

Introduction

Sensing Encounters, Encountering Senses

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With this mysterious cover image we want to seduce you into this issue of *Junctions*, in which we encounter senses, and make sense of encounters. The image shows two hands appearing through the fog, reaching out to touch a see-through surface. The silhouettes of the people belonging to those hands seem to seek a sense of orientation. The image invites us to wonder what it would be like on the other side of the fog, which visualises a boundary between the known and the unknown. Not knowing what lies ahead, they reach out their hands, desperately trying to feel what is near but cannot be seen.

It is through our senses that we can *make sense* of the unknown, a process that has often been of interest to scholars from a variety of disciplines. With this issue, we explore the various ways the senses, and the process of sense-making, are approached across the humanities. With the theme “Sensing Encounters, Encountering Senses” we invited authors to analyze different ways of

knowing the world. The articles in this issue invite readers to reflect on the way in which various senses are used and valued, and how they bring about different encounters and senses of belonging.

The disciplines of the humanities are informed by perception and human ability to sense: to see, to touch, to smell, to hear, and to taste. These senses are, in short, what allows us to make sense of the world. Bodily senses –or bodily perception – are the building blocks of observation and consumption of the environment. Senses are interconnected and can be stimulated accordingly, such as by braille and synaesthesia. Different modes of perception nuance constructions of reality and historical experience. Perceptions can furthermore shape a “sense of belonging,” of identity, and can inform political actions. Making sense of the world results in various interpretations of ideological, historical, and phenomenological encounters unique to the observer and participants. How can these encounters of objects, cultures, and experiences – ranging from perceptions of artwork and music to religious experiences – describe our relationships within the public sphere? How do our senses construct intimacy and vulnerability within society? It is from these questions that this issue of *Junctions* has evolved.

THE SENSES IN THE HUMANITIES

The role of human senses in scientific knowledge production has always been a topic of scholarly debate across the fields of philosophy, psychology, and all across the disciplines that nowadays make up the humanities. The place and meaning of the various senses greatly differ amongst cultures, as do the ways in which they are referred to. For instance, the ancient Hebrews imagined the practice of “understanding” as an experience of hearing, while the ancient Greeks thought it was a form of seeing (Ong 1991, 27). Already in ancient Greek times, philosophers had different opinions on the role of the senses in knowledge production. Plato believed that true knowledge could only be accessed by the use of reason (Cooper 1970), while Aristotle was convinced that our ideas are derived from sensory experience (Aristotle 1941). This is only one example of how the culture in which we grow up teaches us to organize our sensorium in a certain way, and to focus on certain forms of perception over others. In the words of historian Walter Ong: “Growing up, assimilating the growing wisdom of the past, is in great part learning how to organize the sensorium productively for intellectual purposes” (1991, 28). However, in that organizing of the sensorium, certain experiences are privileged, and certain sensory abilities are not fully realized or even obscured. While the modern English language has a rather narrow vocabulary to describe different tastes, other languages, such as Japanese, have a much larger range of words to talk about the taste of food. Yet this cultural variety does not take place in isolation; encountering Japanese food in English-dominated countries, for example, has resulted in the incorporation of the concept “umami” into the English language, broadening the ability to describe different taste experiences (Ong 1991, 27).

Whereas text and language had been dominant in the humanities until the 1990s, the “turn to the body” resulted in an increased recognition of the importance and centrality of bodily perceptions and the senses in processes of meaning-making. Nowadays, empirical data stand at the core of many fields of scientific knowledge production, ranging from biology to linguistics. Many forms of empirical observation are executed by machines that function as extensions of our senses. By X-ray machines we can expand our ability to see, with a microphone we are able to hear sounds of spaces that we cannot physically access, but it is still through the use of our senses that these activities are perceived and interpreted. Despite, or perhaps especially because of, the shifting of these modes of perception over time, the emphasis on the bodily senses continues to be of the utmost urgency if the humanities aim to understand the complexity of human cultural production and encounters. This epistemological shift made it possible to consider the whole body and all its different ways of sense-making as topics of academic inquiry in the humanities and beyond. We should thus not only look at the object of perception, such as a movie, artwork or book, but instead recognize perception as an encounter during which the senses, and the human body, function as a medium to give meaning to the “object.” In this line of thinking, our title of “Sensing Encounters, Encountering Senses” might even serve as a tautology: encounters are perceived through senses, and the way we sense the world is through encounters – whether that be an encounter with music, literature, people or theories.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Scholarship within humanities disciplines tend to emphasize the role of sight, often placing vision and the eye as primary and dominant above all senses. This “ocularcentrism” has often been traced back to the Enlightenment, as a period that reshaped the sensorium, disciplined the senses and came to accentuate vision as the privileged and most objective sense for knowledge production (Schmidt 2000). This centrality of vision has come under increasing scrutiny from scholars across the field. In her famous essay “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1988), Donna Haraway questions the implicit hierarchy of senses in academia, in which vision is regarded as the most reliable tool for acquiring objective knowledge. For instance, someone can feel pain, but it is only when something can be visualised on an X-ray sheet or blood test that this pain is considered “true.” Other senses, such as feeling and tasting, are regarded as much more subjective because they are associated with a closer proximity to the body. Haraway unveils in her article how vision – and all science production that relies on it – necessarily starts from an embodied position as well, and that true objectivity would account for the embodied position of the scientist rather than trying to conceal it. Similarly critical of the privileging of sight as primary mode of knowledge production is cultural anthropologist Jojada Verrips, who argues that: “It is useful to approach in a radically different way the fivefold, hierarchical classification of

the senses we have learned to accept in the West, with vision at the top and touch at the bottom” (2008, 214). This type of critical inquiry reconsiders the body in its complexity, as scholars turn to hearing, touch, taste, and smell as equally significant, and intertwined, modes of encountering the world.

This interest in the more proximal senses has also provoked thinking about the communication between senses. Writing from a phenomenological perspective, cultural theorist Vivian Sobchack has, for example, investigated the synaesthetic experience of cinema. She writes: “our senses interpenetrate each other and cooperate synaesthetically (or cross-modally) even as they subjectively open us to engaging the objective world in quite different and discretely-structured ways” (Sobchack 2012, 123). While the cinema seems to be a space that is dominated by the senses of seeing and hearing, Sobchack illustrates how other senses are also triggered: “We also sense and make sense of the ‘textures’ of the audiovisually given cinematic world as *tactile* – not merely understanding but in some transformed way feeling the rough bark of a tree or the smooth silkiness of a dress” (Sobchack 2012, 124). Thinking differently about the senses, however “radical” that might seem (Verrips 2008), enables new understandings of cultural production. By critically engaging with topics such as community building, knowledge production, and public versus private identity through previously marginalized senses, one conceives a more comprehensive overview of today’s issues within the humanities. We encounter our daily lives using the full arsenal of our senses; why not apply this to our academic practice as well? This journal, much in line with the general broad scope of the humanities, thus invites us to rethink the variety of encounters that make up our cultural space, and the senses through which those encounters are processed, understood, related and interpreted.

To that end, the articles within reveal eclectic and thought-provoking discussions by the next generation of academics, namely, our peers. The articles in this issue engage with a variety of senses and sense-making. The sense of vision is represented by two articles that discuss visual expressions and manifestations of identity. Sound is an important sense in the contribution that discusses religious influences in baroque musical compositions. Smells and scents are evoked in the literary analysis of two novels in which indigenous Indonesian food plays an important role. Finally, we have two articles that work with the sense of touch – both in its physical and emotional sense. As such, this issue gives an innovative overview of the various ways the senses allow for fecund studies in the rich and complex field of the humanities.

ARTICLES

Delving into the effect and affect of vision is Shriya Thakkar's *Art in Everyday Resistance: A Case Study of the Pink Vigilantes of India*. The article traces the development of a well-known Indian feminist group, the Pink Vigilantes, and analyzes its actions within cultures of visual tradition and material production. Thakkar shows how, by choosing the color pink and adopting craftmaking, the women of the Pink Vigilantes are reframing the contemporary female encounter within a patriarchal hierarchy. Thakkar articulates how the color pink, a visual signifier of the Indian feminist group, acts in the broader framework of arts and justice.

In the second article, *The Dutch Police and Religious Signs: An Analysis of the Headscarf Controversy in the Dutch Police Force*, Laura Vendrik explores the contested relationship between expressed civic and religious identities. The author starts by comparing Dutch Protestant culture, and its lack of ingrained visual culture, against the importance of the headscarf in Islam. Arguing that the current debate errs by overemphasizing the connection between visual markers of identity and lived identity, Vendrik elucidates how the hyper-focus on visual identity problematizes the Dutch state's stance of neutrality towards religious minorities.

The third article brings us to the relationship between music and the body. Clemens van den Berg explores the impact of German Pietism on the work of German composer Dieterich Buxtehude in his article *Dissecting Jesus: The Spiritual Role of the Senses in Buxtehude's Cantata Cycle Membra Jesu Nostri (1680)*. In his article, van den Berg analyzes the influence of German Pietism, a religious movement that emphasized the corporeal and sensorial, on a German music score. Focusing on Buxtehude's score *Membra Jesu Nostri*, van den Berg investigates on how this piece embodies German Pietism and illustrates its focus on an immersive experience.

Sophia Seawell's article *Feeling Black, Reproducing Whiteness: A Sensory Analysis of Rachel Dolezal's Identity Claim* explores the controversial case of Rachel Dolezal and her claim to 'feel black'. The anti-racist activist Dolezal identified as Black and was generally assumed to be so, until June 2015, when the legitimacy of her claim became the subject of national and international debate. In an analysis of Dolezal's claim to Blackness, Seawell explores how racist ideology is at work in the discourses that are used to validate this claim. Rather than 'proving' that Dolezal is not 'really' black, the author investigates how we can see whiteness at work in the way that Dolezal claims to see, be seen, look, touch, be touched and feel.

The fifth article by Gwen Kerkhof Mogot takes us along in the tastes and smells of the indigenous Indonesian cuisine. She critically investigates the role of food in identity formation. Her article *Identifying as Indo: Descriptions of Food in Marguerite Schenkhuizen's Memoirs of an Indo*

Woman (1993) and Anne-Gine Goemans' Honolulu King (2015) presents a close reading of Schenkhuizen's and Goemans' texts, in order to reveal how their protagonists construct an Indo-European identity through embracing – or rejecting – indigenous Indonesian food. Mogot's article explores how vital taste is in creating an ethnic and national identity. Previously, this vein has been researched by University of Cologne professor Heike Behrend. Professor of Social Anthropology and African Studies, Behrend has explored community building in relation to the materiality of food. She writes, "societies define themselves to a large degree by what their members eat and drink" that food itself can be a pivotal factor and "used to bind people [as well as] to separate them" (Behrend 2011, 28).

In *Bodyminds in Movement: Embodied Cognition in the Practice and Discourse of Contact Improvisation* Yotam Shibolet explores the sense of touch as a source of knowledge production. This last article investigates how the practice of Contact Improvisation, a form of both dance improvisation and somatic research, can lead to a better understanding of the sensorial and embodied aspects of human experience and phenomenology, veering from an ocularcentric analysis of experience. The importance of the sense of touch in knowledge production is explained by Juhani Pallasmaa, a Finnish architect and professor of architecture. Pallasmaa writes: "all the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense" (Pallasmaa 2011,56) In this way, Contact Improvisation and the necessary sense of touch can also be understood to be a more primary, if not more direct, sense of vision.

As many who have experienced academic publishing will understand, this issue was made possible through constant communication and stamina of all involved. From the inception of the issue to the copy-editing of accepted papers, it took a village to coordinate, over a dozen to peer review, and a dedicated group of copy editors who so diligently and patiently combed through accepted papers. A warm thank you to the contributing authors, the editors, and the anonymous peer reviewers who made the making of this issue a rewarding experience.

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