

21. Ear to Ear, Nose to Nose, Skin to Skin: The Senses in Comparative Ethnographic Practice

Convenors:

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Face-to-face encounters rely on sensory information beyond the visual. Indeed, the major categories of the congress—distance and proximity, identity and alterity in times of rapid movement and transition—are experientially achieved, or at the very least sought, through culturally divergent sensory repertoires. Familiar sound can ameliorate feelings of spatial or temporal displacement, alien scents within familiar terrain may undermine a positive, visual impression. In its physiological dimension, sensory perception is intensely personal and individual, but sensory semiosis is profoundly culturally shaped. The senses have posed methodological problems which also led to their marginalization in ethnographic practice. Ethnography was also strongly patterned by the Enlightenment's emphasis on the truth-value of visual perception. Sensory semiosis as a constitutive ingredient of cultural experience thus often fell outside the purview of anthropological knowledge production. The workshop, contributing to the congress's aim of "recasting the ethnographic presence", will explore the place of an ethnography of the senses, cast in comparative terms and built on methodological innovation.

The smell of green-ness; cultural synaesthesia in the Western Desert

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This paper is a case study that explores the connection between colour and odour made by Pitjantjatjara people in the Western Desert of Australia. Although sound has been construed as the most important sense in structuring social events in Indigenous Australia, Aboriginal people also consider odour to be crucial. When the first rain drops hit the ground after a long dry spell, the smell of land is a smell of the new green growth to come. This odour is manufactured using odiferous plants and animal fats and applied to resurface human bodies, providing a conduit of communication with the Ancestral realm. Through this case study the paper will also address the nature of synaesthesia, both 'cultural' and 'clinical', and the problems of researching it.

Aesthetic and Social Constructions of Fragrance in Cross-Cultural Perspective

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A paradox. Academic literature asserts that a sense of smell varies in different social and cultural contexts, and that every social group has its own distinct 'smell culture'. Not only this, but everyone has his or her distinct personal scent which is as unique as a fingerprint. Yet global advertising campaigns for perfumes suggest that fragrance is a universal form of semiotic communication. Are there, or are there not, specific 'smell cultures'?

In present-day Western societies, it is generally agreed, the sense of smell is undervalued. Scents are highly elusive. Many languages have virtually no vocabulary to describe them, except in terms of the *other senses* of sight, sound, touch and taste. Fragrance is communicated primarily through metaphors. What linguistic and visual metaphors are used in perfume advertising campaigns in Japan, France, the USA and Denmark?

The theoretical literature argues strongly that societies differ in the qualities they ascribe to smell. Yet it also stresses an apparent universal: that the power of smell as a sense seems to derive from a perceived dichotomy between good and bad, and fragrant and foul, that is found in *all* societies. Yet *what* smells 'good' or 'bad' differs from one social group to another, within or between societies. This project aims to find out *if* and *why* Japanese, French, Americans and Danes regard one thing as 'fragrant' and another as 'foul,' and how the fragrance industry adapts, moulds and takes advantage of the *social and moral repercussions* of such classifications.

Food and sensory experience in the making of racial identity: the case of Esmeraldas, Ecuador

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This paper will consider the ways in which sensory experiences of cooking and eating are significant in creating a sense of belonging and identity. It will take the case of Esmeraldas, a small port city in Ecuador, where cuisine is closely linked to ideas of region and race in popular discourse and practices. The majority of the local population is of African descent and the local culinary practices have become a key representation of Esmeraldan blackness – defined in contrast to the country's indigenous, mestizo and white populations. The association between the cuisine and a local racial identity is reproduced, above all, within the family, where knowledges of cooking and food are passed down through the everyday processes of socialisation. This aspect of socialisation is highly sensory: the techniques of cooking and the appreciation of certain foods are learned through smelling, feeling and tasting as much as through seeing and hearing. The scent of particular herbs; the feel of coconut milk squeezed through the fingers; the taste of crab shells cracked between the teeth: sensations like these carry social meanings that are embodied rather than cognitive, and that bind individuals to family, to place and to a cultural identity.

Sensing Nature: Encountering the World in Hunting

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Human hunting involves a close encounter with the natural world and its animal inhabitants. The hunter attempts to close the distance that normally exists between wild animals and humans in order to bring about the proximity necessary to kill the prey. This paper explores how this is experienced by the hunter. In many forms of hunting the hunter must attempt to 'become' animal. The hunter must understand the world they are entering but, more importantly, they must feel, sense and respond to it. Hunting is a totally embodied and multi-sensual practice. At the centre of the paper will be a consideration of English foxhunting. Here humans use hounds to follow the scent of a fox and the success of the event depends on the Huntsman's ability to understand how they sense the world. Attention will also be paid to other hunting events in which hunters attempt to insert themselves into the natural world; something they can only do by depending on their senses to guide their behaviour and by

understanding how their presence might be responded to by the highly attuned senses of the animal others.

Seeing in motion and the touching eye: walking over Scotland's Mountains

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This paper explores what I have called the division of labour between different parts of the body, especially between the upper and the lower part of the body. This division of labour is evident in recent studies that discuss walking (Adam 2001, Edensor, 2000, Urry, 2000) as a 'practice designed to achieve a reflexive awareness of the self' (Edensor, 2000: 82), stressing the notion of freedom of the body that moves through the countryside away from the strains of the city. Although these studies make an attempt to describe the sensuality of walking, the feet that touch the ground are left out and the ways in which the environment is mediated through the senses reflects how they are traditionally located at face level, often with a special emphasis on the eyes.

During fieldwork with mountaineers in Scotland I have learned that how you sense the environment cannot be taken out of the context of the actual movement of the body and, thus, how one senses the environment needs to be examined in relation to how the body measures itself to the ground. The body meets the ground and the touch affects the view because the walker's attention constantly shifts between focusing intensely on the ground and looking into the distance. Through the activity of walking it thus becomes evident that the ways in which the freedom that the walker may experience is limited to the skills of the mountaineer and the knowledge one has of the relations between the body and the surroundings in different context.

Adjectives of touch in Chinese pulse diagnostics

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This presentation discusses adjectives (and similes) that describe tactile experience in Chinese pulse diagnostics. I first present the 28 standard adjectives in Traditional Chinese Medicine, and compare them to others found in Chinese classical texts. The paper highlights different domains of experience and knowledge that are used for describing tactile experience, for instance, the experience of internal pain that certain pulses (felt at the body surface) indicate, onomatopoeic adjectives that imitate sound, ideas of internal body architecture and 'ethno-physiology' that seem to determine the choice of adjective for describing touch, metaphors of the flow of water, or from the plant and animal world.

Phonocentrism in social anthropology

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Phonocentrism (derived from latin – phono/sound) has not only put sound based speech at the top of the hierarchy of human interaction. The phonetic script, as an expression for human thought, is also consolidating the connection between phonocentrism and logocentrism, where scientific thinking is rendered impossible without sound based, sequential written languages.

Through a selection of sound metaphors (inspired by Lakoff&Johnson), the role of *sound* in human relations will be discussed. Sound based experiences have foremost contributed to a confusion of thought and speech. However, phonocentrism also influence interpretations and descriptions of culture, sensory experiences, identity and place. I will show how sound based metaphors are used to describe relations, while silence at the other side is understood as isolation or distance. Belonging (The Scandinavian, Finnish and German terms for *to belong* refer directly to the verb "to hear") is constructed as something local, of physical proximity and within reach of sounds. This also consolidates the traditional conceptions of cultures or societies as sites with geographical borders. These conceptions are also consolidated with the conventional focus on interaction as a process of sound based interaction. Studying communities in which the members do not base their interaction and relations on exchange of sounds (speech), challenges profound assumptions of spatial proximity as a condition for cultural belonging. Examples of such societies are Net based communities and local and transnational sign language based networks. This may also reveal how phonocentric understandings of language, interaction, communication and thought have influenced anthropological practice and epistemology.

Signs and Sight in Southern Uganda: Perception and Persuasion in Ordinary Conversation

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Different languages describe human senses and the reliability of human perceptions in different ways. These features are important in ordinary conversations in which speakers seek to persuade others of their beliefs and of the value of proposed actions. Luganda, widely spoken in Uganda, offers an instructive case of these relations. It contains two verbs that correspond to the English 'to see,' two verbs, *kulaba* and *kubona*. The former is used for permanent and stable entities e.g. table, book; the latter, for objects that appear and disappear e.g. moon, fog, star. The latter is the root of *obubonero*, 'signs' or 'symptoms'. *Obubonero* link a perceived attribute of an object with a current or future state of that object or a linked object: the state of the sky can forecast rain, the shape of a pregnant woman's belly the sex of her unborn child. This paper discusses the sensory modes by which attributes of objects are perceived. It examines a set of ordinary conversations to show how speakers draw on the broad familiarity of these *obubonero* to lead others to agree with their perceptions and with their proposed actions. The *obubonero* imply cultural views of humans as having certain specific capacities for perception, cognition, communication and coordination. This paper considers the significance of these views for discussions of public space and social action in contemporary Africa.

