical Intelligence: The hidden influences of the senses on our feelings, behaviors and decisions.*

Prof. Thalma Lobel. Translated from English by Ofer Kober. Matar Publishing, 232 pages, NIS 75.

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*Sensation: The New Science of Physical Intelligence* brings to our awareness news that is at once both exciting and bewildering from the frontier of embodied cognition. "This is a rising field in psychology", explains the book's author, Prof. Thalma Lobel, "that raises the possibility that our psychology cannot function divorced from the physical world. Our senses are the bridge to both our conscious and unconscious thinking processes."

One can put it in another way. Exactly as guinea pigs, but with human behavior, who enter a laboratory, we too are totally unaware of the way extraneous factors mix into our considerations. What we see, hear, taste, smell, touch, believe and feel is anything but trivial. Even the metaphors that we use act on us and make us dance to their tune without our knowledge. Prof. Lobel has gathered and interwoven an abundance of findings that are strange, bothersome, funny, commonplace and yet unexpected into a well-organized thesis that strengthens the book's basic assumption: "Most of us would like to believe that we have control over our behavior," the author informs us in the book's opening chapter "The Tangled Web our Senses Weave." Therefore it is somewhat troublesome to discover that environmental factors and physical sensations—ostensibly irrelevant—influence our behavior constantly."

People who know nothing about ` psychology but who truly understand human nature will find a gold mine in the extensive information delivered by the book: With its help, one can extract the full potential of a date or job interview while at the same time deepening awareness of the way hidden impressions influence our behaviors. Occasionally it's even embarrassing to what extent the book exposes the sponge-like character of what we call "consciousness" or "personality".

Lack of self-confidence can cause us to feel insignificant in front of a tall person, only because he is higher than us in the dimension of space, and order an extra large coffee. The distance between people in polite conversation also strongly influences the distance in their emotional relations. And it's truly indescribable what a strong and good hug might cause. Ironically, it is seemingly clean people who might perform deceitful acts, but a good shower truly stimulates a person to feel renewed. There are numerous other revelations such as this, but *Sensation: The New Science of Physical Intelligence* should in no way be construed as a book of pop psychology if one should gain that impression heaven forbid.

Most of the book consists of narrative descriptions of studies, outwardly innocent but actually quite sophisticated, that fool subjects such that they don't know what the researchers are actually trying to discover. And what is revealed to researchers in one experiment is just another link in the chain.

In the book's more fascinating moments, straightforward reports are coated in a layer of existential irony a la Seinfeld, whose creator is liked by the author. Her descriptions are made more poignant with references to cinematic and literary works. Even Jerry's quips supply welcome padding to dry facts while faithfully illustrating the principles in the magic of the senses.

Lobel, as the book proves, is an excellent teacher who possesses a magnetizing passion for the subject material and a talent for clearly explaining fairly complicated matters. Occasionally there are didactic repetitions of what she wishes to stress, nevertheless Lobel is never wearisome or verbose. Even the clichés she uses she roasts like a marshmallow in clarifying the influence of language on set positions and prejudices.

*Sensation: The New Science of Physical Intelligence* was originally written in English and most of time is reasonably suited to the local audience. The book's writing technique and its tiptop organization fuel a rhythmic and tight delivery that retains a simple logic.

One can definitely learn a lot from this book. For example that there's nothing like a coffee and croissant to make a couple feel intoxicated with each other; that when a leader wears a red necktie he conveys a dominating impression but a woman wearing red lipstick, , hints that she's "hot" and that you should indeed be suspicious of a person who doesn't remove his or her dark sunglasses.

But the strangest thing is described in the following experiment designed to examine creativity: Researchers checked whether the physical embodiment of the metaphor "thinking outside the box" would encourage creativity among the subjects of the experiment. For this purpose, a one and a half square meter box was built out of cardboard. Participants were divided into three groups; each of them was assigned an identical test they had to solve in which they needed to demonstrate creativity. One group solved the test while sitting in a room which contained the box. The second group solved the test while sitting in the same room, but inside the box. The third group solved the test in the room, which contained no box at the time. Which of the three demonstrated especially impressive results?

Answer: Whoever sat physically outside the box also thought 'outside the box'.

An embarrassing-amusing finding – and its appearance towards the end of the book won't shock anyone who has read until this point and who would realize that, scientifically speaking, people don't have the slightest clue exactly what sets them into motion and how. Would anyone believe that merely being unconsciously exposed to the Apple logo, American subjects would exhibit more creativity? Well that's what happened. Who can imagine to what depths our children are destined to sink in our appalling enslavement to brands?

An American popular book on psychology will never lack a readership. However without including tips that can be tried at home, it won't make it to the printing

press. The target audience of readers who wish to sharpen their awareness will be able to collect valuable tips from the book—along with a warning from the author not to get overly excited. Lobel even gives advice on how to boost creativity, some more well-known (walk freely about a room) and some lesser known (lift up your hands, one after the other). The majority of those tips by the way are really not bad.

To the book's credit is Lobel's respectable tone and delivery—avoiding the tenor of an instructor who has come to dispel our ignorance while retaining her investigator's passionate sense of curiosity. There is also an index, references and an extensive and supporting bibliography, which might not be necessary for someone who has ever fallen in love over a cup of coffee and understands the feeling. Just be careful: this ideal vacation book might have a stimulating effect on your creativity.

Sensation: The New Science of Physical Intelligence / Thalma Lobel

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